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Renew our days of old: Neo-Hasidic Americans imagine past and future in Israel

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Between 2004 and 2007, I conducted participant observation and in-depth interviews among American neo-Hasidic ba'al teshuvahs (newly religious Jews) in two yeshivas in and around Jerusalem.[1] Among the practices I observed was the blending of "spirituality," American counterculture, Hasidic theology and Orthodox Jewish practice. Students at these schools, like other ba'al teshuvahs, enact an all-encompassing narrative of return. In this narrative, the unfamiliar (Israel) becomes familiar and "real," while the familiar (America) becomes strange and false. In this paper, I will explore how this narrative is constructed and experienced, how time and place are reconfigured to facilitate this narrative, and how this mythic narrative of return relates to the actual social trajectory of students at these schools.

Background

My fieldwork took place at two sites: the first, a yeshiva that I will call Chesed V'Emet (CVE), for men only, in Bat Ayin, a settlement just outside of Jerusalem; and the second, a yeshiva that I will call Shirat HaTorah (ST), for men and women (in separate classes), in the Nachlaot neighborhood of Jerusalem. ST was founded by an alumnus of CVE, together with Rabbi Yaakov Rohm.[2] I could not participate at CVE but I arranged for in-depth interviews with nine students, one alumnus, and two teachers. Three interviews took place at the settlement. I also spent one Shabbat at the settlement in an attempt to get a sense for the place. At ST, I participated as a student in two courses (HaNevi'im and Rav Kuk), sat in on additional classes when possible, attended social events, and interviewed seven students and two teachers (one of whom was also an alumnus of CVE).

Both schools were heavily influenced by Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach (1925 - 1994). Rabbi Rohm, one of the founders of ST and at whose home the school is based, was close with Carlebach. Teachers at CVE were also inspired by him. Teachers and students at both schools passed on Carlebach's stories and sayings and listened to his audio recordings. Carlebach was a charismatic figure who developed a following among young participants in the counterculture in

[1] I use the term Neo-Hasidic to refer to these contemporary revivals of Hasidic thought and practice although the participants generally do not use the term to refer to themselves or their communities. This term has also been used to refer to contemporary Hasidic sects, e.g. Chabad-Lubavitch or more insular sects like Satmar. However, I use it here to refer to those revivals that have not been continuously aligned with historical sects but rather use Hasidic ideas and practices in relatively new contexts. In contrast to traditional Hasids, Neo-Hasids are not loyal to one dynasty, but rather "mix and match" text, teachings, and practices from all over the Hasidic world. They also tend to be less "Orthodox" in their adherence to *halacha* and more open to the non-religious and non-Jewish world.

[2] This is and all names in this paper are pseudonyms.

California in the late 1960s. Carlebach blended hippie counterculture with Orthodox Jewish ritual and Hasidic devotional practice and mystical thought. In the early 1970s, Carlebach's followers moved to Israel and founded a communal village called Mevo Modi'im. ST and CVE were socially and culturally connected to "the moshav" (as they referred to it) in a dispersed community very much marked by Carlebach's influence.

Like Carlebach's original founders, the majority of students at CVE and ST were ba'al teshuvahs,[3] "returnees" to Judaism that were born into non-Orthodox families in the United States or Canada. Most were in their mid-twenties and recently out of college. Many shared countercultural markers such as dress, taste in music and literature, and liberal or radical political outlooks. Nearly all of them saw themselves as "spiritual" before their decided to observe Jewish law and come to Israel to study and possibly settle down. They cited fantasy novels, political subcultures, and Eastern religions and meditation (among other things) that figured in their "spiritual" search and ultimately in their transformation as Jews. The schools appealed to (and in turn were influenced by) students' concerns. As a result, CVE and ST were distinctive in their ecological emphasis, which interwove Zionism and Jewish mysticism with modern environmentalism; in their focus on experiential and inwardly focused approaches to Jewish "spirituality," which echoed contemporary therapeutic discourses; and in their overall openness to secular or "non-Jewish" forms of expressiveness and "spirituality."

Most students and teachers had grown up in non-Orthodox homes with varying degrees of religious affiliation. Some had bar and bat mitzvahs while others told me they had no Jewish content growing up. One was raised by "Jew-Bus"[4] (as she called her parents). A few students came from homes with parents who had contact with Neo-Hasidism in some form.[5] Two students and one teacher came from Modern Orthodox backgrounds. That being said, the overwhelming majority of the community identified with the figure of the ba'al teshuvah, the "returning" Jew.

This identification was emphasized recurrently through discourse and practice, and runs beneath many other practices, including those I will explore below. This identification further highlights the centrality of the theme of return at the two schools. The word *teshuvah* in *b*a'al teshuvah has multiple meanings: "return," "penitence," and "answer" (or "response"). It's multivocality allows the term to resonate and be elaborated on many levels. This sense of return was enacted through various cultural and discursive practices, resulting in powerful affective and embodied experiences of homecoming.

Below, I will trace how this "return" is made meaningful and authentic for these American students in an otherwise foreign environment. To what do they see themselves returning? How is their return culturally signified? How is it experienced on a personal level? I argue that in these stories of return, we find a repertoire of imaginal models drawn from American countercultural spirituality, specifically an inflection on ecological holism and embodied experience as correctives to destructive contemporary lifestyles. These models are

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[3] Hebrew plural: *ba'alei teshuvah*.

[4] A slang term for Jewish Buddhists.

[5] Either through Carlebach or Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, another prominent Neo-Hasidic leader. Schachter-Shalomi's followers are by and large not Orthodox.

coded by reference to non-Western peoples, often imagined as premodern. They intermingle with a nostalgic construction of the Jewish past thats create a sense of familiarity and familial warmth. Embodied and affective experience lends an aura of immediacy and authenticity to the reparative holistic model. These practices create a powerful sense of enchantment that animates the narrative of "return" in their lived lives

While it would appear these constructions of the past conform to religious Zionist imaginings, in fact they present a more complicated temporality and relation to the land. Like religious Zionism, they sacralize a secular activist relationship to time in which divine agency works through intentional human activity, directed at divine goals. However, their goal is not only that of nationalist revival, like the classical Zionists, but one grounded in countercultural social critique of global dimensions: ecological reparation can only be realized with the return of the "peoples of the earth" to meaningful relationships with the land they live on, ideally through ancient ways of life. While this narrative of return is pervasive, on the other hand, attempts to forge living links with Yiddish forebears equally pervasive. This evocation of *yiddishkeit*, noticeably thriving in parts of Israel and the United States, and the maintenance of sacred sites in the Diaspora, undermine the Zionist myth of return and the singularity of the Land of Israel. This hybrid temporality and sacred geography allows students an ample margin for creative cultural improvisation within a relatively secure and satisfying social structure. In the process of mythic-symbolic return, filled with uncanny recognition and the sense of destiny fulfilled, they gloss and "forget" their movement through time and space as twenty-something Americans with specific social origins and practical goals.

Ecological holism and the Jewish homeland

Students came to CVE and ST with backgrounds that were often steeped in ecological and environmentalist practice. They brought concerns for "sustainability," "stewardship," and "holistic" living, skills and interests in permaculture and "DIY"[6] domestic arts. They also came with a critique of environmental destruction and social fragmentation and a vision for the future that drew from deep ecology in which a meaningful connection to the earth is a solution to these ills. This kind of "environmental awareness" marked the yeshivas as self-consciously distinct from comparable Orthodox or ba'al teshuvah yeshivas.

Jason and Yonatan had been activists who participated in protests against logging and mining companies on Native American sacred lands; Liz had been a community organizer involved in environmental justice issues. She began her exploration of religion by reading about the connection between environmentalism and Judaism. "The relationship I was trying to have with Torah," she told me, "was [a] holistic … way of relating to God and the world and other humans and all the parts of the world, [including] the environment." She said she started feeling "a personal relationship with God" during her last year in college when she took classes on "globalization, and racism, sustainability and environmental justice." After graduating, she worked on an organic farm. For these three students, ecology and "spirituality" are inherently

[6] Do-It-Yourself.

interrelated: their instinct towards "spirituality" developed in tandem with a drive to correct the imbalance and misdirection -- ecological, social, political -- of the society in which they grew up.

Other students exhibited varying degrees of culturally embedded ecological awareness and sympathy towards radical environmental critiques, even if they weren't activists themselves. Most students described themselves as having "natural" lifestyles: they were vegetarian or vegan and ate only "health food" and organic produce. One, Rachel, had been active in a Wiccan coven that practiced Earth-based rituals.[7] Nearly all expressed a more or less oppositional stance towards industrialism and consumer capitalism, which they saw as alienated, fragmented ("compartmentalized"), and destructive.

These critical perspectives, ecological frameworks, and environmentalist practices were institutionalized at the two schools in a number of ways. At CVE, the head rabbi taught a class called "Judaism and the Environment" based on tales by Rebbe Nachman[8] to discuss the significance of the natural world and the human obligation to take care of it. For some time, students wrote short interpretations of the Torah portion for an "environmental *parsha* project" that was posted online. CVE also had an organic garden on the premises that students tended and harvested for food, quite unusual for an Orthodox yeshiva. One teacher noted with chagrin that some students spent more time in the garden than in the *beit midrash* (study hall).

Yonatan, who received his rabbinical ordination from CVE in 2006, founded the Eco-Activist Beit Midrash (EABM) program at ST around the same time. As described on the website, this one-month-long summer program aims "to become a serious center for deep Torah ecology." The description uses terms like "ethno-botany," "deep Torah ecology," "ancestral land," "sustainable living," "global and local ecologies," and the development of "rooted, informed and inspired activists." Both Liz and Elisheva took part in the Eco-Activist Beit Midrash program before becoming full-time students in the regular women's program at ST.

The language used to describe the EABM is conspicuously influenced by the ideas of deep ecology, the philosophy associated with radical environmentalism. The idea is born out of a critique of contemporary society and its many ills -- environmental, social, and psychological, to name a few. One of the most basic principles of deep ecology is holism, the idea that human life is inherently connected to the natural world on multiple levels, and therefore cannot be lived fully or sustainably without care given to ones relationship with the natural environment. This idea is predicated on the equally central principle of the inherent value of the natural world beyond its utility to human beings. Achieving this holism requires a turn away from industrialism and consumer capitalism.

In the description of the EABM program, we also see the stress on the past as a way to forge that meaningful connection with the earth through "rootedness" to one's local ecology, one's particular patch of the earth. Ancestry is clearly one means of this rootedness. It is implied that this ancestral relationship will foster attachment and provide knowledge of the land. Stewardship, through the lens of the EABM, derives from this ancestral knowledge and

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[7] "I was dancing around burning cauldrons of Wall Street Journals and chanting names of Goddesses and stuff like that."

[8] A canonical Hasidic rebbe from the late 18th - early 19th century.

attachment (one that implies inheritance and possession) "inspired" activism can "grow." Human life -- individual and collective -- is interwoven with the natural world.

At the two schools, this form of ecological holism was interwoven with the traditional organic analogy of a primal connection between the Jewish soul and the Jewish land. This idea is found in many canonical Jewish texts and in classic and contemporary Zionist writings as well, most significantly that of Avraham HaKohen Kuk (Rav Kuk), the "godfather" of religious Zionism. It also finds resonance in Hasidic thought, which is pervaded by mystical pantheism that was historically enacted through the cultivation of intense affective experiences of divinity.[9] At ST and CVE, this organic analogy was fused with the vision of ecological holism and the critical countercultural perspective familiar to many students.

Echoing traditional Hasidic practices, the syncretic religiosity created by the fusion of ecological holism and mystical Zionism was enacted through embodied practices that underscored the role of "ancestral" attachment and knowledge of the land within a holistic framework. Embodied experiences of the land as the sacred homeland -- *eretz yisrael*, the Land of the Israel -- were encouraged and common at both schools. Students recounted hiking, especial in the pastoral open spaces in the West Bank, gardening, dips in the *ma'ayan* (natural spring) near CVE, and Hasidic-style meditation (*hitbodedut*) in natural settings as part of their "spiritual practice." These practices were also worked into the curriculum at the schools: classes were held outside and students were encouraged to take a walk and meditate on the material. Elisheva, Orli, and Jason extended this pedagogical practice to their work leading hikes at the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI). Elisheva told me that one of her main goals in life at the time was "making connections between Torah and *teva* (nature)." Students attachment to their physical environment, their sense of cosmic belonging to the place in which they live, and the innate purpose and meaning of studying Torah in Israel have the effect of instilling a sense of enchantment. As Elisheva puts it, Torah, in the abstract sense, is "closer here... it's deeper here."

The corrective shift towards a holistic lifestyle is part of the "return" these ba'al teshuvas are enacting. Embodied experiences of the Land-of-Israel-as-sacred-homeland contribute to the sense of enchantment that fuels that narrative. The embodied connection can be extended to include all forms of mundane practices through the "holistic" application of Jewish practice to all facets of one's life. Environmental activism is redirected towards explicitly divine goals on the local (Jewish) level, which is often frame on the global (universal) level, as action aimed at redeeming the whole world.

Alterity and authenticity

A recurrent theme for students in their vision of the holistic, environmentally sustainable lifestyle is the image of the indigenous, non-Western Other who is meaningfully connected to the land, guided by ancient customs and cosmologies. This attraction to premodern non-Western

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[9] On the potential antinomianism of Hasidic theology and practice, and its containment within traditional Hasidic social and political organization, see Shaul Magid, *Hasidism on the Margin: Reconciliation, Antinomianism, and Messianism in Izbica and Radzin Hasidism* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

cultures was less explicit than the focus on environmentalism but just as pervasive. Ironically, participating in models of alterity was a means of imbuing emergent Jewish identity and practice with a sense of authenticity.

Their search for meaningful identities as described in their stories of *teshuvah*, was often positioned either in contrast to the dominant "white" identity or in opposition to the capitalist, consumerist paradigm (and often both). A certain counterculture dialectic emerged that posits the West against the non-West, the modern against the traditional and tribal, the alienated and exiled against the indigenous and "landed." Not surprisingly, the student sought to align herself with the non-Western, premodern "native." This process of alignment was embedded in students' personal narratives. After a period of experimentation with non-Western cultures, they differentiated themselves by finding their "true" identity in Judaism. This discourse ends with a vision in which all "peoples of the Earth" return to their homeland and/or ancestral traditions.[10]

Jason and Yonatan spoke at length of their inspiration by North American Indians. Jason told me that before he met the Neo-Hasidic crowd at a Rainbow Gathering,[11] he was planning to go and "learn" with a Lakota community. Shlomo studied West African drumming and dance for years and even traveled to West Africa to study there. Bracha received her bachelor's degree from a university affiliated with Tibetan Buddhism in the United States. Rachel had been Wiccan, as mentioned previously. Liz wore an African-style head wrap for a year before coming to Israel. "People on the bus used to say to me, 'What are you?'" she told me, laughing. Shlomo received similar comments during his travels through West Africa. Although he did not yet identify as a religious Jew, he covered his head with a Muslim-style knit hat as a sign of his "spiritual" identification.

Many students described how their explorations of "others" and their search for meaningful, holistic lifestyles ended with them embracing their Jewishness as a quasi-tribal identification, mirroring the indigeniety they were drawn to in others. For example, Jason described a turning point at a Native American gathering. He gave a speech in which he used an expletive and, as a result, was publicly berated by an old Indian woman.

> I sensed that they need to put their *cavanah* [intention], their energy, into fixing their own people, and we need to fix ourselves. Or I did, as my personal path… and I forget if someone said this explicitly… but I think one of them actually said, 'you know, you're Jewish, you guys actually won your homeland back.' And I was like, 'I have never thought about it that way before.'

Notably, he can't remember who made the comment to him about his "homeland" but he imagines it was a Native American ("one of them"). He frames the scene as an exchange between "peoples" ("they… we…"), constructing a national identity in relation to theirs.

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[10] Naturally, this introduces the question of the other natives in Israel and the Occupied Territories. I bracket this question here (as do the students and teachers) in my attempt to elucidate the religious thinking of these schools, but I found that the Palestinian presence and national struggle was a profound "problem" in this philosophical program, presenting all kinds of cognitive dissonance for students.

[11] Rainbow Gatherings are temporary intentional communities that usually takes place annually in national parks, attracting tens of thousands of participants. They have a clear cultural genealogy to the countercultural of the 1960s, espousing utopian and countercultural values that negate consumerism and industrialism.

Not long after the experience described above, Jason went to a Rainbow Gathering where he met Moish Geller, an old member of Carlebach's following, who told him to go to CVE to study. Jason told me that that was the first time he experienced a "Jewish Sabbath." "I never knew that Shabbat was *this*. I mean, it doesn't really exist in America. And also Jews from Israel seemed to have a totally different energy than Jews—than American Jews." The foreign quality of these (Israeli and American-Israeli) Jews allowed for the possibility of a rehabilitated Jewish identity, distinct from the banal "Jews" -- i.e., American Jews -- he was familiar with. In his narrative, this scene comes directly after his departure from the Native American gathering, providing a logical replacement in a story of self-discovery. He had found his own "tribe" and "homeland."

A similar process took place for Shlomo during his travels in West Africa where he began to think about his own identity in contrast to those around him, framed in the similar discourse of "peoples." He says about the West Africans with whom he studied: "Like, what am I doing here? These are *them*. These are their people."

> I had this one proverb—I never understood it really until I went to Africa. It's from Ghana actually—it says, 'As long as a log floats in the water, he'll never be a crocodile.' You know?… There, you see it clearly. I'm like a log floating around in Africa, trying to be—not *really*—but trying to be an African, trying to tap into that. That's not who you *are*. Ya gotta be a log, you know?

Fittingly explained by a Ghanaian proverb, Shlomo presents a similar situation in which he is pushed back onto his Jewishness when he realizes that he can't enter the otherness he had once emulated. That is "them… their people.'" He has to be what he *really* is – in this case, a Jew. The encounter with alterity concludes with a realization of his own particularism, which once again mirrors "theirs."

This experimentation found expression in the aesthetic and material religious culture of the schools as well. Several students had dreadlocks. For two men, these served as *peot* (forelocks), a vivid expression of the cultural syncretism of the schools. Students also had eclectic clothing styles that mixed various "ethnic" clothes with informal American styles, like baggy jeans. This kind of dressing and self-presentation would be considered problematic at the vast majority of Orthodox yeshivas that stress conformity and propriety. This is part of the reason why these students chose to go to CVE and ST and why they felt comfortable at these schools.

For these students, ecological holism provides a reparative model that can reconnect the individual meaningfully to the earth by means of collective knowledge and shared practices. Countercultural images of indigeniety provide examples of this model as they are situated, both discursively and temporally, in opposition to contemporary Western society. For many students, experimentation with non-Western cultures eventually reached a point of differentiation in which they were pushed back on their "true" identity, history, and people, i.e., the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. They brought these models to the task of "reviving" Judaism as a holistic, "spiritual" tradition. Students retained markers of alterity as signifiers of authenticity, perhaps as a logical extension of the oppositional stance that was encoded in these idealized countercultural models. Thus, authenticity is coded as non-White and non-Western -- and certainly non-middle-class, non-suburban, and non-American.

Authentic Jewishness as *yiddishkeit*

Ecological holism, mixed with countercultural critique, and the idealization of indigenous lifestyles provide powerful motivation for the idea of a return to a traditional Jewish lifestyle in the Jewish homeland. The cultivation of embodied experiences in natural environments, in the context of learning Torah as the knowledge of the land of Israel, can foster attachment and enchantment, animating the narrative of return with strong emotions and affective experience. Another way that the narrative of return was animated at these schools was in the performance and affective experience of *yiddishkeit*, a specific construction of Jewishness. *Yiddishkeit* is the Yiddish word for "Jewishness," a term that calls to mind the lost world of Ashkenazi Jews that was lost that gave birth to the Hasidic movement in the 18th century and was lost to genocide in World War II. In contrast to alterity-as-authenticity, *yiddishkeit* codes authenticity in the markers of the familial past. There is enough distance between students and the Yiddish past for it to be practically unfamiliar but enough proximity for it to be culturally recognizable and identifiable with one's family history. The familial association was extended to the relationships with teachers and with Carlebach himself.

I myself took the frequent use of Yiddishims for granted for some time, unconsciously accepting it as a sign of the "Jewishness" of the schools, although none of these people grew up speaking Yiddish. In fact, their day-to-day languages were English and Hebrew, with a few people conducting most of their lives in Hebrew and speaking only English at the schools. Yet "*yiddishkeit,*" or alternately "*frumkeit*," were terms that were often mentioned to refer to Jewishness. (*Frumkeit* as roughly the same meaning of *yiddishkeit* but refers to religious Jewish life.) Similarly, they spoke of being "*frum*" rather than "religious" or "*dati*," the Hebrew word. Many religious words that might have been expressed in Hebrew terminology were often expressed in Yiddish. *Hasidus* instead of *hasidut*, *shabbes* instead of *shabbat, rebbe* instead of *rav*, etc. Unusual Yiddishisms, like *mamish* and *gevaltic,* were also common, mostly because Carlebach was fond of them years ago and their use spread among his followers. These have become virtual shibboleths of the Carlebach-inspired community.[12]

This constant use of Yiddish played an important role in marking the cultural space of the yeshivas with a specific construction of "Jewish." For most American Jews, especially those in their twenties and thirties, this "old world" language is associated with grandparents who either came to North America around the turn of the last century or were born to recent immigrants from Europe. The language and the mannerisms of Ashkenazi Jews will be recognizable as that of an authentically Jewish past, one they associate with these early generations. Part of the "warmth" of the schools, I suggest, is related to these associations.

All of these facets came together during Carlebach's *yarzeit* [memorial day] that was commemorated at ST with a *kumzits*, a gathering at which people drink and sing together.[13]

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[12] Not surprisingly, these words signify thematic emotions for Carlebach followers. *Gevaltic* mean, roughly, "amazing." *Mamish*, which has a modern Hebrew equivalent with a different pronunciation, is an emphatic word that means, simply, "really."

[13] *Kumzits* is Yiddish for "come sit." Carlebach was famous for these.

Between *niggunim* and *l'chayims*, people "gave over"[14] *dvrei torah* and stories about Shlomo. During one of the stories, Shlomo was described as everyone's "*zayde,* the link to Jewish home we might have never personally experienced."[15] The image of the Jewish grandmother or grandfather is embedded in Jewish American culture and imbued with warmth. For those who may not have had a *zayde* or a *bubbe*, Neo-Hasidic culture constructs one in the figure of Shlomo and in the teachers at the schools. With Shlomo's death, his grandfatherly charisma -- his *zayde*-ness -- was routinized through these practices and dispersed throughout the social-cultural institutions of the schools.

Yiddishisms and "old world" mannerisms create a living link to the past, both real and imagined. They may also trigger actual memories of grandparents who used some Yiddishisms and in that way recalled their own past. In this way the countercultural holistic model is injected with recognition and affectivity, achieving a full sense of authenticity. This grandfatherly ambiance is both familial and homey, practically distant yet experienced as close. Significantly, this Yiddish is a Yiddish of the past, not the Yiddish of contemporary Brooklyn or Mea Sha'arim, the *haredi* neighborhood of Jerusalem, but rather the Yiddish of the European *shtetlach*. In this way, Jewishness is displaced back in time and revived. This cultural practice provides a personal, affective dimension to the narrative of return.

Temporalities of return

Facilitated by teachers and the schools' institutional setting, students are able to cultivate powerful affective experiences that instill a sense of authenticity to their activity at the schools, providing multiple dimensions to their narratives of return. A nostalgic, familiar vision of the Jewish pre-American past is mapped onto the countercultural model of premodern indigeneity to provide a hybrid fantasy that comes to life through embodied and discursive practices that are evocative and productive. Securing the past allows students to orient towards a future that they work to perfect in the present. Their activist stance, informed by environmentalism, social justice, and indigenous rights movements, dovetails with the activist ethos of Zionism, both secular and religious.

These two orientations, however, can sometimes contradict each other; they also occlude other more practical narratives. I argue that the unarticulated goal of these competing temporalities is to set up a creative tension towards the future that allows for the greatest enchantment, purpose, identity, and, most importantly, freedom and versatility to improvise new forms of social and cultural being. At the end of this paper, I will come back to the experience of uncanny familiarity and think about how this overall narrative of return plays with temporalities and affectivity in relation to practical goals.

The construction of Jewishness at these Neo-Hasidic schools is neither the flattened time-space of modern nationalism nor the unidirectional movement of Zionism, secular or religious. The continual undercurrent of allegiance to *yiddishkeit* undercuts the Zionist hegemony over

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[14] An Englishized Yiddishism.

[15] Yiddish for "grandpa."

Jewish identity and the singularity of the Land of Israel in the religious Zionist imagination. The vast majority of Yiddish speakers in Israel are *haredim* (ultra-Orthodox) who have an antagonistic relationship with the state dating back to the origins of the Zionist movement. Although it is not explicit, in their celebration and affiliation with the Yiddish past as the site of authentic Jewishness, the Neo-Hasidic community maintains a subtle respect and identification with their insular coreligionists who have outwardly refused all engagement with modernity, including the modern state of Israel.

Though Yiddishisms were constant, there was also a back and forth between the Hebrew and Yiddish pronunciations. I could never figure out if I should call the teacher, Moshe, "Reb Moishe," as Liz and Andrew called him, "Rav Moshe," as others called him, or perhaps "Moishele," as one student called him. In my interview with him, we went back and forth on certain words, for example *ahavat yisra'el* and *ahavas yisroh'el*. I found that this unconscious ambivalence was widespread. This linguistic indecision reflects the cultural indeterminacy in relation to the modern state of Israel versus the Jewish past of the shtetl and the Diaspora. Beyond Yiddishisms, several of the male students made the pilgrimage to the grave of Rebbe Nachman in Uman in the Ukraine over Rosh Hashana. Others visited the grave of the Chabad rebbe on trips to New York City. These practices, common among ultra-Orthodox Hasidim, have the effect of maintaining the Diaspora as a site of holiness and Jewish authenticity, complicating the inherent, singular holiness attributed to the Land of Israel. This displacement and diffusion was often rationalized with a turn to mystical, pantheist, and universalist thought that was Hasidic and holistic at the same time. "*Maleyo kol ha'aretz kavodo*" ("the whole world is filled with His glory") was an oft-quoted phrase in this regard.

That being said, the Zionist revival was never completely absent, in part because it was all around us in multiple ways. The religious Zionist movement has always been more open to secular forms, and thus more accessible and relatable to these American ba'al teshuvahs. The earthy, primordial nationalism of Zionism, and the messianic political activism of religious Zionism, fuses neatly with Neo-Hasidic practices of embodiment and the activist ethos of their environmentalist practices. The land is central in the vital holistic lifestyle and the embodied experiences at these schools "root" the student to the land in a way that mimics dominant cultural patterns in Israel (for example, in Israeli youth groups). These practices put emphasis on the present more than anything -- on the work that needs to be done to redeem the Jewish people and the world. The past is necessary to move meaningfully towards the future and to create the effect of enchantment in the present.

The result is a temporal and geographic ambivalence. The land is both sacred materiality and a sacred symbol. It is *eretz yisrael* as the actual land of Israel; it is the "local" iteration of a universal concept, i.e., the ecological holistic model, in which all parts of the earth have an immanent value; but it is also a "place" in the sense of a specific conglomeration of practices, relationships, and affective experience that is marked as Jewish, and in this way it is transposable -- some of "*eretz yisrael*" can be found in Uman, some in Crown Heights. The blend of these variously constructed temporalities -- the Jewish past, the indigenous premodern past, the enchanted present, the future as divine, unrealized, and ultimately indeterminate -- create a spatial ambivalence that allows for maximum social and cultural experimentation within the structure of an authentic tradition.

Canny and uncanny, reversed: practical time and the forgotten present

Between the sometimes paradoxical temporalities of Neo-Hasidic Jewishness is another kind of time that gets lost in the shuffle. I refer to this as practical time (in Bourdieu's sense of practice) by which I mean the largely unconscious strategies by which individuals move through and maneuver time to achieve socially prescribed goals within the social field. However, in these Neo-Hasidic settings, Bourdieu's concept of practice can be augmented with Wallace's concept of the mazeway through which the individual reaches fulfillment and meaning in their life. This expands Bourdieu's somewhat limited agnostic and materialist perspective. It would be reductive to say that these American Jews came to study at these schools in order to acquire a kind of "capital" (be it social, cultural, or religious) to wield in a field of power relations. However, Bourdieu's concept of practice and misrecognition can be helpful in understanding how practices serve unarticulated interests. In this case, two goals come to the surface. One is in practical time: their gradual advancement through the social field as they date, get married, and eventually have children, all of which was happening constantly among students at the schools and lay at the base of much of their activities, though it was rarely discussed. The other is the social-cultural experimentation towards a more satisfying and morally demanding collective life, for which Judaism and American counterculture (and by proxy, images of premodern indigeniety) provide the raw material.

In order to bring out these forgotten "banal" temporalities (the not-worth-mentioning; the awkward-to mention; the difficult-to-put-into-words), I would like to look at the most paradoxical aspect of the narrative of return: the feelings of recognition and familiarity that students describe when first encountering the Neo-Hasidic community and as an extension, the Jewish tradition and the Land of Israel. These stories seal the narratives of return in that they fuse the mythical-symbolic with the personal-affective. I suggest that it is this conflation of mythical and practical time that truly animates the social reality of these narratives of Jewish return.

Bracha told me that when she first came to Israel, she felt like she was home. She immediately "fell in love" with the Rohms, the founders of ST, and with the Nachlaot community. Yonatan echoed her when he explained that his first Shabbat at the Rohms was "love at first sight." "Candles, and light, and *niggunim*, and stories, and just another world. I saw people really praying and really dancing and singing and joy and family and all these things..." Not long after, he went to CVE and had a similar feeling of "kindred spirit." He told me that peoples' faces looked familiar to him. There were "real people," he said, people who were "on the same path" as him. Shlomo described a similar experience on his first stay at CVE. "It was very clear to me. Just, this—this is my identity. Like, this is who I am. For some reason, I was never taught any of this stuff."

These descriptions pick up on themes discussed above. The sense of family and home can be attributed to the sense of a living link with *yiddishkeit* -- coded as authentic Jewishness -- and to embodied experiences such as dancing and singing, and other forms of "sensory pageantry" that contribute to the sense of enchantment in the present. However, the experiences of authenticity and enchantment seem to go beyond these cultural cues to a deeper experience of recognition and providence that has an almost magical quality (e.g., Shlomo describes

recognition without prior knowledge; Yonatan describes recognizing faces of people he had never met before). It is no wonder that they compare the experience to romantic love, which is often experienced as having the same transcendent quality.

Bourdieu refers to love as the harmonization of habitus, as "a way of loving one's own destiny in someone else and so of feeling loved in one's own destiny."[16] The students at these schools come from very similar sociocultural backgrounds and have developed similar "tastes" in the countercultural milieux of North America. They celebrate authenticity and "naturalness," embodiment and sincerity, and they have broadly the same countercultural critique of consumer capitalism and secular modernity. They were drawn to Israel to pursue a life for their future selves than would be more fulfilling than the ones they saw around them growing up. They shared ideas about the value of alterity, authenticity, and ancestry, and imaginative material drawn from idealized images of premodern non-Western peoples. In this context, we can understand their seemingly uncanny recognition as the recognition of others with the same cultural intuition -- the same "bright idea" -- to combine countercultural models with Orthodox Judaism for an authentic, holistic, and "spiritual" life that connected meaningfully both to the natural world and to the social collectivity (to "community"). This recognition is then perceived and acted upon as if auspicious and "meant to be," glossing the social and cultural origins that make it possible and focusing instead on the enchanted experience of personal and collective destiny.

Mythic time, the narrative of national return, obscures practical time, in which the student joins a community, finds guidance from elders, searches for a suitable spouse, and establishes his or her own household. From a certain perspective, their enchantment and religiosity facilitated this very pragmatic social passage,[17] but to reduce it this way leaves out how students maneuver through the social-cultural field not only for their personal success but to create a more fulfilling collective model in which they will participate. This was also often (but not always) obscured, especially in the way their previous lives fed their critical perspective and, ultimately, their turn to Jewish practice and identity.

Students were quick to forget their pre-observant lives or to rewrite them as preludes. Their time in college or in post-graduate jobs, their relationships t with friends and romantic partners, and the levels of training and privilege they acquired that prepared them for livelihoods in the United States were often framed as prologues to rediscovering Judaism. They worked in and against this time in many unspoken ways, implicitly adapting or otherwise canceling out their previous forms of socialization and the "professionalization" that took place in so many middle class educational institutions. The question of "what I'm doing with my life" came up obliquely as the voice of family and friends, occasionally countered with an explanation addressed to such an audience. Not surprisingly, it is this audience (speaking broadly) that ultimately funds much of the work of these schools and, one can predict, the salaries of these students once they find jobs as rabbis and Jewish educators at schools or outreach centers in

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[16] Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction*, p. 243. (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1984.)

[17] This is what scholars of the evolution of religion would refer to as "costly signaling." See, Irons, "Religion as a hard-to-fake sign of commitment," in *The Evolution of Commitment*, 292–309. Randolph Nesse (ed.), New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 2001.

Israel or North America. Although the story of return often hovered on the level of the mythic and destined, it was very much interwoven with the practical movement through time and the social and cultural contexts out of which these imaginal models and cultural practices arose.

As mentioned above, the term *teshuvah* is triply resonant, meaning repentance, response, and return. For these ba'al teshuvahs, it is premised on recognition, the discovery of unknown knowledge and the recovery of a lost past. It is a correction, going backwards to go forwards. Through the practices explored in this paper, we see it as an act of creation, one that builds on social and cultural practices that set the stage, as it were, for these experiences. Return requires a sense of authenticity and enchantment for it to "work." This is supplied by the models of past and future that lay the ground work for the individual journey through mythic and practical time.