

literature or in communal life, Hasidism nourishes itself by its stored-up reserves of spiritual power. In the eighteenth century it was a great creative force which brought into stagnant rabbinical Judaism a fervent stream of religious enthusiasm. Under the influence of Hasidism the Russo-Polish Jew became brighter at heart but darker in intellect. In the nineteenth century, in its contact with European culture, it was more reactionary than rabbinism. The period of stagnation which it has lately passed through must, however, result in its gradual decay.¹⁴

It is worth noting several items in Dubnow's description, which tellingly reflected and informed both the scholarly and the popular opinion of Hasidism in the era we are examining: (1) its followers are the "uneducated masses,"¹⁵ (2) it is described intellectually as "dark" and "reactionary," (3) in its present "period of stagnation," it is sustained by "its stored-up reserves of spiritual power," but it is fated to gradually decay.

Given this evaluation, it is no surprise at all that both European and North American observers expressed horror at the thought that Hasidism might actually come to America. Thus, when, in 1873, news arrived in Europe that a group of Hasidim had founded a synagogue in Chicago, the *Israelitische Wochenschrift* of Magdeburg carried the following:

A Polish synagogue is to be inaugurated. The detailed description lets [us] know that we have to do with a group of Hasidim. It is to be regretted that such scenes should be taking place in America.¹⁶

In North America itself, another Hasidic congregation, founded in Montreal in 1884; elicited negative comment from an observer who expressed the fear that "the malignant leprosy of *Hasidut* will spread on the soil of this land."¹⁷ The traditionalist-oriented *The American Hebrew*, in response to a letter to the editor defending the conduct of a Hasidic rabbi in New York in 1893, stated editorially,

"We should all exert the fullest influence possible to discountenance the transplanting of this system to this country."¹⁸

II. Methodological Considerations

As we can see from this reaction, there were eastern European Jews in North America from the very beginnings of the mass migration who founded congregations that contemporary Jews understood as "Hasidic." But what does "Hasidic" actually mean in this context? One important factor to take into consideration is that the Hasidic spiritual leadership, particularly at the beginning of the migration, tended not to emigrate. Second, this leadership also tended to discourage its followers from emigration because they had grave doubts about

Isaac's grandson, Israel Friedman, recalls:

Boyan was a small town with no more than five or six hundred Jews and maybe a couple of thousand gentiles. This was a *hojf* town. The entire Jewish community existed by hundreds of people coming there to see the Rebbe. There were little inns and little restaurants. One of the businesses was to rent *shtraymlen* [fur hats] for *yontev* [Shabbes and the holidays]. You have to understand that in Russian Hasidim do not wear *shtraymlen*. But my grandfather insisted that in Boyan on *yontev* everyone was to wear *shtraymlen*. So some enterprising entrepreneur got himself a couple of *shtraymlen*, and if I remember, my father jokingly said each consisted of sixteen hairs, and they rented them for a small fee. The town more or less lived from the Hasidic community, which arrived there by the hundreds and by the thousands, especially during the times of the Jewish holidays. (IF)

The dynasty endured no more than one lifetime in Boyan, as the outbreak of the First World War forced townspeople to flee from the area. Boyan, just a few miles from the Russian border, came under immediate attack, and the Boyaner Rebbe and his family and followers fled the war zone for Vienna, then the gathering point for refugees.

When Reb Isaac died in 1917, he was succeeded by his son Reb Mordchei Shlomo Friedman. The youngest of four sons, Reb Mordchei Shlomo remained in Vienna, where he had a *shibul* (a small house of study and prayer) with a few loyal Hasidim. His social and economic prospects, however, were poor, as he was the youngest of the Rizhin dynasty, with scant hope of attracting greater numbers by outshining his older, better-known brothers and cousins. In 1924, when his followers in America invited him to visit the United States, he accepted in the hope of earning enough to support his family and remain in Europe. After his return to Vienna, however, a sudden illness consumed his earnings.

He had hoped to accumulate some money, and then with the savings he would be able to live. But when the savings evaporated he had two choices: the Hasidim in America wanted him to return, while some Boyaner Hasidim in Galicia wanted him to settle there in Drogobych. My father didn't feel like going to America and be away from the family, but my mother, being more modern, did not feel like being in Drogobych where she would be completely surrounded by an ultra, ultra Hasidic community. This would have given her no freedom whatsoever. It would have been a great strain on her as she wanted to remain in a more Westernized milieu. So he went to the doyen of the Rizhiner dynasty, the Tchoortkover Rebbe [the grandson of the Rizhiner Rebbe], who was one of the great figures in Jewish life, and not only in Hasidic circles. He was one of the leaders of Agudat Israel.¹¹ It took everybody by surprise that the Tchoortkover Rebbe advised my father to go to America because he felt that he would be able to accomplish something

for *Yiddishkayt* [the observance of mitzvot and the spread of Torah learning]. (IF)

Dire predictions were made for those abandoning Europe for America. The temptations and opportunities available in a pluralistic free society, where both ideas and goods could be displayed openly in the marketplace, were always measured with apprehension by the Orthodox. The most conservative feared that the dream of freedom in the New World would become a nightmare for an unshackled populace. In America, it was said, freedom would accomplish what no tsar had been able to do—separate Jews from Judaism.

In 1926, after receiving another invitation from his American followers, all of them poor and working-class new Americans, the Boyaner Rebbe decided to emigrate permanently to the United States.

I remember before he went to America, my father went to visit his oldest brother in Chernovtsy. Since Boyan is not too far from Chernovtsy he went to Boyan and he could not recognize it. It was completely destroyed.

When we left, the entire family, perhaps forty or fifty people, gathered at the railroad station to bid us goodbye. There were tears galore. Both my mother and my father were the youngest in their families and were very, very beloved, and everyone felt they were going away and who knows when they were going to see them again. They were going to the wild reaches of America where Yiddishkayt was very poor. In general it was felt how could they leave Europe? (IF)¹²

Between the Wars: The Boyaner Rebbe in America

Like most Jewish immigrants from Eastern and Central Europe the Boyaner Rebbe settled on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. A once elegant three-story house at 247 East Broadway became the family home and the center of the Boyaner Hasidim in the New World.

We came there in August of 1927 (my father arrived in 1926) and we actually occupied three floors. The ground floor was a synagogue. The first floor consisted of our kitchen and where my father had an office and where he received people; we had the *ish* [communal meal] there. We lived on the second floor, where we had six rooms. We ate downstairs. The third floor was rented out. But during the depression we realized we could no longer afford to live in the duplex apartment, and so we gave up the second floor and we moved into the first floor where we organized our living quarters. My father's office went to the ground floor where the *shul* [synagogue] was sort of shortened and the part of the *shul* toward the street was made into a separate room where my father *davened* [prayed] and where he received people. (IF)

to others. It didn't bother them—the encroachment of money, of time, of everything in order to help others. That's what it was to be Kapitshinitzer. Much to my regret and sorrow, that wasn't me. I wasn't up to such standards. (SH)

It proved difficult to convince the Hasidim of his decision.

This is a story of the Seer, the Lubliner, and of his contemporary, the renowned Rabbi Ezriel, known as the Rosh ha-Barzel, the mind of iron, out of respect for his intellect. He was a big Misnaged. One day the Seer, the Lubliner, met him and complained about how difficult life was for him. People were constantly beleaguering him. Hasidim were constantly showering him with honors, and asking him for advice, for his blessings. It was all too much for him.

"Well," said Reb Ezriel, "the solution is very simple. Next Shabbes when you're in shul, get up on the podium and tell the people that you are unworthy of honor, that you are really not learned and thus not deserving. Ask the people not to come to you any more."

"Good idea," the Lubliner said, and he promised that he would do so.

When they met next Reb Ezriel asked him how it went, and the Seer, the Lubliner, said, "It's worse than ever. No sooner did I make my announcement than the crowd grew larger. Now they say 'Look how modest he is. He must be a great tzaddik!'"

So Reb Ezriel said, "I didn't think of that. But I have a solution. This Shabbes get up on the podium again and tell them how brilliant and saintly you are and they'll run from you."

"Aah, no," the Lubliner said, "that I can't do. That would be lying."

It was like that with me. When I protested that I was unequal to the task of being a Rebbe they said that my modesty was proof that I was worthy, and they wanted me all the more. (SH)

Boyan: Reb Nahum Dov

A growing number of appeals convinced Menachem Brayer of the need to prepare one of his sons to become the new Boyaner Rebbe.

It so happens that when my revered father-in-law, the Rebbe of Boyan, may his memory be blessed, passed away in 1971, I was called in by the previous Gerer Rebbe, Rebbe Israel of Jerusalem (they called him Bayes Yisrael), and he asked me in very clear language to keep in mind the future of the dynasty and to make sure that my two sons attend the Rizhiner yeshivah in Jerusalem, which is the unique Hasidic yeshivah built by my father-in-law, and which carries the philosophy and perpetuates the tradition of Rizhin. I had no choice but to promise him that I will. And I felt also the obligation, as they say, *noblesse oblige*, that if there are no other descendants who will perpetuate the dynasty of Boyan, Sadager, and Rizhin, which goes back to the Maggid of Mezritch, this would be, God forbid, an extinction of a long chain of traditional leadership of Hasides, and so I felt impelled both by

conscience and also by tremendous pressure from all Hasidic and rabbinic authorities—from Rabbi Feinstein, blessed be his memory, to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, to the Gerer Rebbe, to all the rebbes in Israel, and other tabbeim, that Boyan should be continued. To make it short, my children, my two sons, studied in Jerusalem. My oldest son, Yigal Israel, claimed he is not worthy to sit in his grandfather's chair. He became an aerospace engineer—working for Rockwell for NASA. He studied in Jerusalem and got his rabbinate—a brilliant mind and a humble heart.

The younger one, Nahum Dov, got all the pressure and everyone concerned on him. I have a tremendous sense of humility, an enormous sense of concern and worry that I have encouraged a young man to undertake a herculean task which is too much for him. I felt a supreme sense of obligation that in my hands, so to say, humbly, lies the balance between the continuation of Boyan, or the extinction of it. I had to make a decision and I made it. (MMB)

Reb Nahum Dov, the younger son, began his studies at the Rizhiner yeshivah in Jerusalem with the idea of fulfilling the responsibilities of his legacy.

the Rebbe were some local philanthropists who were delighted to see Bobov flourish. With the help of these committed individuals, the Rebbe acquired two buildings in Manhattan on West 85th Street. One was converted into a trade school where men learned to repair watches, cut diamonds, and engaged in other trades. Another building was multipurpose: it was the residence of the Rebbe's family and the war orphans for whom the Rebbe acted as a surrogate father. There was a mikvah in the basement and a *besmedresh* (a place of prayer and study) with a small sukkah on the first floor. It housed the Rebbe's office, which on Shabbat became the women's besmedresh. The building had dining rooms for men and women, and, of course, a kitchen.

Many of the Hasidim who came to the Rebbe's American court were alone and rootless, stripped of everything but their memories. These very memories of their fathers and grandfathers, of how life was before the war, were evoked when the Rebbe donned his *shtreiml* (festive fur trimmed hat), presided over a *tish* (festive holiday and Sabbath table), or gave a blessing. In the figure of the Rebbe, the Hasid found a father, while in his *chaverim* (comrades), he found new brothers. Indeed, a rebbe and his Hasidim functioned as a surrogate family to the orphaned Hasid. What Jacob Katz writes about the relationship between the Hasid and a Hasidic community at the onset of Hasidism is equally true of the movement after the war:

membership in the emotion-packed Hasidic congregation and the strong attachment of the Hasid to his mentor served to some extent as a substitute for family ties. (Katz 1961:243)

Recovery was slow, but steady. An informant of mine recalled Bobov's first seder in the United States, one in which all twenty-five or so Bobover Hasidim gathered together in celebration. What a curious Hasidic fete it was! Nobody had a beard except the Rebbe. No one could even afford *yom tov* (holiday) clothes (much less Hasidic ones), and what they did wear did not match. That night, instead of giving his traditional Torah, the Rebbe told a tale:

Once there was a Jewish farmer. And the Jewish farmer had everything a farmer should have, he even had ducks. Now you know Jews, if you own animals, you yourself aren't allowed to eat until you've fed them first. This is the law. So these ducks were fed quite well. And they looked fine too. Whereas gentile

farmers would pluck the duck's soft feathers to make pillows, Jews weren't allowed to do this. No wonder the Jewish ducks felt better and looked nicer.

Now this farmer had a gentle neighbor who was very jealous of his happy animals, and so, decided to steal them. He waited until the farmer went away for a few days, took his ducks, and hid them away from him. In time, he thought, perhaps they wouldn't recognize each other. But one day sometime later the gentle opened the duck's gate so they could walk around. Remembering the good times with their old master, the ducks waddled straight home. As they approached their master's house, they started to quack. Startled by the commotion, the farmer opened his door and looked down at them. "They don't look like my ducks," he said, "but they sure sound like them." And when he saw that they recognized him, he took them in and gave them food and water.

The Rebbe concluded:

Because the gentile didn't feed the ducks well, and because he plucked their nicest feathers, the real master shouldn't let them return? They're his!

Explained my informant:

Now the Rebbe was very happy to welcome everyone again. You see, the story was really about himself and his Hasidim, but perhaps too, about himself and the Almighty. Maybe we all don't look like we did before that war, but we're still your children!

Both the Rebbe and God welcomed home their long lost children and together built an oasis of Yiddishkeit in this treyf land. Some thirty years have gone by, and a Bobover tish in Boro Park is now an altogether different event. On holidays, it is attended by hundreds of Hasidim from within and outside the community. Dignitaries also pay homage to the Rebbe. One Purim, Mayor Koch was in attendance: having just attended a St. Patrick's Day parade, he cut an odd figure—a speck of kelly green in a sea of black coats and hats, worn by clapping, singing, and dancing bearded Bobover Hasidim.

Through his impressive pedigree, strength of character, and plain good timing, the Bobover Rebbe inspired many to join his community, offering his Hasidim a total environment—job advice/training, a yeshivah education, a congenial place to wor-

modernists." Following Weber, postmodernists view the present age as a kaleidoscope of competing values—the result of alienation from ultimate truth. It is typified by fragmentation and ephemerality (Harvey 1989), the superficial hodge-podge of pastiche (Jameson 1984), where any semblance of unity is undermined by radical perspectivism (Dallmayr 1987; Dews 1987; Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982) and the dissolution of a shared morality and metatheory (Lyotard 1984). Postmodernism, David Harvey writes, "does not try to transcend it [modernism], counteract it, or even to define the 'eternal and immutable' elements that might lie within it. Postmodernism swims, even wallows, in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is" (1989:44).

In her thought-provoking article, "A Place Called Home?" (1992), Doreen Massey analyzes the loss of place that so typifies the postmodern era marked by the trend toward globalization, the fragmentation of local cultures and disorientation of its residents. The process of globalization is twofold: "Home-grown specificity is invaded—it seems that you can sense the simultaneous presence of everywhere in the place you are standing"—when boundaries are rendered meaningless (ibid.:7). A key attribute of this brave new world is the compression of time and space, a result of the increasing irrelevance of distance and "meaning-endowed durations" (Emberley in Massey 1992:7). Moreover, as context-specific social forms and relations spill over community borders, fewer of them are contained within the place itself. We are more like the other precisely because we least resemble our former selves.

This postmodern topography of fragmentation and ephemerality has engendered a reactionary drive for home and homeland so evident in the emergence of worldwide localisms and nationalisms. Massey points to the pursuit of security and permanence through a sense of place (Harvey 1989), to the longing for an existential compass (Jameson 1984), and to the quest for clear and distinct identities—"placed identities for placeless times" (in Massey 1992:7), as delineated by Robbins (1991). It is in this context that we can situate the Hasidim's quest for home. To paraphrase Weber, the Hasidic quest for home is a "reenchantment" of the world. It is "an irruption of the sacred" into profane space through which communication with the Almighty is established (Eliade 1959:63). If exile is paradigmatic of the alienation from

the God, as it certainly is for Hasidim, then home symbolizes the reinstatement of a relationship with God through the building of a new center in which Torah is the privileged value and where the Rebbe, who serves as Torah incarnate, links his flock with the Almighty. "To be home now means to be at or near that Center, and as such to have the security, the lasting name, the contact with Heaven that the builders of Babel have sought in vain through their Tower" (Eisen 1986:25).

Eden, Jerusalem, Babylon, Vilna, Bobov—these are renowned centers of past Jewish life decimated by the harsh winds of history. The Bobover community in Boro Park has now taken the torch. As its predecessors, it thrives on living memory, it longs for spiritual life, it builds a better future for its children here in exile without losing hope of the pending return to their ultimate home. In the end, Boro Park may be yet another home that is built on shifting sands, but it is no sandcastle. Bobov, in the words of its proud inhabitants, is "the new fortress of Torah" (The Miracle of Bobov n.d.:5). And it is designed to protect the Jews from the chaos of modernity and postmodernity.

I conclude this paper with a passage from a Bobover publication, "The Miracle of Bobov," that celebrates the achievements of Bobov in America while yearning for an ultimate resting place:



Bobov. Krakow. Kotovitz. Tarnov. Auschwitz. Charnov. Bilitz. Such . . . once proud Polish cities boasting flourishing Talmud Torahs and Jewish communities. Now part of a roster of victims of the Holocaust, decimated, devastated beyond belief. But the Bobover Rebbe has taken a sacred vow that neither we nor our children nor our children's children will ever forget the millions of innocent men, women and children who suffered and were slaughtered.

To this end, we of Bobov are creating a living memorial to the cities and yeshivos that could have been, should have been part of our beautiful future. Here, in our new Boro Park Torah Educational Complex, we are having the names of each city, each yeshivah engraved upon the walls . . . where they will be seen and remembered by all for generations to come. It is our hope, our fervent belief, that this will be an everlasting tribute for all who walked with their heads high through recorded history's darkest chapter.

May Hashem [The Almighty] bless us that, in the very near future, we may be able to sing and dance with fervor in our holiest of holy cities, a Yerusholaim rebuilt. Amen. (n.d.:16)

room of the Gerer Hasidim. He likes the punctuality, the mix of people, and the intellectual rigor which led him to embrace some Hasidic customs: he goes to Hasidic rebbes for a blessing and "celebrates" a *yahrzeit* rather than solemnly marking the occasion. His father-in-law, who he describes as a real "Yeke" (German Jew), and who comes from a long line of *Misnagdim* (opponents of the Hasidim), is appalled. But in Boro Park, such close associations inevitably foster cultural and religious pollination.

As Hasidim transform Boro Park into home, even the Litvish yeshivot are turning more Hasidic in their orientation: less emphasis is placed on Hebrew grammar, Jewish history, and *Eretz Israel* (the Land of Israel); greater weight is given to demonstrations of piety, such as customs, blessings, and the manner of praying, than is given to erudition; more time is devoted to Talmud and less to bible studies; the mystical is favored over discursive commentary; teaching in Yiddish takes precedence over both English and Hebrew. While many of the students would have normally gone to college, very few choose this route today. It is doubtful, one informant told me, that his own children will even bother to finish the secular studies program at their yeshivah, for a secular education is simply not esteemed. In the Orthodox world view, "making it" means becoming a sage, not a yuppie.¹⁴

Yeshivot have traditionally been the preserve of the *Litvak*. Yet Chasidification in Boro Park owes a great deal to the yeshivah network that the Hasidim themselves constructed. Said one informant, "The only Hasidic movements that took hold in America, and for that matter in Israel too, were the ones that built a yeshivah." Other Boro Parkers concur. In the words of a local historian:

In order for a rebbe to sustain a following after World War II, he must have built a yeshivah. Before the war many rebbes did not have one.¹⁵ Their followings were maintained in other ways: through people living at the court of the rebbe; through informal study of the dynasty's Hasidism. After the war when few links existed to a traditional way of life, the yeshivah became vital for it attracted the young who were without attachment to any dynasty. The rebbes who did not set up yeshivot were left without a youthful following and with only the nostalgic. It is the young people in each Hasidic group who are the rebbe's soldiers.

Indeed, according to the son of one prominent rebbe, the younger generation of Hasidim, the ones who learned at the neighborhood yeshivot, are the most zealous in their allegiance to the rebbe. "The older generation remembers many prominent rebbes. Perhaps they also lost their own and took on a new one in the United States for whom they can't form the same attachment. They particularly can't be devoted to someone they bounced on their lap or saw playing stickball."

The Blueshover and Stuchiner Rebbes are examples of two eminent pre-World War II rebbes who never established yeshivot in this country, and hence, never attained the prominence of their less sage and august peers. The Blueshover in particular was regarded in Europe as a great scholar, serving as a member of the revered Agudath Israel's Council of Torah Sages. Before his recent death, his following consisted of the elderly who knew him in Europe, some of their children, and a few non-Hasidic admirers.

That yeshivot have played such a critical role in the success of Hasidism in Boro Park is due in large measure to the new function with which they were endowed by the Hasidic community. Today's yeshivah is not just an institution of Torah instruction; it is also a center for perpetuating and disseminating the Hasidic way of life. Bred into the students' bones, the dynasty's customs and teachings turn an initiate into a devotee of the rebbe whose yeshivah it is.¹⁶ Today all Hasidic groups of any distinction in Boro Park have established educational facilities: Bobov, Krasna, Ger, Skver, Munkacz, Pupa, Karlin-Stolin, Spinka, even Satmar (based in Williamsburg) all compete for the loyalty of this neighborhood's youth. This competition extends to summer camps. Since parents prefer their children to be formally supervised the entire year, the most popular yeshivot are those affiliated with a camp.

There are other reasons why Hasidic efforts at home-building in Boro Park have succeeded so well, some having little to do with Hasidic endeavors. One factor that may account for the success of Hasidim in Boro Park is the religious infrastructure they found in place there. The Hasidim benefitted from the fruits of an Orthodox community, such as its schools, *mikvahs* (ritual baths), and self-help organizations, while they established their own institutions. It should also be noted that unlike the Lower East Side, which swelled with impoverished *grinners* (newcomers), the community of Boro Park was a middle-class neighborhood as well as

one as well??? Just wondering. "Fader" is a *heimishe* [a communal spelling of *haymishke*] name.

May 1, 2007 11:33 PM, Anonymous said . . .

The name "ayala" is generally either heimish, israeli, or religious Zionist . . . in no way an outsider.

At May 2, 2007 12:14 PM, Anonymous said . . .

A number of women pursue advanced degrees in order to become more accomplished teachers, and they are required to write dissertations, etc. Better that they should fulfill requirements by researching and writing about some element of their own community rather than go chasing after information about goyish culture. I think it's interesting to see these studies from time to time; we just have to remember that they represent a "school project" rather than emes 'truth'.

This instance of "blogging the anthropologist" is one implication of working with a group of nonliberal Jews who, in their everyday lives, are formulating an alternative religious modernity. Their concern with their representation is part of their broader engagement with what they call the "secular" and "Gentile world," an engagement that is the basis of their cultural critique. Despite differences between Hasidic circles and across denominational divides, the Hasidic narrative of religious modernity described in this book takes particular issue with secular liberal versions of knowledge, truth, and freedom. As the posted comments suggest, academic knowledge, with its secular prestige, is, after all, a form of what many Hasidic women call *goyim-riakhes* ('Gentile rewards' (superficial rewards that have no real Jewish meaning)). Those seeking secular knowledge, the blogger suggests, can never truly understand Jewish *emes* 'truth', because they do not live by the discipline of Jewish law as interpreted by contemporary Hasidic and other ultra-Orthodox Jews.

In this book I have described how Hasidic women elaborate nonliberal understandings of the person, language, knowledge, and the body. This is a broader epistemological project that aims, ultimately, at messianic redemption and yet depends on participation in and knowledge of secular modernity. The specifics of the Hasidic case have broader implications for anthropological conversations about alternative modernities, for both theory and methods. There are also implications for the discipline of anthropology when an ethnographic encounter between the anthropologist and those with whom she works is characterized by a contested struggle for truth(s).



ALTERNATIVE MODERNITIES AND NONLIBERAL RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

Hasidic women's construction of an alternative religious modernity points to the value of ethnographically studying narratives of modernity thriving here at home. My approach contributes to the growing literature on what are variously called parallel modernities, alternative modernities, and multiple modernities.² This literature examines the encounter between the West and its others, often depicting a singular Western modernity against which non-Western others in postcolonial contexts react. One of the critiques of this literature has been that it essentializes Western modernity.³ The experiences of Hasidic women and girls provide a corrective, a case of one alternative narrative of Western modernity thriving within the heart of cosmopolitan New York City. Hasidic Jews' historical and contemporary participation in European and North American forms of modernity complicates the analytic category of the West itself.

In some ways, the alternative religious modernity that Hasidic women and girls live is a very modern, North American story. Arriving after persecution, they have flourished in a climate of religious pluralism and tolerance. Fluent in the language of liberal democracy, Hasidic women use this language for their own nonliberal religious purposes; they have especially adapted the North American emphasis on the freedom to be different, on self-improvement, ingenuity, and self-transformation, to complement their Jewish religious beliefs that a person can achieve perfection through discipline, whether through controlling the inclination for evil, speaking in Hasidic English, or sewing up a slit in a skirt. Hasidic women even call themselves *amerikaner yidn* 'American Jews' in contrast to Jews in other global contexts. And yet, ultimately, Hasidic Jews roundly reject North American goals of tolerance and pluralism, or even, as noted in the introduction, neighborhood building across ethnic and religious lines. Rifky, for example, told me that in North America Hasidic Jews can "respect others, you know, live and let live," meaning that Jews and Gentiles can live side by side peacefully. However, she added:

We don't raise our kids that this is ok, this is ok. We're lucky that we were born into this family . . . and we have such an education, and we have an obligation to continue in that way, and it's not a matter of choice, and it's not a matter of acceptance and tolerance.