



Preface

The purpose of this essay is to present a basis for Modern Religious Zionist thought, which integrates Torah with *derekh erez* and which is open to the modern world and its values. There is often an impression that only the extreme ends of the ideological spectrum have systematic ideologies, as extreme positions lend

themselves more easily to slogans and soundbites. In contrast, those who champion more complex and moderate positions often find it difficult to clarify their beliefs and articulate them coherently. Consequently, they are liable to be deemed spiritually lax and to lack serious ideology.

But this impression is inaccur-

- * In the Hebrew version, we labeled the manifesto as 'Moderate Religious Zionism'. While the term 'moderate' accurately captures the ideology of the movement, to ensure clarity for English readers, we opted to use the term 'modern', which is more widely recognized and understood.

rate. The modern religious worldview has a strong ideological backbone and spiritual depth. Its positions are firm, albeit complex. It must be conceded, however, that it lacks a systematic, written declaration that clearly, concisely, and sharply represents its core teachings. Nevertheless, this lacuna does not attest to ideological weakness; it remains robust.

This essay was written to fill this gap, at least partially. Its contents are merely concise principles of a much vaster and broader worldview. Nowadays, when many people feel ideologically and spiritually homeless, this seems to be of great importance.

Ideological Foundations

The Modern Religious Zionist worldview draws its values from various sources. It is based on the thoughts and actions of the forerunners of Zionism, who spoke about advancing redemption by natural means, supported the Zionist idea, integrated Torah study with broader education, and more. It draws nourishment from the teachings of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook, who called for a renewal of Judaism in the State of Israel, a return to its universalist dimensions, and for the necessary integration of all the various forces active within Jewish society, in order to reveal it fully.

This world of ideas is also

based on thinkers of the HaPoel HaMizrahi movement, who stood for the values of 'Torah va-Avodah' ('Torah and Labor'); it also espouses the worldviews of Modern Orthodoxy in the United States and England, as represented by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, and Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, which promote the integration of Torah with secular knowledge, tradition with modernity, etc. Another major source is the Torah of the rabbis of the Middle East and North Africa, who wholeheartedly supported the Zionist idea, displayed openness to the values of the new world, and practiced

All of this leads to a complex worldview that amalgamates different voices and values and indicates broad horizons of thought

halakhic moderation, which brought the public closer to the Torah and the Torah closer to the public.

If we distill the common denominator of all the sources that shape the world of ideas of Modern Religious Zionism, we can say that it emerges from a mix of various different sources of authority - whether 'Torah and Labor' or 'Torah and General Knowledge'; whether Rabbi Yosef Messas's 'law, reason, and time' or Rabbi Kook's 'the sacred, the nation, and humanity'; Modern Religious Zionism demonstrates openness to a range of sources of authority

and seeks to integrate them.

The Modern Religious Zionist worldview opposes ideological fundamentalism, which considers life from only one perspective. “One who says that he has nothing but Torah... does not even have Torah” (Yevamot 109a). **This worldview recognizes that God is revealed in the world in different ways. He is not only the Giver of the Torah, but is also the Creator of the world Who imbued human beings with intelligence and free will. God controls history and is also the Source of the wisdom we observe within nature.** The different forms of revelation obligate humanity to listen closely and consider all of them together in order to attain perfection. **All of this leads to**



a complex worldview that amalgamates different voices and values and indicates broad horizons of thought.

There are more than a few values and norms that form the basis of the path of Modern Religious Zionism. First and foremost are, of course, Torah and *halakhah*, to which it is fully committed. Beyond these, Modern Religious Zionism recognizes science, natural morality, common sense, human decency, human dignity, Zionism, solidarity, general education, freedom,

contemporary culture, and more as sources of authority. **Modern Religious Zionism** does not deny that conflict is likely to arise between these sources, but it **accepts the challenge of contending with this conflict and sometimes living with it, despite the difficulties it entails. This bold attitude does not relinquish responsibility but rather obligates people to exercise the totality of their powers to become profoundly familiar with both the world and the tradition,** to refuse to remain content with what is received and known, and to strive constantly to do what is good and right within changing circumstances.

This path, embraced by Modern Religious Zionism, can be

identified with the ‘middle way’ that is familiar from works of philosophy and religion. We will return to this path below.

The Torah and Faith

Before elaborating the middle way, we must consider the principles of Modern Religious Zionist faith and belief. The basis of Modern Religious Zionist thought is not grounded in the flourishing of only the Jewish people but of the world at large. The order of the Torah, which begins with the creation of the world and moves from there to the development of the people of Israel, dictates a line of thinking from the universal to the particular and back. That is: the purpose of the Jewish people is not self-centered but

rather is focused on leading the perfection of the whole world.

From this stems the importance that the Modern Religious Zionist worldview ascribes to universal issues like sustainability, opposing pollution, concern for wildlife, etc. **Believing that God created the world obligates every person to treat every creature with respect and refrain from improperly exploiting it.** Supplementing this is the belief that God created humanity - all of humanity - in God's image. **Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's assertion that "the image of God is either in every man or no man"** ("Religion and Race", 1963) is a

guiding principle that grounds our duty to treat every human being - Jew or Gentile - with dignity, to defend their rights, and to be sensitive to their needs. The historical role of the Jewish people and the Torah should be understood based on this outlook. **The election of Israel does not imply that it is superior to other nations, but rather that it has been chosen for a mission. If the Jewish people fulfills its charge, it vindicates its election. Israel is otherwise no different than any other people throughout history.**

This universal mission establishes responsibility not



only to observe the Torah and *mitzvot* but also to realize the vision: “Observe and keep them, for that is your wisdom and discernment in the eyes of the peoples who, on hearing of all these laws, will say, ‘Surely, that great nation is a wise and discerning people’” (Devarim 4:6). This does not speak of the desire for others to ‘like us’ but rather expresses the fundamental universal purpose of the Torah and provides a litmus test for its proper observance. The sensitivity toward anything that can be construed as a desecration of God’s name - in the eyes of Jews and non-

Jews alike - stems from here. Our role, especially today, is to sanctify God’s name in the world and to avoid desecrating it, as Rabbi Yehuda Amital taught.

Modern Religious Zionism opposes the blind veneration of rabbis and *rabbaniyot* and rejects the doctrine of ‘*Da’at Torah*’, which has no basis or source within the Jewish tradition.

The Modern Religious Zionist worldview is steeped in *Emunat Hakhamim*, faith in the sages, and absolutely believes in the Oral Torah that accompanies the Written Torah. However, as Rabbi Nachum Eliezer Rabinovitch dem-

onstrated (in his book *Pathways to their Hearts*), **faith in the sages does not mean abstaining from criticism and independent thinking. On the contrary,**

faith in the sages requires us to believe that the words of our sages are the products of reason and logic, and we must therefore make efforts to study and understand their words properly. Only by understanding them clearly can we ascertain the proper course of action for our time.

This sort of faith in the sages cultivates a sober view of Torah sages. **Modern Religious Zionism opposes the blind veneration of rabbis and rabbaniyot and rejects the doctrine of 'Da'at Torah', which has no basis or source within the Jewish tradition. Rather, Modern Religious Zionism teaches its adherents to honor, admire, and heed spiritual leaders, but nevertheless to**

be wary of self-abnegation toward them. One must always apply one's critical faculties to anything they say or do.

Modern Religious Zionism believes that to establish a full and wholesome understanding of Torah, it is necessary to study all the sources: Tanakh, Mishnah, Talmud, the literature of the *Rishonim* and *Aharonim*, *halakhah*, *aggadah*, and Jewish philosophy. Moreover, Modern Religious Zionism maintains that traditional study must be combined with modern methods of study, including academic methods, as long as their purpose is to reveal the truth. Modern Religious Zionism is not deterred by difficulties that may arise from this integration and believes that it is precisely

through this integration that we can enrich and deepen our understanding of the Torah, as Rabbi Kook wrote in a letter (Letters, 1:134).

The Middle Path

Ancient philosophers recognized that human existence is complicated. Every person harbors different powers and inclinations. The path of perfection does not mean denying any of these powers and tendencies, but rather bringing them into balance. This led to the development of the doctrine of the “middle path”, which obligates people to espouse moderation.

Rambam (Maimonides) was the greatest of the Jewish thinkers to adopt the idea of

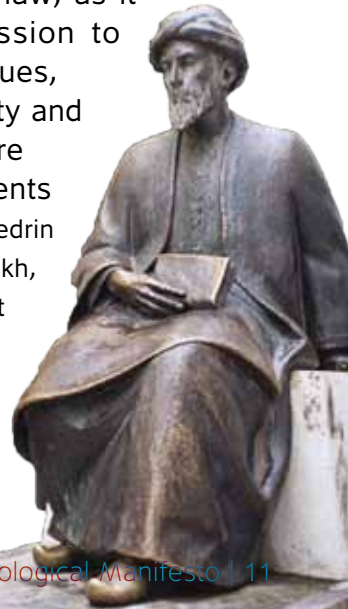
the middle path. He elaborated on it in his discussion of character development (Laws of Temperaments 1:4): “The early Sages instructed a man to evaluate his traits, to calculate them and to direct them along the middle path, so that he will be sound”; it is apparent that Rambam took a similar, balanced approach throughout his works. In his halakhic works, he combined *halakhah* and philosophy, and he wrote his philosophical treatise, *Moreh Nevukhim* (The Guide to the Perplexed), to offer a balanced response to the apparent contradiction between the straightforward meaning of Scripture and philosophical thinking. In the same work, he interpreted the Torah’s commandments as components of a healthy, balanced life: “It

says ‘just statutes and judgments’ (Devarim 4:8), and you already know that ‘just’ here means ‘equitable’” (Moreh Nevukhim 2:39). In other words, **the Torah’s commandments give ample space for every physical and psychological power, without exaggerating any of them, thus enabling each person to maximize their virtues as beings created in God’s image.**

Rabbi Norman Lamm, the President and Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva University, had such ideas in mind when he called his movement “Centrist Orthodoxy”. Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Etzion, identified the middle path with “the way of God” that made Abraham special and worthy of being chosen by God:

“For, I have chosen him so that he may charge his children and household after him, that they will keep the way of God to do righteousness and justice” (Bereishit 18:19). According to *halakhah*, even in court, the site of law and justice, the path of compromise is preferred to that of strict law, as it gives expression to additional values, like equitability and peace, that are also components of truth (Sanhedrin 7b; Shulhan Arukh, Hoshen Mishpat 12:2).

Rabbi Kook expressed himself similarly in a



political context, arguing that three forces

exerting themselves on the emerging Jewish society in Eretz Yisrael - the sacred, the national, and the humanist - which manifested in three different movements: the Orthodox, the nationalists, and the liberals. In his view, perfection is not found in any of these forces alone. Rather, it demands their cooperation. Moreover, according to Rabbi Kook, it is incumbent on those who adhere to just one of the three forces to recognize the value of the opposing forces, which balance it and restore it to its proper dimensions.

Taking the middle path does not imply concession or weakness, but rather a courageous decision.

Taking the middle path is a conscious, intentional choice. It **does not imply concession or weakness, but rather a courageous decision. One who walks the middle path espouses a wide range of views and values, weighing them against one another. There is no surrender to them, but rather an attempt to reach a balance among them. Consequently, one who takes this path cannot be expected to adhere to a predetermined view.** Given its multitude of sources, the middle path can sometimes produce different stances, contingent upon changing circumstances. Stances that were true in the

past might change in a different era. Even within a given set of circumstances, it can manifest the desired equilibrium in different forms.

The middle path is reflected in moderation. **Moderation does not imply tepidness. Tepidness expresses spiritual laxity, while moderation expresses strength. Moderation manifests a temperament and a mood that are reflected in all aspects of life - physical and spiritual, social and political, intellectual and religious.** Moderation both broadens and restrains. It calls on the individual to be attentive to a wide variety of voices and forces, and to assign them a place in the world. Consequently, they must be balanced against one another

and limited to their proper dimensions. Extremism has the exact opposite effect; it focuses its perspective on a single idea or inclination and then applies it to every realm of life. This is a problematic stance that is likely to cause significant damage. In contrast, moderation cultivates life.

In the next sections we will see how this conception of Modern Religious Zionism is expressed in various crucial issues within contemporary Judaism.

The State of Israel: Between Opportunity and Responsibility

Modern Religious Zionism believes that the establishment of the State of Israel is a fulfillment of the vision of the

prophets. It maintains that the amazing achievements of the Jewish state, which, in just a few decades, managed to become one of the world's most advanced countries economically, militarily, and scientifically; to absorb millions of Jewish immigrants; to settle every part of Eretz Yisrael; and to reestablish Jerusalem as its capital are miraculous, proving God's role in history. Consequently, we have a responsibility and obligation to support the Zionist project, mark national holidays, and thank God for the ongoing miracle of the Jewish people's return to its homeland.

However, from the perspective of Modern Religious Zionism, this view of the State offers no

guarantee that its fate and future are promised unconditionally. **Modern Religious Zionism is not messianic in the sense that it does not deign to assert that we are witnessing an irreversible process of redemption.** While recognizing the wonder of Jewish national rebirth, Modern Religious Zionism approaches historical events with humility and admits that we cannot know what the future holds. This stance gives rise to a sense of obligation and responsibility for the State's actions, alongside gratitude. If we do not work to build a model society upon foundations of integrity, charity, and justice, as the prophets instructed - **if the State of Israel does not fulfill its charge to become a source of blessing for all peoples**

of the earth - our continued existence here is not certain.

The destruction of the Third Jewish Commonwealth is, God forbid, a real possibility.

For this reason, Modern Religious Zionism contemplates the State of Israel from a perspective that is filled with admiration yet tempered by concern and criticism. The State is a source of blessing for the Jewish people, which has found in it a safe home, but it can also pose a danger to its unity and to the realization of its destiny, as history has shown more than once. Divisions, which can develop into civil war, alienation from tradition, blind wielding of power, and other side-effects, can threaten the historical mission of the Jewish people.

Therefore, Modern Religious Zionism must take a sober view of developments within the state and remain sensitive to changes in its moral and spiritual stature. This balanced perspective dictates the attitude of Modern Religious Zionism toward a range of the components that constitute Israeli state-consciousness:

- Governing institutions and their leaders are critical for the functioning of the State, and we value the privilege of self-government, but this does not mean that these institutions should be deemed inherently sacred. No leader is

An Ideological Manifesto



above the law and morality or immune from criticism. On the contrary, Modern Religious Zionism recognizes that power tends to corrupt, and it is therefore necessary to insist that elected officials especially are upright and honest, and that they are closely scrutinized.

- Even religious national institutions are not inherently sacred. The Chief Rabbinate does not accrue value merely because it is the state rabbinate, nor do rabbis who hold state offices automatically become

especially worthy of esteem by the mere fact of their appointment to a prestigious office. Modern Religious Zionism maintains that, like any other governing institution, **the power of the Chief Rabbinate must be counterbalanced and subjected to criticism, so that its power does not corrupt it - as we have seen happen all too often in the realms of kosher certification, conversion, etc.**

- The project of settling throughout Eretz Yisrael is a major component of the realization of the Zionist

vision, but it is nevertheless not unconditionally holy. Settlement must be undertaken within the boundaries of law and morality, and it certainly does not justify breaking the law or harming the innocent and their property. Like the Zionist enterprise more generally, settling the land is not just a right but also - and primarily - an opportunity that we have to return to the land of our ancestors and actualize our heritage therein. Therefore, the mindset that accompanies the settlement enterprise should not be one of arrogant possession of land, but recognition of the massive responsibility incumbent upon whomever God has entrusted with it (Vayikra 25:23; Rashi to Bereishit 1:1).

- Military and national service are viewed as both a civic duty and halakhic obligation incumbent equally on every Israeli citizen. There is no place for wholesale exemption of yeshiva students from service. Military service is a symbol and demonstration of the self-sacrifice of Israeli citizens for their state. However, despite the importance and virtue of this service, the exercise of power and use of violence that it inevitably entails





should not be sanctified; rather, they should be viewed as ‘necessary evils’. Weapons are not sacred objects, indeed, the Sages rule (*Mishnah Shabbat* 6:4) that weapons of war are not adornments but are in fact reprehensible, and thus forbidden to wear in a public domain on Shabbat. They adduce as a proof-text the well-known verse from Yeshayahu (2:4): “And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not raise sword against nation, neither will they train for war anymore.” The State of Israel must not authorize the use

of military power except for defensive purposes.

- Nationalism is a foundational layer in the formation of Jewish identity, yet we must take care lest it devolve into chauvinism. When nationalism becomes a value in itself, there is a concrete risk that it will uproot moral principles, justify unacceptable means, and bring about destruction. **One function of religion is to counterbalance Jewish nationalism, so that it recalls that its value is contingent on its service to the higher values** that comprise the Torah’s vision - to be “a

kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Shemot 19:6). **On the other hand, nationalism provides a counterbalance to religion as it removes it from the ‘ghetto’ and demands that it adjust to the circumstances of a sovereign people** that is involved in contemporary life and contains a range of different voices. Religious nationalism therefore ought to constitute a balanced combination that restrains its two components; we must be wary of those who transform this combination into something that radicalizes them both.

- The principled stance of Modern Religious Zionism is that **the ideal identity of the State of Israel is both Jewish and**

democratic, as Rabbi Hayim Hirschenson wrote (Malki Ba-Kodesh 1:7-9). Though these two components may occasionally be in conflict or tension, both are crucial for the longevity of the state, which must, on the one hand, maintain its Jewish identity, but on the other hand, restrain its power to harm individual rights. **Without a balance between these two components, the State of Israel might stray toward one of the extremes - chauvinism to one side, and a ‘state of all its citizens’ on the other**, thus losing the spiritual justification of its existence, namely, rebuilding Jewish national identity to serve as a blessing for all peoples.

- Modern Religious Zionism

views diaspora Jewry as a full partner in the founding of the State of Israel and in the shaping of its identity, recognizing that the State is part of the broader Jewish story. It supports and encourages *Aliyah* while also recognizing the important role played by Jews who choose to live abroad. Modern Religious Zionism makes sure to preserve ties with diaspora Jewry out of a sense of partnership and responsibility for the future of the Jewish people throughout the world. It promotes partnership with all movements and streams that are active abroad, strive to formulate agreement on matters of dispute, and accord a place of honor to any Jew who seeks to participate in

the building of the state.

Individual Liberty

The democratic identity of the State of Israel is based on the universal values of human dignity and individual liberty. Modern Religious Zionism espouses these values and even locates their roots within the Jewish tradition, as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks demonstrated in his works. Therefore, **Modern Religious Zionism fundamentally opposes religious coercion and deems it very important to preserve the independence of the institutions that protect human rights within the state - while still demanding a healthy balance between them and the authorities that work to actualize the state's Jewish identity.**

As a rule, Modern Religious Zionism believes that a state founded on Jewish values is also more intrinsically democratic, in that it respects every person as being created in God's image and protects human freedom; likewise, a democratic state is inherently more Jewish when it recognizes that it is impossible to confer an identity on individuals using aggressive means of discipline and legislation, but only through education. In light of these assumptions, Modern Religious Zionism strives to achieve consensus on issues that pertain to religion and state, while recognizing and respecting the varied interests of the different sectors that comprise Israeli society.

Modern Religious Zionism's adoption of the value of freedom is not limited to public issues but rather forms a key concept of its educational outlook. Modern Religious Zionism educates toward a Jewish identity that is loyally committed to Jewish tradition but nevertheless opposes applying mechanisms of social force to foist this identity on any individual. In the view of Modern Religious Zionism, it is imperative to give every person room to shape their own spiritual and religious path, as it recognizes that the human psyche is comprised of a free, individual persona,



on the one hand, and identity-forming ties like family, community, and nation, on the other. Consequently, **Modern Religious Zionism supports a diverse general and religious education and opposes 'assembly line' education. It takes pride in the continuum that it cultivates, not in the uniformity that characterizes closed societies.**

Modern Religious Zionism deems it important to connect with all populations that comprise the State of Israel and opposes sectoral isolation. Its synagogues are open unconditionally to all who wish to enter, and they enable the

widest possible expression of different customs and traditions.

Modern Religious Zionism is indeed aware of the cost entailed by ideological and educational openness. Nevertheless, as stated in the introduction, it does not shy away from challenges, but rather

Modern Religious Zionism supports a diverse general and religious education and opposes 'assembly line' education.

confronts them. It recognizes and even welcomes the emancipation of the human spirit, wrought by modernity. Rather than building walls around Judaism, it builds bridges to

different worlds. From its perspective, the order of the day is the development of a rich, broad, and inspiring Judaism, which will penetrate the hearts

of the broader public and the younger generation.

The respect that **Modern Religious Zionism** accords to differences impacts its conduct. It treats every person, even those who reject its path, with tolerance and civility. **It insists on the principle that “*derekh eretz precedes the Torah*” and expresses itself in a dignified manner, not noisily or vulgarly. It is attentive to other opinions, following the School of Hillel, who “placed the words of the School of Shammai before their own words.” It does not ostracize or disqualify those who disagree with it just because they take an opposing view.** It refrains from *ad-hominem* attacks and strives to uphold substantive discourse about important issues of the day.

Israeli Society

Modern Religious Zionism seeks integration with the whole of Israeli society, out of a sense of partnership and responsibility for its image and actions. It exists in the dialectic tension between sectoral interests and a broader Israeliness; it respects tribal identities but wishes to promote and strengthen a sense of allegiance to the state. It strives to integrate into every realm of activity and penetrate every impactful opinion in the State of Israel.

Modern Religious Zionism deems it important to bring the Torah out to the public square, viewing it as a living Torah, relevant to every aspect of life and every sector. It believes in the power of *halakhah* to

become a productive and enriching force in the Israeli cultural renaissance. It therefore operates in the social, cultural, and spiritual spheres to mediate between the Torah and tradition, on the one hand, with today's world, on the other.

The attitude of Modern Religious Zionism toward Jews who do not observe the Torah and commandments is complicated. On the one hand, it disagrees with the path they have chosen and works to ensure that its youths maintain a religious lifestyle. On the other hand, it refuses to estrange or isolate itself from the nonobservant public. It does not condescend and does not view Israeli secularism as being 'empty'. It can identify the positive moral

burden borne by secularist society, and it remains in dialogue with it. It regards the phenomenon of secularization less as a threat than as a challenge, demanding that religion remain fresh, honest, and relevant.

As such, Modern Religious Zionism actively encourages the secular public to participate in Torah study and religious ritual, and certainly does not discourage such participation. It refuses to apply to this public the statuses and laws that were applied in the past to Jewish heretics, and it views this public as a full partner in building spiritual life in the renascent State of Israel. This encounter with secularization demands that it develop complex halakhic

and spiritual worldviews that do not take binary approaches but use fuzzier concepts like spectrums and relativity.

Modern Religious Zionism also has a complex relationship with Haredim. On the one hand, it views Haredim as full partners in the world of Torah, its development, and its advancement. On the other hand, however, it disagrees with the Haredi worldview with respect to the State of Israel and involvement within it, as well as on basic matters of faith. It is important to emphasize that Modern Religious Zionism does not feel inferior to the Haredi public with respect to religiosity. Rather,

It insists on the principle that “derekh eretz precedes the Torah” and expresses itself in a dignified manner, not noisily or vulgarly.

it is secure in its path and its spiritual world, but it refuses to factionalize or treat its disputants as pariahs, as others sometimes do.

More broadly, Modern Religious Zionism strives to serve as a bridge between all components of Israeli society. Its ability to speak multiple languages and belong to different worlds places it at the cutting edge of society, capable of healing various rifts that divide and harm Israeli society.

The Status of Women

Women comprise 50% of the population, and in the modern world, they are full participants

in shaping and leading the way in every field. Modern Religious Zionism also recognizes the equality of women by virtue of the religious tradition, as God stated that He created man and woman as equals: “Male and female he created them” (Bereishit 5:2). If this equality between men and women was disrupted, it was due to the sin of Adam and subsequent curse; this state of affairs certainly does not reflect ideal conditions. Therefore, **Modern Religious Zionism views the inclusion of women in leadership as repairing historical injustice, and it works, men and women alike, to achieve equal status for women in every realm of life, in Israel and around the world.**

A major challenge that the Modern Religious Zionist worldview faces is the place of women in the religious world. Rules and customs that have become entrenched in the religious tradition evidently perpetuate inequality, sometimes to the extent that it is an affront to women’s dignity. Whether the issue is the institutional rabbinate, rabbinical courts, synagogues, and even within the family, it is clear that the inferior status of women is a built-in feature of religious frameworks.

Modern Religious Zionism recognizes this disparity and strives to narrow it to the degree possible. Its guiding principles are commitment to *halakhah*, respect for communal

frameworks, awareness of the differences between men and women, and opposition to the blurring of these differences. In addition to these, it views women as autonomous beings with full and equal rights and as necessary partners in the improvement of the world, including in religious contexts. Even if Modern Religious Zionism is presently incapable of addressing every disparity, its direction is clear: it recognizes these tensions, is bothered by them, and actively pursues their rectification.

With respect to halakhic scholarship, Modern Religious Zionism examines halakhic sources in depth to ascertain which laws stem from solid, unvarying tradition and which depend on social conditions and are thus subject to change. **Modern Religious Zionism also supports entrusting matters that relate directly to women, and especially to their bodies, to qualified women.** On the communal level, Modern Religious Zionism strives to achieve equal representation to women in areas that are not patently halakhic, like membership in synagogue committees, synagogue presidencies, and various other communal activities. At the institutional level, Modern Religious Zionism actively



promotes training women and appointing them to key roles in every facet of religious leadership - from educational systems to state religious institutions.

Modern Religious Zionism supports drafting women for military service alongside volunteering for national service, as it recognizes the ethical and religious importance of military service and comprehends its significance in shaping Israeli national identity. With regard to roles that may raise halakhic problems, and especially in context of

Modern Religious Zionism views the inclusion of women in leadership as repairing historical injustice, and it works, men and women alike, to achieve equal status for women in every realm of life, in Israel and around the world.

mixed service, Modern Religious Zionism strives to reach consensus through dialogue with the military, subject to halakhic principles and security considerations, and taking the value of equality into account.

In addition to the advancement of women in every field and shattering glass ceilings, **Modern Religious Zionism works to strengthen the status of woman within the family, while recognizing her central place within it. It is a**

full partner in the battle against domestic violence against women and works to

strengthen their rights vis-à-vis their roles as women and spouses. Modern Religious Zionism believes that it is possible to integrate a career with motherhood, and every woman should have the power to decide the right path for herself when balancing conflicting commitments. The state and community have no right to impose a particular path on any woman.

The Status of Minorities

Modern Religious Zionism recognizes the profound changes to Jewish existence wrought by the return to Eretz Yisrael and the founding of an independent state. **From communities surviving as a minority within a non-Jewish**

majority, the Jewish people became sovereign in its own land, where it governs various minority groups. Understanding and internalizing this change requires a complete overhaul of attitudes toward non-Jewish citizens and their status. Instead of viewing them as enemies, we, the majority group, must consider them from the aspect of the party responsible to ensure the maximal realization of their rights.

Here, too, Modern Religious Zionism oscillates between conflicting values. On the one hand, it wants to preserve the Jewish identity of the state and prevent intermarriage; on the other hand, it advocates for a democratic state, which grants equal rights to all its citizens.



In a religious context, Modern Religious Zionism must also take into account the turn away from pagan religion that transpired throughout the world - as Rabbi Menahem HaMe'iri noted in the medieval era, and as various halakhists have noted in our day as well. By accepting these values and balancing between them, Modern Religious Zionism fashions its approach to various issues that occupy Israeli society today vis-à-vis the minorities living in its midst.

Regarding matters of security, Modern Religious Zionism demonstrates intolerance for

anyone who threatens the peace of the State of Israel. On the other hand, **regarding civil and social matters, Modern Religious Zionism views itself as committed to raising concern for minority populations that live in its midst and to giving them equal treatment, both by virtue of a universal humanistic value and by virtue of the religious imperative to protect the foreigner, “for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt”** (Devarim 10:19), as taught by both Rabbi Hayim David HaLevi (Responsa Aseh Lekha Rav 9:30)

and Rabbi Yitzhak Isaac HaLevi Herzog (in his article, “Minority Rights According to Halakhah”).

On the spiritual plane, Modern Religious Zionism is open to dialogue and cooperation with all religions that are committed to ethical conduct that accords with the seven Noahide laws. Modern Religious Zionism maintains that interreligious cooperation in a secularized world can advance quite a few shared religious values and make the world a more honest and just place.

The Status of Homosexuals

The issue of homosexuality is the subject of some of the most impassioned Jewish discourse of recent years. The Torah’s

prohibition of penetrative sex between men and description of such acts as *‘to’evah’* (generally rendered as ‘abomination’) evidently restricts anyone whose sexual identity is not heterosexual from realizing the deepest inclinations and desires, pertaining to the crisis of human loneliness, about which the Torah attests, “It is not good for man to be alone” (Bereishit 2:18). (The Torah does not expressly forbid lesbianism, but for present purposes we treat male and female homosexuality as equivalent.) On the other hand, homosexuality undermines the ideal models of the Torah, which take the form of heterosexual intimacy and the establishment of the family through joint biological conception.

To sharpen and clarify the stance of Modern Religious Zionism on this issue, let us first mention two contemporary religious responses. The first response avers that if the Torah forbade sex between men, it implies that same-sex attraction does not really exist, or that, at best, it reflects illness or deviancy that must be remedied. This approach promotes ‘conversion therapies’ to restore homo-sexuals to their ‘true nature’. **Modern Religious Zionism** opposes this position, as it **does not deny the existence of a phenomenon merely because it contradicts the Torah’s command.** Does

the existence of a prohibition on pork imply that there is no real appetite to eat it? Does the obligation to refrain from labor on Shabbat mean that no one wants to work then? Likewise, **the prohibition of sex between men does not imply that no such attraction exists.** Consequently, Modern Religious Zionism opposes the use of ‘conversion therapies’ as a necessary or immediate solution to homosexual inclinations.

The second response, which is common in inclusive religious communities, is to differentiate the prohibited act from the permitted attraction. According

to this approach, *halakhah* does not prohibit same-sex attraction or even cohabitation. Those who espouse this approach have a tolerant attitude toward homosexuals and treat them equally within communities and institutions; at the very least, they treat them as they would a member who commits other sins. This all comes with a tacit or explicit requirement that they refrain from the prohibited act.

There are several major difficulties with the second response. Despite the difference in the centrality of sex acts within heterosexual relationships versus homosexual relationships, they are still central to the formation of any intimate homosexual relationship. An even greater

problem with this approach is that it does not address the identarian challenge that homosexual inclinations pose to halakhically acceptable ideal structures of families and intimate relationships.

The solution proposed for Modern Religious Zionism is to accept the possibility of living, for now, in contradiction, with spiritual and psychological patience that recognizes that the world - both the halakhic world and the general culture - changes at its



Philosophical Manifesto

own pace, and solutions do not present themselves all at once. This is especially true of homosexuality, which, aside from having a genetic basis, also carries cultural weight, so it has not yet obtained scientific attention that is sufficiently well-founded to make definitive statement in various contexts. Therefore, **Modern Religious Zionism continues to espouse the Torah's ideal family structure, comprised of male and female, with all that entails, but accepts with real respect anyone who has taken a different path.** With this complex stance,

Modern Religious Zionism opposes those forces that seek to dismantle the traditional family institution, yet it accepts the possibility that there are lifestyles that it cannot justify at present.

Modern Religious Zionism continues to espouse the Torah's ideal family structure, comprised of male and female, with all that entails, but accepts with real respect anyone who has taken a different path.

At the personal and civic levels, Modern Religious Zionism supports full and equal rights for homosexuals. It opposes discrimination against them and protects their rights. On the other hand,

with regard to anything issue of religious substance, Modern Religious Zionism acknowledges the present conflict, and the solutions it

proposes are localized and individuated, not fundamental, with the goal of granting homosexuals a maximum of rights extended to all other members of the religious community, but without denying the halakhic prohibition it entails. These solutions will have to address a wide range of considerations, like the identity of the community and its constituents, the sensitivity of the issue, the nature of the relationships between community members, etc.

The guiding principle is that homosexuals are people with equal rights, who are entitled, like anyone else, to equal and inclusive treatment, without giving up meticulous observance of the halakhic framework.

Moderate *Halakhah*

Modern Religious Zionism has a unique approach to *halakhah*. Following the writings of Rabbi Yosef Messas (*Mayim Tehorim* §24), it seeks to balance between the written law, commonsense, and awareness of the challenges of the times. By weighing these values, it reaches a halakhic conclusion that is appropriate for the time and place.

A central principle in the Modern Religious Zionism's approach to *halakhah* is the identity of its target audience. In contrast to isolationist approaches, Modern Religious Zionism does not consider only the religiously observant to be *halakhah's* target audience, but the entire Jewish people. It wants *halakhah* to

adjust to contemporary life and integrate harmoniously into the lives of everyone connected to their Jewish identity, even if they are not religiously observant. **It opposes approaches that tend to adopt stringent**

halakhic views out of fear and concerns for a slippery slope, and which therefore asserts that, “*Ha-hadash assur min haTorah*” (“What is new is forbidden by the Torah”).

Rather, it reaches pragmatic halakhic conclusions that it deems proper, with the belief that the Torah is a living Torah and that *halakhah* can meet the challenges of the time.

Modern Religious Zionism places special emphasis on the idea that *halakhah* is a means for spiritual and physical improvement of both individual and society. The commandments are not merely

a recipe for the individual person to achieve eternal life; they have both heavenly and earthly purposes that pertain to all of society, as the Torah states on several occasions (Devarim 4:6, for

instance). Therefore, halakhic decisions are reached not only on the basis of internal codes, but also based on the goals that it is supposed to attain. If we disconnect *halakhah* from

its broader contexts, it can be transformed from a life-giving elixir to poison and become a substrate for extremism, zealotry, and corruption of character.

Modern Religious Zionism integrates *derekh erez* in its methods of deciding *halakhah*, as elaborated by Rabbi Eliezer Goldman, Rabbis Yuval Cherlow, and many others, and it takes interpersonal obligations no less seriously than a person's duties toward God. It cautions against becoming a "*naval birshut haTorah*" ("scoundrel with the license of the Torah") and seeks to do what is right and good



in the eyes of God and human beings in every situation.

Modern Religious Zionism proceeds with a profound faith in the Sages, understanding that the halakhic tradition, with all its genres and subfields, contains wisdom and understanding that have proven themselves over the generations; yet it is not content to adhere closely to what was stated in the past. Rather, it applies discretion in properly translating halakhic conclusions for the present day - out of a deep sense of responsibility for bringing Israel's Torah into everyday life in a way that enriches and uplifts it. It is not afraid of

engaging in new disciplines, and it seeks ways to impart its spirit into every realm.

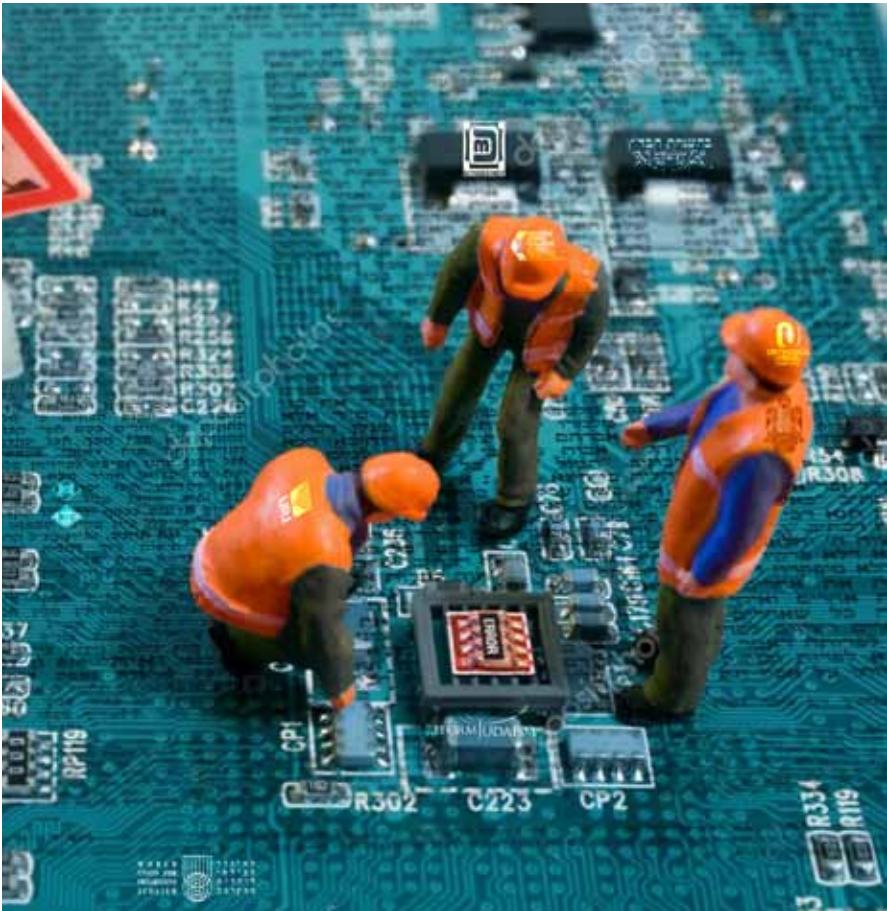
Openness to the World

To summarize an element that recurs throughout this essay, the principled stance of Modern Religious Zionism is not to fear openness to the contemporary world and its culture. True, contemporary world culture can be quite ruinous. Trends that seek to dismantle the institutions of family, community, and nation, and that question the structure of the human personality, threaten things that Modern Religious Zionism deems correct and proper. Nevertheless, Modern Religious Zionism opposes an approach

that demands isolation from the world.

The first reason for this stance is that isolation is not really possible. **Advanced technology does not permit isolation from world culture, and sooner or later, one will be exposed to it, willingly or not. Therefore, instead of isolation, Modern Religious Zionism deems it important to educate toward grappling with these global trends and developing a solid Jewish and Israeli identity** that will be able to counter foreign influences and filter the good from the bad. Any attempt to isolate a person will ultimately harm them, as it takes away the most important ability: the ability to confront challenge.

The second reason for Modern



Religious Zionism's openness is not that it is impossible to isolate people from global trends, but that it does not want to. Despite the many problems with contemporary culture, there is no denying that it also contains much good, and Judaism certainly has what to gain from them. **Many positive contemporary values originate in western and other cultures, and although Judaism can find internal sources for these values, it does not deny that its inspiration was global movements that are not necessarily Jewish.**

sarily Jewish.

According to the *midrash*, Moshe explained the Torah to the people of Israel in seventy languages (Mishnah Sotah 7:5). Beyond the explanation that avers that he did so to ensure the Torah's survival in exile, this passage also contains an important principle concerning the Torah itself. There are certain worlds, expressions, and values that can only be articulated in foreign languages, and if we strive for perfection, it is important for us to know how to integrate the Torah with

It refrains from judging contemporary circumstances dichotomously, as though we are engaged in the struggle of light against dark, automatically rejecting approaches and opinions merely because they were uttered by someone from the other side.

various cultural languages. This openness does not minimize the value of the Torah, but rather recognizes the value of general culture, as Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein expounded (in his book *By His Light*).

In a world filled with knowledge and content, ideas and opinions, the general approach of **Modern Religious Zionism** is consistent with Rambam's instruction: "Heed the truth from whomever speaks it" (*Commentary to the Mishnah*, Introduction to *Avot*). **It refrains from judging contemporary circumstances dichotomously, as though we are engaged in the struggle of light against dark, automatically rejecting approaches and opinions merely because they were**

uttered by someone from the other side. Rather, it knows how to approach each subject judiciously and examine claims and ideas on their own merits. This approach indeed demands deeper investigation and is far more challenging than binary approaches to reality - but it is closer to the truth, and it strives for perfection.

In Conclusion

This essay presents a general outline of Modern Religious Zionist thought. As its name suggests, Modern Religious Zionism seeks the integration of a thoroughgoing Israeli identity, complete fidelity to tradition, and openness to the values of the modern world. By virtue of its complexity,

it is expected that there will be internal disagreements on various issues - perhaps even about the different sections of this essay - both in the specifics and over the general approach. Nevertheless, it seems that the fundamental principles, which speak of a complex world and a variety of sources, are shared by all who follow the path of Modern Religious Zionism.

Many issues hold the attention of those who follow this path,

but, to my mind, the issues addressed above suffice to characterize this spirit and approach of this worldview. I hope that this essay leads to greater self-awareness among those who espouse this approach, advances public dialogue on the principles it articulates, and offers support and a language to the broad public that grapples with difficult challenges in today's State of Israel.



Room for Questions

Moderate Religious Zionism for the Next Generation

Search for **#Room For Questions**



Additional booklets in the series:

- **Atchalta DeTikva:** Religious Zionism, the State of Israel, and the halachic implications of a Jewish state
- **Freedom, Authority, and Responsibility:** Individual freedom and the role of religious authorities
- **So That You Broaden Your Understanding:** Religious studies and secular education
- **The Chosen People:** The non-Jew in halacha and Jewish ethics
- **Society as a Whole:** Gender and modesty in a halachic society
- **Why Work?** Integrating a life of Torah with a life of work
- **Confrontation or Cooperation** - Orthodox Judaism and its Attitude to Non-Orthodox Denominations and to Diaspora Jewry

For reading or purchase on the Ne'emanei Torah Va'Avodah website

www.toravoda.org.il

This booklet concisely and clearly articulates the ideological platform of Modern Religious Zionism. **Modern** because of its openness to the modern world and its values; **Religious** because of its fidelity to halakhah and Jewish tradition; **Zionist** because of its acknowledgement of the centrality of the State of Israel and the Zionist vision. Based on a wide array of Torah and spiritual sources, and engaging directly with current challenges, “**Modern Religious Zionism: An Ideological Manifesto**” offers a clear, sharp ideological stance for anyone whose basic identity includes the Torah of Israel, the People of Israel, the Land of Israel, and the State of Israel.

Rabbi Dr. Ido Pachter, head of Ne’emanei Torah Va’Avodah’s Rabbis and Communities Initiative and founder of the Techelet movement, is a scholar and lecturer on Modern Orthodoxy and writes and edits a podcast on the thought of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. He served for nine years as the rabbi of Young Israel of Ramat Poleg, in Netanya.



Published under the auspices of the:
“Ideological Center of the Ne’emanei Torah Va’Avodah”

Neerit Zeligler

To support
distribution, scan
the barcode

