# “There Is a Place Beyond the Forest”[1]

Yair Eldan

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## A.

“A new guy came to the neighborhood,”[2] we sang as children. His arrival stirred not only excitement about him—what he would bring with him, what loves, what games, what ideas, what conversations—but also excitement at the magical interweaving of East and West that characterizes Alon Oleartchik’s wonderful music.

The song validated our deepest longings: that the differences among us would become, as the cliché has it, the basis for a marvelous and abundant creativity; that the everyday tensions surrounding class and money, religion, tradition, and education would flow into a rich sea of artistic creation; that the daily humiliations expressed in phrases such as “Moroccan knife” (a slur portraying Moroccans as violent), “gefilte—yuck,” and “they made soap out of your grandmother” would ultimately prove worthwhile, and that a magnificent swan would emerge from them.

Instead, we each found ourselves confined to our own narrow room. Slowly, we unraveled our colorful webs, with their contradictions, their self-directed intrigues, and their impossible angles.

Liberal anxieties formed the basis of our interpretation of reality, causing us to become aggressive and to miss opportunities. Yoel Sussman, then President of the Supreme Court, commented in an uncharacteristic manner upon Justice Menachem Elon’s attempt to base his interpretation of the phrase “others whose protection was incumbent upon him”—how poetic—on Jewish law:

> Jewish law is certainly a precious cultural asset of our people, from which both the legislature and the courts may draw inspiration. Yet we are dealing here with a specific provision of criminal law that developed from another source and has nothing to do with Jewish sources. I also venture to doubt whether the application of Jewish criminal law would truly be acceptable to the Israeli public. **For example, would a majority of the Israeli public, both in number and in stature, be prepared, in 1979, to put an adulterous woman to death by stoning in accordance with Jewish law, and, if she were the daughter of a priest, by burning?**[3]

The case concerned Afengar, who was charged with assaulting plainclothes police officers who had broken into an apartment in which he was staying without presenting the search warrant in their possession.

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[1] Alon Oleartchik, “All Night I Am in Your Garden” (1987), from Oleartchik’s second album, *Sha’ashu’ei Ke’ilu* (Make-Believe Games).

[2] Alon Oleartchik, “A New Guy Came to the Neighborhood” (1984), from his debut album, Oleartchik.

[3] CrimA 89/78, *Yaakov Ben Eliyahu Afengar v. State of Israel*. Emphasis added.

Justice Menachem Elon, who wrote the principal opinion, held that Afengar was entitled to the "defense of necessity." At the end of the 1970s, the Penal Law provided that this defense was available to a person who attempted to prevent "harm [...] to the bodies or dignity of **others whose protection was incumbent upon him**."

Justice Elon believed that this phrase should be interpreted as broadly as possible and based his decision, among other things, on Jewish law. He therefore acquitted Afengar of assault, even though the facts of the case make it fairly clear that Afengar had realized that the intruders were police officers and had even attempted to warn his roommates.

Justice Shlomo Asher accordingly expressed surprise at both Justices Sussman and Elon, who had attributed:

> thoughts and intentions to the appellant that the appellant himself did not even attempt to raise in his testimony. Had such concerns existed in his heart [that the police officers entering the apartment would harm his companions], as my colleague suggests, I would have expected to hear of them from his own lips. Yet even a renewed examination of his testimony reveals nothing that could provide support for my colleague's supposition.

Justice Elon turned to Jewish law in order to advance his overarching democratic objective: educating law-enforcement authorities to respect the rights of suspects and defendants.

Justice Sussman, who pursued precisely the same objective, was blind to the cultural richness that could exist only here, in the cradle of the Mishnah and the Bible. He feared that turning to the sources of Jewish law concealed a genuine danger to the democratic identity of the state, and he therefore based his opinion exclusively on democratic principles: the police officers should have presented a search warrant before entering the apartment; since they failed to do so, Afengar's assault upon them was legitimate.

Liberal anxieties have led to the rejection of important parts of our complex identity. A similar, though not identical, tendency can also be detected among religious Jews.

One of the surprising phenomena encountered by anyone who has engaged in dialogue with the Haredi and Hardal—Haredi-nationalist—public in recent years is the arrogance and *gaiveh*—pride, pronounced in the Ashkenazi manner, with the stress on the first syllable—that surround its men and women.

The phenomenon is surprising because an inseparable part of religious life is the injunction "to walk humbly with your God," together with the cultivation of humility. Religious life is intended to direct the individual toward the improvement of character, while pride and arrogance in their negative sense are regarded as corrupt traits with extremely damaging consequences.

Rabbeinu Bahya ibn Paquda, who lived in eleventh-century Spain and authored *The Duties of the Heart*, discusses the virtue of humility and connects it to suffering:

> The methods by which the quality of humility may be acquired, and by which its acquisition may be made easier for the individual, are based upon constant reflection and the direction of thought toward seven matters. [One of these is this:] when a person reflects upon the kinds of trials that he encounters in this world—such as hunger, thirst,

> heat, cold, illnesses, disasters, and anxieties—from which he finds no rest except in death; and when an intelligent person grasps all this and understands that, because he is weak and possesses little capacity to obtain the means by which he might repel all these things, he becomes aware of the true nature of his position as a prisoner in this place—indeed, he is truly a prisoner—he then becomes humble, with the humility of a prisoner held in captivity.[4]

Some of the arrogance of the Haredi public can, of course, be explained by the immediate context of the culture war and the war of values in which we find ourselves.

This arrogance expresses defensiveness and insecurity in the face of the attack upon Haredi society and its identity. It is a direct result of the sense of persecution accompanying Haredi and Hardal men and women in the public sphere.

Yet this explanation is insufficient in view of the intensity of the phenomenon.

I remember that sometime toward the end of 2022, during the coalition negotiations to establish the far-right government, I was traveling on a bus. A Haredi man was standing beside me. Speaking on the telephone in a loud and confident voice, he said, "I am the sovereign. That is the outcome of the election," referring to the Haredi public's success at the ballot box.

For a moment I smiled to myself: here, at last, were days in which a Haredi man spoke in a "democratic language," one that also contained responsibility for the state.

The smile was quickly replaced by fear. The confidence, arrogance, and absence of doubt with which the man spoke frightened me. If he is the sovereign, if he possesses the power to impose his values, and if he lacks the humility or humbleness that give rise to skepticism and responsibility, where are we headed?

As noted, the sense of persecution surrounding the Haredi public explains some of this arrogance. In view of the intensity of these feelings, however, I would like to propose an additional and more deeply rooted explanation, one that connects contact with suffering to humility.

The Bible addresses suffering directly. A suffering individual turns to God, sets out his suffering before Him, and asks for relief. Anyone who has read Psalms in a time of distress understands the role played by religion in confronting human suffering:

> Why, Lord, do You stand far away?
> Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?

Thus Psalm 10. Or:

> Deep calls to deep
> at the sound of Your waterfalls;
> all Your breakers and Your waves
> have passed over me.

[4] Rabbeinu Bahya ibn Paquda, *The Book of Guidance to the Duties of the Heart*, trans. Benjamin Abrahamov (Bar-Ilan University, 2019), Gate Six, Chapter Five, p. 224 [Hebrew edition].

Thus Psalm 42. And:

> To the Lord in my distress I called,
> and He answered me.

Thus Psalm 120.

There is also, of course, Jonah's prayer from within the fish:

> Out of my distress I called to the Lord,
> and He answered me;
> from the belly of Sheol I cried,
> and You heard my voice.

Moses himself turns to God in his distress. Particularly memorable is his prayer for his sister in Numbers 12:

> O God, please heal her, please.

The Bible is filled with men and women who turn to God on the day of their misfortune.

According to Maimonides, turning to God in a time of distress lies at the heart of the biblical commandment of prayer:

> A person should supplicate and pray every day, recounting the praise of the Holy One, blessed be He, and afterward asking for the things he needs by means of petition and supplication, and afterward offering praise and thanksgiving to the Lord for the goodness He has bestowed upon him—each person according to his ability.[5]

The suffering person's appeal to God therefore possesses a double emotional significance.

It has the potential to reduce suffering: the sufferer leans upon God, and prayer grants him hope. Yet suffering is not merely projected outward, spoken of, and put into words in a manner that makes it easier to endure. Prayer also affects a person's inner being.

Engagement with suffering and the appeal to God from the heart of darkness generate an inner process that teaches humility and an awareness of the limitations of human existence, bound to a perishable body and to the soul tied to it.

Prayer is not even dependent upon belief in God. It is what Avi Sagi calls a "primary datum" in his book *Prayer After the Death of God: A Phenomenological Study of Hebrew Literature*, in which he refers to Avraham Halfi's well-known lines:

> If I am flesh and blood
> and darkness is heavy with the abyss,
> why should I not suddenly utter a prayer:
> Blessed are You—I do not know who.[6]

Even before the Jewish religion developed a true legal system—at a time when its law consisted of a set of commands and prohibitions without the more complex features of a

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[5] Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Prayer, 1:2.

[6] Avraham Halfi, Poems, vol. 2 (Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1988), p. 113; Avi Sagi, Ptsu'ei Tefillah: Tefillah le'ahar "Mot ha-El"—Iyun Fenomenologi ba-Sifrut ha-Ivrit (Bar-Ilan University and Shalom Hartman Institute, 2011), p. 92 [Hebrew edition]. Published in English as *Prayer After the Death of God: A Phenomenological Study of Hebrew Literature*, trans. Batya Stein (Academic Studies Press, 2016).

legal system[7]—it confronted human suffering by giving that suffering explicit expression and opening a direct channel of appeal to God.

This aroused hope in the sufferer; the very act of speaking about his suffering reduced it; and his humility and modesty were strengthened by the recognition of his vulnerability.

Unlike the Bible, however, in which suffering is addressed directly, the legal rules formulated by the Sages created indirect, intriguing, and complex methods of bringing relief to suffering men and women.

In the immense normative development of the halakhic enterprise, expressed in the Mishnah and in the halakhic midrashim, the tannaim altered the legal system's relationship to suffering.

The direct treatment of suffering through spontaneous prayer gave way to a more complex mechanism. The most fitting title for this mechanism would be: the validation of suffering and of the mental disturbance resulting from it, coupled with the imposition of limits upon its expression.

A "secondary" but by no means accidental product of the validation of mental disturbance was the empowerment of religious authorities, who were expected to attend to the suffering person's disturbance and to set boundaries around it.

Prayer still occupies a central place within the halakhic legal system, but unlike biblical prayer, it is governed by rules and a fixed text. To be sure, it contains an element of supplication, and there are differences between Hasidim and Mitnagdim (their traditional opponents). Yet direct contact with suffering—the contact that generates humility—is obscured in favor of established rules and a fixed liturgy.

Release from vows (*hatarat nedarim*) is, as is well known, an original invention of the Sages.

Biblical law does not permit an individual to violate a vow. A person who makes a vow must fulfill it. A verbally expressed commitment to dedicate something to God is a serious matter in the Bible:

> If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath imposing an obligation upon himself, he shall not profane his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds from his mouth.

Thus Numbers 30:3.

According to the Bible, a person cannot release himself from a vow. The obligation is total and irrevocable. The Sages, by contrast, created a process for release from vows, enabling an individual to withdraw from his commitment through a recognized procedure performed by an authorized person or institution.

[7] Herbert Lionel Adolphus Hart distinguished a legal system from a mere set of rules on the ground that a legal system also contains secondary rules concerning the modification of laws, adjudication, authority, and the recognition of legal rules.

Of the countless examples the Sages might have offered at the beginning of Tractate Nedarim in the Mishnah, they focused upon a person who forbids himself to another, who forbids himself to partake of another person's food, or who tells another person that he is ostracized from him:

> One who says to another: "By vow, I am barred from you," "I am separated from you," "I am distanced from you," "I shall not eat of yours," or "I shall not taste of yours"—is bound by prohibition.

These vows express self-disgust and a feeling that the self cannot come into contact with the other because it is unworthy of doing so.

The final mishnah of the first chapter takes this self-disgust to its extreme:

> One who says to another: "*Konam* (a formula declaring something forbidden by a vow) be my mouth that speaks with you, my hand that works with you, or my foot that walks with you"—is bound by prohibition.

The chapter begins with a person who prohibits himself to another, distancing himself from the other in a general manner and forbidding himself from performing activities such as eating or tasting together with that person.

In the final mishnah of the chapter, however, the sense of self-disgust experienced by the person making the vow is intensified: he forbids the parts of his body to his companion.

These vows make clear the sense of separation experienced by the person making the vow between himself and his own body. The vow thus expresses the feeling of a person who believes himself unworthy of coming into contact with the world.

By making the vow, he reflects this feeling, but he also does something of the greatest importance: he restores a measure of control to himself. A sense of self-disgust may be accompanied by a powerful feeling of lost control, anxiety, and an inability to confront the world.

What is the source of the self-disgust reflected in the fundamental vows listed at the beginning and end of the first chapter? The tractate provides us with no details.

It is clear that the content of the vows presents a picture of self-disgust, which in turn may indicate an unstable emotional condition. The vow can restore to the person making it some of the control that he feels he has lost.

The mechanism for release from vows, an invention unique to the Sages, thus offers a twofold response to psychological problems, such as anxiety and depression, whose consequences include self-disgust.

On the one hand, it validates the use of an age-old defense mechanism for coping with anxiety and depression and preventing a loss of control. The legal system accepts this form of coping and grants it legal force, while simultaneously making it possible to restrict it.

A person who wishes to be released from his vow must approach a rabbi and describe the vow and the emotional and social context in which it was made.

This is a therapeutic process that requires speech and reflection. At the same time, however, this mechanism grants the Sages extensive power: they are exposed to a person's innermost secrets, and they possess the ability to direct the control he exercises over his life through vows.

Here is another classic example in which the Sages confront an obsessive-compulsive disorder.

The opening mishnayot of Tractate Pesachim provide that, on the night of the fourteenth of Nisan, a search for leaven must be conducted, but that only places in which leaven might be found are to be searched, rather than every possible location:

> On the eve of the fourteenth, leaven is searched for by the light of a candle. Any place into which leaven is not brought need not be searched. And why did they say [that one must search] two rows in a cellar? [Because it is] a place into which leaven is brought. […] We do not fear that a weasel may have dragged [leaven] from house to house and from place to place; for if so, [we would have to fear that it was dragged] from courtyard to courtyard and from city to city—and there would be no end to the matter.

The authors of the Mishnah thus insisted upon a dual move.

On the one hand, they validated the obsessive-compulsive feeling by treating it seriously. On the other, they limited the obsession: one searches only in a place into which leaven is ordinarily brought and does not fear that a weasel may have dragged the leaven elsewhere. The reason is both practical and psychological: "there would be no end to the matter."

Meticulous halakhic observance in every area borders on obsession and gives those who practice it a sense of control. At the same time, in a matter possessing the potential to develop into a serious obsessive-compulsive disorder, the Sages considered it necessary to limit that disturbance explicitly—yet even here, while validating it.

Instead of addressing suffering directly through prayer and supplication, we encounter a sophisticated mechanism that does not reject the psychological disturbance rooted in suffering, but validates it while granting the Sages the means to limit it and define its boundaries.

Validating the disturbance while limiting it is positive in itself. Over the years, however, it results in its normalization.

The psychological disturbance is no longer regarded as an impediment to functioning and mental health, but as something that activates the mechanism of a commandment and a halakhic process. Consequently, the suffering seething beneath it is no longer as accessible to the sufferer as it once was.

The power obtained by the Sages turns the members of the community into their captives. The Sages are exposed to the suffering of the members of their community, without possessing the means to channel this power and without the power itself being subject to limitation.

Religion, which constitutes a central avenue for coping with the psychological disturbances of the halakhically observant public, no longer serves as a means of

relieving human suffering. Instead, it transforms those disturbances into a path toward the observance of commandments and the enhancement of rabbinic power, in a manner that no longer permits access to the suffering at their foundation.

**B.**

Liberals, in their anxiety, interpret reality one-dimensionally. They fail to recognize the potential inherent in tradition and religion to give resonance to their complex identity within Israeli social reality and its legal system.

The false pride surrounding the Haredi and Hardal public, by contrast—a consequence of detachment from suffering and of regarding psychological disturbance as an inseparable part of religious life—prevents its members from identifying within themselves a universal connection to other human beings.

As if caught in a pincer movement, our inner and social identity remains blocked by dams. It grows ever narrower and its colors fade, leaving us cut off from ourselves and from our place, and filled with despair.

Were it not for their fear, liberals could make use precisely of those issues within Jewish law that are entirely foreign to their moral and cultural positions and that even arouse revulsion in them.

These are the very issues that even Justice Elon believed to be irrelevant to Israeli law: the city led astray into idolatry, levirate marriage and *halitzah* (the ritual release from the obligation of levirate marriage), sacrificial worship, the Hebrew slave, “an eye for an eye,” and many others.

Such a move requires the abstraction of religious law and the identification of the universal human need to which it seeks to respond.

Each of these subjects could assist us in confronting the weighty questions before us. Their spiritual and religious dimensions are inseparable from the interpretive efforts made by the Sages to adapt them to the social and ethical reality in which they lived.

For their part, were Haredim not to cling to halakhah as the force directing every fiber of their lives, they might create space within their souls.

Such space would be suited to the Israeli social climate and would also make it possible to limit the power of rabbis who, from the outset, occupy a position outside their field of expertise.

**C.**

An additional question now arises concerning the religious way of life and its relationship to morality.

In our own time, when Islamist and Jewish fundamentalists perpetrate violent crimes in the name of religion, it is easy to forget that the connection between religion and violence is not inevitable.

Religion is also a way of life that advances peace; sanctifies life; grants dignity to every human being; educates toward self-discipline, self-awareness, and the recognition of mistakes; and makes a person humble, honest, serious, committed, and responsible.

The author of Proverbs formulated the profound connection between religious life and moral life with particular sharpness:

> Six things the Lord hates,
> and seven are an abomination to Him:
>
> haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
> and hands that shed innocent blood;
>
> a heart that devises wicked thoughts,
> feet that hurry to run toward evil;
>
> a false witness who breathes lies,
> and one who sows discord among brothers.[8]

From this perspective, the puzzle is a profound one: how is it that Haredim, who are devout in their religion, lead immoral lives? And what is there in their religious lives that has the power to shape their character as such men and women?

At times, I imagine a Haredi man or woman rising from sleep to perform the service of the Creator. They wash their hands and recite the blessing, and then say the morning blessings.

In the small space left to them by the cultural and communal forces exerted upon them, a thought arises concerning the war being waged, as this essay is written, in the north and the south, and concerning the male and female hostages languishing in the tunnels of Hamas.

At first they think about Torah study as that which preserves the people of Israel. Then, when this thought fails to reassure them because of its abstract character, they think: "One would think that we are the only people who do not enlist—and through our Torah study, we are acting on behalf of the people of Israel."

Then another thought steals into their minds: "Who says that your blood is redder?"[9] They shake it off and turn to the labor of their day.

They see a problem in accepting allowances from a state with which they do not identify, but this thought, too, is dismissed by the argument that "everyone takes" and that "we contribute our share. The claims that our share of tax payments is smaller are false."

They experience the immorality that touches the very roots of life: failing to participate in the burden of obligations while enjoying the rights; taking money from the group while one's sense of belonging to it is incomplete and even unstable; and, at the same time, claiming the right to make decisions for the members of that group in matters of life and death.

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[8] Proverbs 6:16–19.

[9] Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 74a.

This immorality appears and reappears from within their existence, but they continue to live within it.

Haredi society is a group governed by strict social norms and substantial social pressures. Haredi men and women nevertheless retain a degree of intellectual and practical freedom. In a certain sense, therefore, they decide every morning to lead immoral lives.

This immoral foundation finds concrete expression.

Haredim encourage their children to study Torah. They do not invest in the study of science and mathematics, which are indispensable to the existence of a society in every sphere—from security and health to planning and construction and the maintenance of a viable framework for commercial activity.

When they encounter a problem, however, they turn to the very men and women who have invested in these fields.

It may, of course, be argued that Haredim are no different from other human beings and that religion is merely, in some cases, an instrument, and in others a conduit, for channeling impulses that have existed since the dawn of humanity.

Yet we are speaking of a group whose members' lives revolve around halakhah as their central focus and organizing core.

Halakhah does not distinguish between law and morality or between the private and public spheres. It applies to every area of life. Its direction of conduct is not restricted to the practical realm but also extends to beliefs and opinions.

Halakhah contains numerous legal rules whose primary purpose is to shape a person's awareness of the other and to cultivate solidarity, love of the other, and remembrance of the past. In this respect it differs from the liberal legal system, which is committed to the harm principle.[10]

The question therefore arises once more: how do their religious lives—which contain the potential for moral existence and for the formation of sensitive, humble, and self-aware individuals—lead them to live immoral lives?

One possible reason for this surprising phenomenon is the blurring of the distinction between belief in God and the treatment of God as an established fact.

Faith is a universal human phenomenon. It provides a natural response to the uncertainty inherent in human existence and to the mystery of the universe.

In *The Drowned and the Saved*, Primo Levi writes of his envy of the people of faith in the camp:

> Their world was broader than ours, extending farther in space and time, and, above all, it was more comprehensible. They had a key and points of support. They had a thousand-year tomorrow for which self-sacrifice might have meaning, a place in heaven

[10] "That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant." John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. David Bromwich and George Kateb (Yale University Press, 2003), p. 80.

or upon the earth where justice and compassion prevailed—or would prevail—in a future perhaps distant, but certain.[11]

Throughout the generations, rabbinic Judaism succeeded in maintaining a separation between reality and belief in God.

Work for the sake of earning a livelihood was praised, as were turning to physicians for medical treatment and to professionals in order to repair reality—all alongside belief in God.[12]

In recent years, faith among Haredim, and also among the Hardal public, appears increasingly to have assumed the character of an established fact.

This is expressed in the manner in which they speak about God, His ways, and His actions in the world without the slightest trace of doubt—not merely as part of the liturgy, but as part of everyday life.

"The World to Come," about which human beings know nothing, becomes in their speech an ontological entity.

Many of the legal rules of halakhah are intended to make God present within the believer's life precisely because of the gap between faith and reality.[13] Within Haredi society, by contrast, an attempt appears to be made to eliminate this gap entirely.

Repeated verbal references to God and the World to Come as though they were matters of fact encourage a form of life in which reality itself is shaped in accordance with faith.

In other words, in Haredi society halakhah does not respond to reality and change as a result of it. Rather, factual reality is reshaped in the shadow of faith, as illustrated by the way some believers interpreted Shabbetai Zevi's conversion to Islam as part of the process of redemption.

Frequent talk about metaphysical matters such as God and the World to Come, or about Torah study as preserving the people and the state—treating all these, without any skepticism, as tangible realities—enables Haredi men and women to avoid holding themselves morally accountable.

Such speech creates an alternative reality shaped by faith and places distance between the believer and reality.

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[11] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (Am Oved/Sifriyat Ofakim, 1991), p. 113 [Hebrew edition].

[12] See, for example, the position of Rabbi Ishmael from the tannaitic period, according to which the command appearing at the beginning of the Book of Joshua—"This book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth"—should not be interpreted literally. Torah study should be combined with work that sustains the person engaged in it.

See also the position of the Babylonian amora Abaye: "Many acted in accordance with Rabbi Ishmael and succeeded"—Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 35b.

And, of course, see the well-known position of Maimonides, the greatest halakhic authority of all time:

Anyone who resolves to occupy himself with Torah and not to engage in labor, and to support himself through charity, has profaned the Name, disgraced the Torah, and extinguished the light of religion.

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Torah Study, 3:10.

[13] A clear example is the manner in which blessings address God in the second person: "Blessed are You…"

It is this distance that enables the immoral lives of Haredim, since it allows them to speak of morality at a theoretical level. Moral lives, however, can be lived only in relation to reality itself.

Moral dilemmas arise out of encounters with reality. They require daily decisions because reality is complex and many-shaded.

Section 2 of the Draft Basic Law: Torah Study provides:

> The State of Israel, as a Jewish state, regards the encouragement of Torah study and of those who study Torah as a matter of supreme importance. For the purposes of their rights and obligations, those who have undertaken to devote themselves to Torah study for an extended period shall be regarded as persons rendering significant service to the State of Israel and to the Jewish people.

Torah study is indeed an important value within Judaism and deserves a special status in the Jewish state.

Yet this provision takes the blurring of the metaphysical and the physical embodied in Haredi life and gives it legal force as a constitutional right.

The consequences of such a move extend beyond the dangers associated with violating the right to equality through a Basic Law.

What makes this law a religious law is not the fact that it exalts Torah study—which is, as noted, an extremely important value—but rather its failure to distinguish between reality and faith.

The arrogance that has characterized the Haredi public in recent years can also be explained against the background of this detachment from reality.

As we have seen, humility and suffering are connected, and suffering is possible only through standing face to face with reality.

The same applies to the use of science and medicine. In such a condition, one may easily retreat into an alternative reality in which physicians are perceived as instruments for preserving the health of God's emissaries in the world—the Haredi men and women.