

Authoritative and Accessible

THE YEAR 2005 WAS A big one for ArtScroll. It marked the completion of the seventy-third and final volume of their *Talmud Bavli: The Schottenstein Edition*, a massive work of thirty-five thousand pages, involving over eighty rabbinic scholars for more than fifteen years, at a blistering production rate of one volume every nine weeks.¹ No other publication has more definitively signaled ArtScroll's ascent in the publishing world. Several other ArtScroll books have had a dramatic impact on the English-language Jewish public sphere, such as *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur* (their basic prayer book) and even their best-selling cookbook, *Kosher by Design*.² But ArtScroll's Talmud is unique in terms of the intellectual, symbolic, and financial resources at stake for a project of this magnitude, as well as its impact on the relationship of the publisher with its patrons, customers, critics, and even competing publishers.³

Let us recall here the status of the Babylonian Talmud as arguably the central text of Rabbinic Judaism. It consists of the written record of what is known in Jewish tradition as the *Torah she be'al peh* (the Oral Law), originally transmitted to Moses on Mt. Sinai alongside the *Torah she bi khtav* (the Written Torah, i.e., the Hebrew Bible), and systematized by a long tradition of authoritative commentators.⁴ More than any other text in the Jewish tradition, it symbolizes the shift in ancient Israelite religion from a temple cult organized around sacrificial practices to the religion of a

“people of the book,” living in diaspora, in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem. Over the ensuing centuries, the Talmud has represented the most important source for adjudication within halakhah (Jewish law), while also providing an unparalleled treasure house of legends and anecdotes, philosophical and moral reflections, and historical and scientific observations that mediate the interpretive possibilities of the Torah itself. Mastery over this famously difficult text, written in *leshon ha-kodesh* (the “holy tongue,” a mixture of Aramaic and Hebrew), and laid out on the page in a complex pattern of intertexts, has also provided a key source of symbolic and social distinction throughout the long history of diaspora Jewish communities, dividing an elite of male scholars who are able to “talk in Talmud” from the “lesser world” of women and the ignorant.

ArtScroll is not the first publisher to have embarked upon a translation of this central work in the Jewish canon.⁵ But theirs is distinguished as the most thorough and elaborate edition of the Talmud ever produced in the English language, and it is already the most successful. This success is evident from the impressive readership the *Schottenstein Talmud* commands, as measured in the brisk sales of individual volumes, and in the development of a market for entire seventy-three-volume sets.⁶ The *Schottenstein Talmud* is also the only English edition to have received the approval of prominent scholars and rabbinic authorities from across the entire Orthodox world, who all praise the ArtScroll text as a remarkable feat of scholarly maturity and exegetical clarity.⁷ Its completion thus represents a key moment in the history of this publisher within the larger circulations of knowledge, capital, symbolic power, and religious authority that define the Jewish public sphere.

The completion of the *Schottenstein Talmud* also provides a useful occasion to take stock of a deeper logic that structures ArtScroll’s ongoing effort to present simultaneously “authoritative” and “accessible” Jewish books. As I have already suggested in the Introduction, ArtScroll tells a story of how a specific group of intellectuals and cultural producers, embodied in the institutional form of a publishing house, engages in the business of addressing both insiders and outsiders through the medium of books written in the holy tongue and in the vernacular. This effort involves a complex negotiation between the publisher and its imagined public, defined by competing pressures of autonomy and control, custom and innovation, ignorance and erudition, and sacred duty and economic interest. In turn, the ArtScroll story sheds light on the larger intellectual, cultural, and social situation in which Haredi Judaism finds itself today. Located in a public realm defined

by increasing diversification of affiliations, cultural patterns, social locations, competencies, and degrees of commitment and interest, Haredim are called upon (and call upon themselves) to posit, and defend, their claim over Jewish tradition. But their efforts invariably transform that tradition, among other things by *redesigning* the corpus of Jewish texts that most “authentically” communicates its meaning. The aim of this chapter is to show how this paradoxical logic of authority and accessibility informs ArtScroll’s project, locating the publisher within the intellectual, cultural, and economic ties between Haredi society and the media-rich public culture of English-speaking Jewry.

The powerful, competing pressures to be both authoritative and accessible permeate the entire ArtScroll enterprise, shaping the terms on which the publisher defines itself and addresses others. We can even find them at work in seemingly minor terminological decisions, such as ArtScroll’s description of its edition as an “elucidation” of the Talmud rather than a translation. On the one hand, this choice of terms is clearly meant to appease an audience of Orthodox scholars in an intellectual climate that has traditionally been characterized by suspicion of, if not outright hostility toward, translation of the Talmud into the vernacular.⁸ On the other hand, ArtScroll’s “elucidation” is designed to reach a much larger constituency of readers, from the novice to the most advanced student. In a refrain that has become familiar for the publisher in its publication of religious texts, Rabbi Scherman suggests that the Talmud “really has been a closed book to the vast majority of English-speaking Jews. The idea [behind the *Schottenstein Talmud*] was to create a volume that would elucidate it, make it comprehensible.”⁹ At the same time, the promise of English to expand the Talmud’s readership is also a dangerous index of unauthorized use and intellectual corruption—a concern that further underscores the need for proper training and thorough explanation, not mere translation. As Rabbis Scherman and Zlotowitz elaborate in their preface to *Tractate Makkos*, the very first Talmud volume they published in 1990,

It is not the purpose of this edition of the Talmud to provide a substitute for the original text or a detour around the classic manner of study. Its purpose is to help the student understand the Gemara [Talmud] itself and improve his ability to learn from the original, preferably under the guidance of a rebbe. The Talmud must be *learned* and not merely read. As clear as we believe the English elucidation to be, thanks to the dedicated work of an exceptional team of Torah scholars, the reader must contribute to the process by himself to think, analyze, and thus to understand.¹⁰

This cautious description of ArtScroll’s Talmud as a “helper” to, but not a substitute for, “real” study (preferably under the watchful eye of a reputable Haredi authority figure) reveals how delicately the publisher is poised in its efforts to promulgate, and to publicly legitimate, new renditions of the Jewish canon in vernacular form. In a press interview around the time of the launching of the final volume of the *Schottenstein Talmud*, Rabbi Scherman admonished prospective readers: “Using the Schottenstein Edition isn’t easy—you still have to think. Anyone who reads it will see there is room for further inquiry and discussion. If you pick up a popular magazine which gives you a ten-to-twelve page overview of a particular topic, would any serious person go away saying they’re an expert because they’ve read ten pages in *Reader’s Digest*?”¹¹ One might be tempted to respond to Rabbi Scherman that, just as *Reader’s Digest* is a poor substitute for “real” literature, so too might the Schottenstein elucidation serve little purpose other than to comfort a feeble and lazy readership. But that would ignore the actual work performed by such texts: to both vulgarize and enlighten. So designed, they empower readers to negotiate their own paths through the hierarchy of discursive and linguistic registers that demarcate “high” and “low” literary forms. Much like *Reader’s Digest*, the *Schottenstein Talmud* is caught up within the twin forces of authorization and popularization that shape all pedagogical literatures. To get a sense of the complexity, the fragility, and also the productive capacities of such work, let us consider four moments that marked the conclusion of ArtScroll’s Talmud project and its arrival on the public stage.

FOUR SCENES OF ARRIVAL

At the Library of Congress

The first event occurred on February 9, 2005, when the Mesorah Heritage Foundation (the agency responsible for funding and overseeing the Talmud project) held a special dedication ceremony in the foyer of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Among those in attendance were over twenty senior American politicians, including Senators Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), Joe Lieberman (D-CT), Hilary Clinton (D-NY), and Sam Brownback (R-KS), Congress Representatives Steny Hoyer (D-MD), Shelly Berkley (D-NV), Eric Cantor (R-VA), and Ralph Regula (D-OH), and an array of journalists from prominent publications, such as the *New York Times*. ArtScroll’s ability to muster such an audience says a great deal

about the extensive networks of influence that provide the American Orthodox Jewish community with ready access to highly placed cultural, political, and administrative elites. Of equal interest here are the symbolic stakes that ArtScroll has managed to mark in the very act of presenting its Talmud edition to the Library of Congress. In his dedication speech before the assembled lawmakers, library patrons, and distinguished guests, Rabbi Scherman underscored this symbolic victory:

My friends, this is the most historic day in the Library of Congress since the year 1800. Now if you think that's presumptuous of me, let me explain what I mean. The library was founded in the year 1800, and the collection was started with a gift of two thousand books by Thomas Jefferson. One of those books was a Latin translation of Tractate Bava Kama in the Babylonian Talmud. It is still here some place in the caverns of the library, and on page 140, you will find the initials "T.J.": Thomas Jefferson. And now, after more than 200 years, that edition, that Latin edition of the Bava Kama, is being joined by a full edition of the Talmud in *our* language. And it's an *American* contribution. And it's no exaggeration to say that [in] 350 years of Jews in America, in this blessed country, there has not yet been a literary, religious, cultural publishing effort of this magnitude. It's an astounding effort. Fifteen years of scores of world-class scholars working literally day and night. . . . And tonight we have the great honor to present the complete *Schottenstein Talmud*, this elucidation of the Babylonian Talmud, to the Library of Congress. This library is one of the great gifts of the United States of America. Our culture, our knowledge, our aspirations for the future, are all housed in these magnificent buildings. And now, the complete Talmud, the *Schottenstein Edition of the Talmud*, will take its place with Thomas Jefferson's single Latin volume of Tractate Bava Kama.¹²

The recipient of ArtScroll's gift, Dr. James Hadley Billington, the Librarian of Congress, echoed Rabbi Scherman's characterization of the historical significance of this occasion in his own speech:

As a lover of books, and with my special responsibilities for this collection, I'm especially pleased to . . . celebrate the completion of this monumental Schottenstein edition of the Talmud, and its donation to the library. . . . The *Schottenstein Talmud* is an example of the deeply sympathetic and intensely creative relationship between America in general and its Jewish community in particular. It is sure to become a classic, and it will join other editions of the Talmud in the library's extraordinary

Hebrew book collections. Scholars can now consult all the great editions of the Talmud, from Bomberg's groundbreaking edition produced in Venice in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, to the late nineteenth-century Vilna edition, upon which the Schottenstein edition is based. So, with this new edition, scholars will now have a remarkable tool with which to understand the deeper meaning of the text, and their continuous resonance for all who value the life of spirit, the world of learning, and the extraordinary record of the people of the book. And for the gift of these precious books to our collection, I give you the sincere thanks, not only of the Library of Congress, but of all lovers of books, and lovers of the deep values that underlie our entire civilization.¹³

What is the significance of this dedication ceremony? Through the staging of this event, ArtScroll presents itself as a bridge between the inner world of Jewish scholarship and the outer world of American intellectual and political life. This bridge is paved with ArtScroll's monopolistic claims over the entire history of the Jewish presence in America, cast here as a history of intellectual contributions consummating in the production of the *Schottenstein Talmud* itself. Rabbi Scherman and Dr. Billington concur in their description of the arrival of ArtScroll's Talmud as the "completion" of a collection first begun by the founding father Thomas Jefferson. In turn, the production, circulation, and preservation of books synecdochally references the collaborative and mutually enriching relationships of Jews and non-Jews, dating back to the foundational moment when Jefferson saw fit to add a Talmud volume to his personal library. In this account, ArtScroll is rhetorically sutured into the fabric of national history and, more precisely, into the history of the American republic's self-appointed *mission civilizatrice* to gather all the world's knowledge and to make it available in the world's most magnificent library. As the dedication speeches make clear, the *Schottenstein Talmud* has now been positioned as a decisive contribution to "our culture" and "our knowledge." Its gift to the library cements the "deep values that underlie our entire civilization." At stake in this first scene of the *Schottenstein Talmud*'s arrival, then, is ArtScroll's status as a contributor to the very order of the "civilized world." The narrative of divine election, of the capacity of a specifically Haredi form of Jewish scholarship to serve as a "light onto the nations," is enacted here through the idiom of American nationalism, through the authorizing power of the library's acquisition practices, and through the presentation of English as the gateway to a truly universal readership.

At the Siyum haShas

A second noteworthy event occurred a couple weeks later, on March 1, 2005. In close proximity with the release of the final volume of the *Schottenstein Talmud*, there was a massive public rally of Orthodox Jews: the Siyum haShas (Talmud completion ceremony) that marked the conclusion of the eleventh cycle of Daf Yomi, a popular movement of both religious professionals and laypersons engaged in regular Talmud study. On the night in question, an estimated 120,000 celebrants attended events held simultaneously at Madison Square Gardens in New York City, at the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, at the Yad Eliyahu Stadium in Tel Aviv, at the Binyanei ha-Umah Convention Center in Jerusalem, and at the Ricoh Centre in Toronto, as well as gatherings at over seventy other cities around the world, in order to watch simulcast presentations via satellite television feeds.¹⁴ One of the most dramatic public events in the history of Orthodox Jewry, the eleventh Siyum haShas epitomized the growing strength and confidence of the Haredi movement, expressed here in terms of its success in fostering new practices of reading and popular study of canonical Jewish texts. But this particular ceremony was also marked—even if only tangentially—by the presentation of the *Schottenstein Talmud* as an equally momentous benchmark of the waxing public presence of Haredi Orthodox Judaism.

Daf Yomi (literally, “daily page”) is a program of study that was instigated in 1923 by Agudat Israel, one of the preeminent Haredi organizations dedicated to the defense and promotion of Orthodox Judaism.¹⁵ Rabbi Meir Shapiro (1887–1933), then headmaster of the Hakhmei Lublin Yeshivah, proposed the Daf Yomi program as an international effort to encourage all adult male Jews to study one complete page of the Babylonian Talmud each day. In his understanding, this initiative would bring the entire Jewish world together, both laymen and scholars: a unity that would culminate in a *siyum* (completion celebration) every seven years and five months, the duration required to complete all 2,771 tractate pages.¹⁶ Although in its early years, the practice of Daf Yomi was restricted to a relatively small circle of scholars and students, the program has enjoyed growing popularity in the post-World War II period, not least in the English-speaking world.¹⁷ This popularity is registered, for instance, in the exponential growth of *siyum* (completion) ceremonies held in the greater New York area: in 1968, a Siyum haShas held at the Bais Yaakov religious academy of Boro Park (Brooklyn, New York) was attended by a mere 200

participants. In 1984, there were 7,600 participants; in 1990 there were 21,000; in 1997 there were over 70,000; and in 2005 almost double that number again.¹⁸ In between these dramatic and very public moments of mass celebration, the growth of the Daf Yomi movement can also be traced through the spread of Talmud study circles. Across the North American continent, and elsewhere, in virtually every city with a Jewish population, one now finds local Daf Yomi participants gathering at synagogues, schools, community centers, and other sites for *shiurim* (Talmud lessons) held in the early morning hours, at lunchtime, and in the evening. One rather famous study circle, led by Rabbi Pesach Lerner, consists of a group of lawyers, accountants, and other professionals who have been meeting daily since the early 1990s on the 7:51 a.m. commuter train from Far Rockaway to Penn Station in New York City.¹⁹

The rising popularity of Daf Yomi is also materialized in the rapid expansion of new goods and services catering to existing and potential Talmud students. Starting in the early 1980s, the growing demand for daily Talmud lessons encouraged organizers to develop new telecommunications services, such as Dial-a-Daf, a telephone network enabling callers to access prerecorded lessons by leading *maggidei shiurim* (Talmudic instructors), such as those by Rabbi Eli Teitelbaum of Boro Park (in Brooklyn, New York). The popularity of Dial-a-Daf, administered by the Torah Communications Network, eventually led to the creation of an extensive Torah Phone Library, and other offshoots, such as a growing market of *shiurim* distributed and sold on audiocassette. Not long after, with the personal computing revolution and the emergence of video-conferencing technologies, a new organization, the Torah Conferencing Network, began transmitting recorded *shiurim* of Talmudic “superstars”—such as Rabbi Yisroel Reisman, of Flatbush, New Jersey, and Rabbi Asher Weiss of Sderot, Israel—via satellite to dozens of sites around the world.²⁰ Since the 1990s, the means for accessing lessons via advanced communication technologies has only continued to expand through the proliferation of Internet databases, chat rooms, Weblogs, and interactive Web sites that offer digitized images of Talmud tractate pages, or lessons in MP3 audio file format, among other electronic tools for enriching Talmud study.²¹ Other companies, such as Torah Educational Software (TES) Inc., have developed new learning tools that tap into the rising popularity of Daf Yomi, such as *Gemara Tutor* (in which students compete to learn Talmudic vocabulary and concepts) and *Talmud Master* (an “interactive Talmud trainer” focusing on the text’s logical flow and reasoning process).²² And in March 2005,

with much fanfare and considerable media attention, a young entrepreneur named Chaim Shulman launched the ShasPod, a version of Apple's iPod digital recording device that comes preloaded with lessons for the complete Daf Yomi cycle, culled from Talmud lectures by Rabbi Dovid Grossman of Los Angeles.²³ There is little room for doubt that, with the development of new communication technologies, future entrepreneurs will continue to find ways to harness their capabilities and market new products to the Daf Yomi movement.

ArtScroll's Talmud project has played far more than a peripheral role in the success and growing popularity of Daf Yomi in the English-speaking world. This was highlighted during the eleventh Siyum haShas ceremony when the Novominsker Rebbe, Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, current president of Agudath Israel of America and de facto leader of the Daf Yomi movement in the United States, singled out ArtScroll in his address to the gathered mass:

This *simcha* [joy] tonight is shared by all circles, by those who study in the traditional *Shas* [Talmud], in Yiddish. It is also shared, however, by a new generation of Torah students, who communicate effectively in the spoken language of our country: in English. And therefore, I believe, we would all be remiss at this point not to acknowledge, in public, the tremendous contributions made by those Torah scholars: the writers, the editors, and the benefactors, of a society known as ArtScroll. Without the truth of the *Schottenstein Shas* [Talmud], who have made the study of *Gemara* [Talmud] accessible to so many thousands of thirsty Jews, eager to drink from the fountain of Torah. The completion of the *Schottenstein Shas* in our day is an historic milestone—a sign, I believe, from providence, that Torah can and will be advanced, *baruch hashem* [thank God], on all frontiers of Jewish life.²⁴

As a sign from providence itself, the coincidence in timing of the conclusion of the *Schottenstein Talmud* and the ending of the eleventh Daf Yomi cycle cannot easily be reduced to a mere marketing ploy (although it cannot escape attention that this synchrony presented an ideal opportunity for the press to publicize the availability of the entire edition, just as the new, twelfth cycle of daily Talmud reading was about to begin). The Siyum haShas was simply the most dramatic public moment within what was in fact a deep, symbiotic relationship between ArtScroll and its Daf Yomi audience, running through the entire history of the Talmud translation project. As Rabbi Scherman and Nesanel Kasnett explain, “ArtScroll’s

publication schedule has revolved around *Daf Yomi* in order to help participants navigate through *daf* after *daf* [page after page] of the sea of the Talmud. The *Daf Yomi* cycle stretches for seven and a half years and in order to coordinate with it as much as possible, new volumes of the Schottenstein Edition were published on a staggered basis to coincide with the *Daf Yomi* schedule, so that it would be in synch with the new *Daf Yomi* volume.”²⁵ If the Library of Congress ceremony addressed the larger, non-Jewish world of lawmakers and library patrons, the Siyum haShas ceremony provided ArtScroll with an occasion to emphasize its links with this popular movement of Orthodox Jewish students, as well as a potential audience of future initiates to the *Daf Yomi* program. The timing of the completion of ArtScroll’s Talmud thus signals a decisive coming of age for both the publisher and the movement in whose name it speaks. The *Schottenstein Talmud* is presented as an ideal vehicle of popular pedagogy in that it promises to sate the thirst for knowledge and understanding, particularly among constituencies of Jewish readers unable to engage in full-time study and therefore lacking in many of the requisite reading skills. Moreover, as the first edition ever produced that has been designed specifically to accommodate *Daf Yomi*’s modular logic—the reading of one page per day—the ArtScroll text heralds a new regime of interpretive techniques, reading practices, and modes of social organization that has helped to propel Haredi Orthodox Judaism to a dominant position within the popular imagination and within the habitus of everyday life for a growing number of English-speaking Jews.

At the Gala Supper

The third event occurred on March 15, 2005, when the Mesorah Heritage Foundation hosted a gala supper at the New York Hilton Hotel for some 2,700 patrons, supporters, and friends of the publisher.²⁶ The evening began with a cocktail event that featured kosher sushi, chamber music, and the exhibition of a “Patrons Scroll” projecting the names and faces of prominent donors to the foundation onto the wall of the hotel’s Mercury Suite. Afterward, the guests were ushered upstairs to the Grand Ballroom, where they were seated before a long stage upon which sat ArtScroll’s principal stakeholders, including the foundation’s trustees and board of governors. On a side stage, no less prominently lit, sat an assembly of the key rabbis involved in the translation project. The event was, in the words of one guest with whom I shared a table, a “who’s who” of the American Orthodox world and its friends. The stars included prominent financiers and

roshei yeshiva (headmasters of religious academies), as well as more mainstream celebrities. Even the Hollywood actor John Voight was in attendance.

The supper was followed by a string of speeches and dedications, including those by Rabbi Scherman, Rabbi Zlotowitz, and members of the Schottenstein family, and then the audience was treated to videotaped greetings from Israeli rabbis who were unable to attend in person, as well as a documentary film dramatizing the momentous achievement of the Schottenstein publication and its impact on readers throughout the English-speaking world. At the closing of the evening's events, Rabbi Zlotowitz spoke about the ongoing work of the Mesorah Heritage Foundation, which included the continuation of their Hebrew edition of the Talmud and the inauguration of a new project to translate the Jerusalem Talmud into English. This new effort promised to rival the Babylonian Talmud in terms of its challenges for translators and exegetes and was projected to fill forty-seven volumes in the coming years. The audience was also told about the existing opportunities to dedicate individual volumes in their names and was advised to contact the foundation to arrange for appropriately sized donations. Upon departure, each guest was presented with a deluxe shoulder bag containing copies of the ArtScroll catalog, a limited-edition commemorative volume honoring the scholars and patrons involved in the creation of the Schottenstein Edition of the Babylonian Talmud, a unique ballpoint pen with a pullout miniaturized scroll inscribed with the Tefilah haDerech (the Wayfarer's Prayer, traditionally recited when setting out on a journey), and a copy of the recently completed first volume of the aforementioned Jerusalem Talmud.

Through its speeches, food, musical entertainment, and opportunities for socializing, the gala supper was carefully orchestrated to strengthen the bonds of patronage that underpin the Mesorah Heritage Foundation's publishing projects. The gathering of authors, editors, and donors affirmed and helped to further consolidate relationships vital to ArtScroll's success as an institution dedicated both to disinterested scholarship and to the marketing of print commodities. Indeed, the gala supper enacted exchanges in the narrow sense of fundraising and promotionalism, but also through the performance of gift exchanges, in and through which authors, religious leaders, patrons, and curious onlookers (myself included) were invited to perform acts of mutual recognition (Fig. 1). One might say that ArtScroll's stakeholders, by seeing and being seen, speaking and listening to speeches, and participating in the lush festivities, affirmed a principle the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu described as the "interest in disinterestedness": the tacit,

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Mesorah Heritage Foundation

February 27, 2005

Mr. Jeremy Stolow

Dear Jeremy,

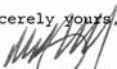
Thank you for your recent generous contribution of
* * * **THREE HUNDRED SIXTY DOLLARS** * * *
in support of our Judaic projects. Below is your **official receipt**.

We at the Mesorah Heritage Foundation, an IRS-approved 501(c)(3) not-for-profit publicly supported organization, are grateful for your kind response to our Patrons Dinner / Commemorative Journal on March 15, 2005, and for your reservation for 1 person to that event. This historic occasion celebrates the completion of the entire 73-volume Schottenstein Edition of the Talmud and inaugurates other Foundation projects which make an enormous impact world-wide. Primarily it honors those visionary people who are making these works possible.

Indeed, it is through individuals such as yourself that we can continue our work of sharing Judaism's treasures with the English-speaking world -- for which generations yet unborn will be grateful.

In the merit of your generosity, may you and yours enjoy everything good, and the continued ability to participate in great causes.

Sincerely yours,


Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz
Chairman

בניה

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Mr. Jeremy Stolow

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the WRITTEN WORD IS FOREVER

Figure 1. Receipt for ArtScroll patrons' gala dinner, New York Hilton, March 15, 2005. Here I demonstrate my own implication in the "social alchemy" that enables ArtScroll to convert economic into symbolic value.

and sometimes even disavowed, accumulation of advantages that allows for a “social alchemy,” in this case transforming sacred, consecrated objects into objects of commercial value.²⁷ Without financial donors, ambitious projects such as the translation of the entire Talmud would never have been possible; without the army of editors and authors ready to undertake this work, and the most prominent Haredi rabbinic authorities to bless it with their approval, donors would have no project in which to invest and thus no source of symbolic capital to acquire for themselves. More than just a celebration among insiders, the gala supper dramatized these complex relationships of interdependence and exchange. Unlike the more public events such as the Siyum haShas, which highlighted ArtScroll’s resonance with a broad readership, the gala supper threw into relief the *Schottenstein Talmud*’s position at the intersection of a network of financial backers, intellectuals, and guardians of cultural capital, whose partnerships are key to the ArtScroll enterprise.

At the Yeshiva University Museum Exhibit

The fourth and final defining moment pertaining to the completion of the *Schottenstein Talmud* took the form of a major exhibition at the Yeshiva University Museum in New York City from April 12 to August 28, 2005. *Printing the Talmud: From Bomberg to Schottenstein* was an exhibit (and subsequently a catalog publication) that showcased a large range of examples of Talmud texts, from thirteenth-century manuscript fragments to rare original copies of key Talmud editions, beginning with the very first printed edition by the Flemish printer Daniel Bomberg, produced in 1519–23.²⁸ The exhibit also featured a floor mosaic from the sixth-century synagogue at Rehov, in Israel’s Bet Shean Valley, presenting the only known surviving copy of a rabbinic text from the time when the Talmud was redacted, as well as a video installation entitled *The Infinite Sea*, compiled from live video footage of Talmud students sitting and learning in classrooms around the world, from Lima to Moscow to Glasgow.²⁹ Although, as noted by the museum’s director, Sylvia Herskowitz, the initial idea for a show on the history of Talmud publication had preceded the completion of the *Schottenstein Talmud*, the latter event provided the museum an ideal pretext “to try to capture and convey the energy that Talmud represents,” not least with respect to *ArtScroll*’s edition, “which has succeeded in making the Talmud accessible to all.”³⁰

The Yeshiva University Museum show was an important venue for the public arrival of the *Schottenstein Talmud* in at least three respects. First,

as suggested by the very title of the exhibit, it defined ArtScroll's Talmud as the latest—and at least for the time being, the *final*—published edition of the Talmud, placing it at the pinnacle of a tradition stretching back to the fifteenth-century Bomberg text. Second, the museum show emphasized the artifactual nature of the Schottenstein edition, presenting it as a valued object to collect and to display. Standing in juxtaposition with displays of older Talmud editions, and even antique relics such as a floor mosaic imported from “the Holy Land,” ArtScroll's Talmud acquired an aura of authenticity, as enshrined by the curatorial practices and visual theatrics that underpin the work of museum display.³¹ Finally, the show was significant for its location in the Yeshiva University Museum. Founded in 1886, the Yeshiva University has served as the preeminent American school for “modern” Orthodox Jews, and its motto, *Torah u'Maddah* (Torah and secular knowledge), identifies a form of Orthodoxy dedicated to Jewish law and custom, as well as a professed engagement with the “non-Jewish” world. As such, the Yeshiva University represents a cultural and ideological camp that historically has sharply distinguished itself from the Haredi yeshiva world (a topic to which I shall return presently). In this context, the museum's decision to put on a show paying tribute to the *Schottenstein Talmud* can be read as a remarkable concession.³² In this final moment of ArtScroll's arrival, one catches sight of an emerging terrain of intra-Orthodox consensus and a blurring of formerly rigid dividing lines. The consecration of the *Schottenstein Talmud* within the lineage of legendary printed works, and as a material specimen for display, epitomizes a growing acceptance by non-Haredim of Haredi modes of constructing Orthodox Judaism, in tandem with what some observers have characterized as a tectonic “rightward shift” within Jewish culture and society, and among Orthodox Jews in particular.

The ceremony held at the Library of Congress, the Siyum haShas in Madison Square Garden, the Mesorah Foundation's gala dinner at the Hilton Hotel, and the Yeshiva University Museum exhibition represent four distinct stages of public-making for ArtScroll's most ambitious publishing venture. Taken together, they also delineate some of the key opportunities and constraints that define ArtScroll's mission to affirm and to expand the influence of Haredi rabbinic authority through the medium of canonical religious texts. Each venue materializes one dimension of ArtScroll's success in having produced a “definitive,” scrupulously traditionalist, but also pedagogically innovative edition of the Talmud, designed to reach multiple audiences, from the most elementary, part-time student to the advanced scholar. At the

same time, the succession of venues for staging the *Schottenstein Talmud*'s public arrival points to the polyvalent character of ArtScroll's mission: driven by the need not only to win customers but also to serve a student movement, to establish legitimacy among intellectual peers, to overtake competitors, and to engage with diverse categories of outsiders, such as journalists, librarians, museum curators, and political elites. The story of the completion of the *Schottenstein Talmud* thus sheds interesting light on a much larger set of shifts that have shaped Haredi Orthodox society over the past several decades and that have transformed the place of Haredi-derived sources of knowledge and religious authority within contemporary Jewish public life. How mediating institutions such as ArtScroll play a decisive role in these transformations is the subject of what follows.

ORTHODOXY, MODERNITY, AND THE RISE OF HAREDISM

Lacking a single, unifying center of authority or an official statement of principles, Orthodox Judaism is made up of several cultural communities, differentiated by their organizational affiliations, their traditions of textual interpretation and ritual practice, and their varying attitudes toward non-Orthodox Jews and, more broadly, the high-tech, culturally hybrid, “non-Jewish” universe in which they find themselves. Broadly speaking, these differences among the Orthodox can be divided into two camps. Those who call themselves “modern” Orthodox (or who in more recent times favor the term *centrist*) accept the authority of the written and oral laws of Jewish tradition but also ascribe inherent value to the “secular” protocols of state citizenship, science, economic interest, and modern cosmopolitan living. By contrast, Haredi Orthodox society—which includes members of the yeshiva world, Hasidic groups, and sectors of the Sephardic community—is characterized by its opposition to all “liberalizing” tendencies in Jewish thought and practice. They are punctilious in their performance of Jewish ritual, dedicated to the intensive study of canonical texts as a religious ideal in its own right, and submissive to a narrow rabbinic elite, to whom Haredi Jews have granted unchallengeable authority in all matters of Jewish law.³³ Haredi society is also characterized by its enclosure within tight cultural enclaves, defined by such things as their geographic concentration (typically in neighborhoods of major urban centers, such as Jerusalem, New York, London, and Toronto), their endogamous kinship patterns, and their distinct forms of speech and dress.³⁴ Within these confines, Haredim often style themselves as the *she'erit yisrael* (the remnants

of Israel), the sole surviving progeny of the original Chosen People, and the unique bearers of Jewish authenticity, who in their everyday lives adhere without compromise to the Jews' covenant with God.³⁵

Of course, this enclave society was never fully closed off from the outside world. But in recent years, a combination of centrifugal forces has propelled Haredi Jews well beyond their communities through the creation of Haredi fundraising and lobby groups, political organizations, and media institutions. Likewise, Haredi-trained teachers, missionaries, pulpit rabbis, scribes, kosher licensers, and other agents have been taking up positions in Jewish schools, synagogues, and other institutions throughout the Orthodox community and in the broader public culture of Israel and the Jewish diaspora. One of the effects of this outward movement has been an increasingly emboldened challenge to the authority and legitimacy of modern Orthodox Judaism, the basic outlook of which has been the object of relentless criticism among Haredim. Haredi teachers, rabbis, and other agents have also been at the forefront of pressures within Orthodox Jewry to devalue the practice of socializing with cultural others and the pursuit of secular studies and professional careers.³⁶ At the same time, they have called upon fellow Orthodox Jews to withdraw from many of the existing arenas of intra-Jewish cooperation, in extreme cases denouncing adherents to Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist Judaism as “non-Jews.” Some Haredim have likewise refused to accord any legitimacy to the state of Israel, insisting that the Jews remain a people living in divinely prescribed exile, even when living in the Holy Land.³⁷ In all these ways, the Haredim have involved themselves in a moral mission to expand the frontiers of Haredi authority and to draw the Jewish nation further along a path toward what they define as repentance and redemption. This mission has brought Haredi society into increasingly intimate relationship with the non-Haredi world, precipitating what some refer to as a “slide to the right.” But this impression of rightward movement is an effect of the repositioning of the walls separating Haredi enclave culture from the outside world, and consequently the expanding visibility of Haredi Jews in the public sphere, through new channels of mediated communication and new possibilities for the circulation of Haredi forms of Jewish thought and practice.

Like any movement that defines itself as an orthodoxy, Haredism was never a static expression of tradition. Rather, it was a product of (often cataclysmic) social change, precipitating the very need for efforts to systematize, ideologically sharpen, and institutionally reorganize the conditions under which one could claim to uphold traditional Jewish thought, practice, and

moral outlook. It is possible to identify historical precedents of religious stringency and asceticism in the Jewish tradition going back to antiquity. Yet Haredi society as we know it today first emerged in the aftermath of a rapidly industrializing, urbanizing, and nationalizing European modernity, within its ensuing regimes of voluntary association and political factionalization and its expanding realms of economic opportunity and cultural choice. “Traditional” European Jewish society had been defined by centuries-old patterns of obligatory membership in geographically and legally constricted corporate communities—known as *kehilot*—that sustained a complex web of local traditions and intercommunal exchanges. These conditions anchored cultural practice, political power, and the formation of Jewish subjects in relatively stable institutions of governance and patterns of daily living.³⁸ But over the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during the great age of European imperial expansion and nation building, corporate Jewish society was exposed to an evolving set of promises and demands from the project of so-called Emancipation, which aimed to integrate Jewish subjects into the emerging European civil order and to redefine collective Jewish identity on the basis of principles of private confession and voluntary association. A well-known example of the new forms of Jewish public culture that crystallized in and through these shifts is the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment), an intellectual and cultural movement first appearing in Germany at the close of the eighteenth century. In their efforts to “rescue” fellow Jews from the privations of corporate life and to bring them into conformity with the sensibilities of modern civil society, Maskilim (enlightened Jews) advocated a series of revisions to liturgical practice (out of which the Reform movement was born) and amendments to Talmudic scholarship and legal reasoning, based on approaches to the Bible that incorporated the emerging scientific discourses of Orientalist historiography and philology. Other trails leading Jews away from the disintegrating world of the *kehila* were blazed by such diverse movements as secular Zionism, Bundism, and communism. And at a more anonymous level, an even wider range of options was made available to post-*kehila* Jews, including the growing opportunities to migrate from countryside to city, or much further abroad—such as to America—and also to reinvent themselves through new patterns of consumerism, fashion, exposure to non-Jewish literature, and even intermarriage and religious conversion.³⁹

The rise of Orthodox Judaism is likewise situated in the aftermath of the dismantling of the *kehila* and the circulation of promises—whether near or distant—of a new life and its attendant signs of belonging, in the form of

new ideas, new political formations, new commodities, and new relationships with the outside world. This transforming landscape obliged rabbinic leaders to seek out new ways to assert their intellectual, cultural, and political authority. Through their distinctive approaches to rabbinic literature, their ideological pronouncements, and their efforts at institution building—including the creation of sectarian communal organizations, schools, seminaries, philanthropic societies, and political parties—these Orthodox Jewish elites engaged in a dynamic process of reinvention of community, incorporating a wide range of tools to fend off even the mere possibility of influence by liberal and Reform Jews and to inoculate “the faithful” against the contagion of modernity.⁴⁰ One of the more dramatic instantiations of this effort was the creation of Agudat Israel (union or band of Israel): the first truly international organization claiming to speak on behalf of all Orthodox Jews in promoting the authority of halakhah in the regulation of both personal conduct and public life.⁴¹ From its foundation in 1912 at Kattowitz (near Cracow, Poland), through the joint efforts of a wide array of German, Polish, and Lithuanian Orthodox rabbis and scholars, Agudat Israel defined itself as an exclusive source of legitimate authority of the Jewish people in its entirety and as a direct legatee of God’s covenant at Sinai, faithfully administered in the present by its supreme governing body, the Moetzet Gedolei ha-Torah (Council of Torah Sages).⁴²

Despite its professed goal to “restore” the traditional authority of Orthodox rabbis and Talmud scholars to the pinnacle of Jewish society, in practice Agudat Israel effected a remarkable transformation in the fields of education, political activism, and social service provision, as evident from the multitude of organizations it brought into being: schools and academies, lobby groups, philanthropic societies, political parties, labor unions, agricultural cooperatives, newspapers and publishing houses, orphanages, community outreach groups, a women’s movement, a youth movement, and, not least, sponsorship of the aforementioned Daf Yomi initiative. Through these diverse enterprises, Agudat Israel dedicated itself to the defense and cultivation of Haredi values and practices wherever Jews happened to live and wherever questions of legitimate Jewish conduct happened to emerge. Before World War II, when Agudat Israel catered principally to the interests of European Orthodox Jewish communities, the movement articulated its *raison d’être* with reference to a conception of collective Jewish existence based on cosmological explanations of the state of Jewish exile in the world, as had been elaborated in centuries of canonical writings.⁴³ Among other things, this vocabulary of exile formed the basis for explicit opposition to

the project of Zionism and the prospect of a secular Jewish state in Palestine (which Haredi elites tended to regard as an illegitimate attempt to “hasten the end of time,” since it involved the mass return of Jews to the land of Israel without the prior signs of divine approval). Practically speaking, Agudat Israel’s principal goals were to legitimate the arrangements of authority and privilege of the existing Orthodox Jewish consistorial bodies and to curtail the spread of *goyish* (non-Jewish) influences among constituencies of “faithful” Jews, including the enticement to emigrate to Palestine, or to America, the consummate *treife medina* (“unholy land”).

However, over the course of the twentieth century, even greater changes were visited upon Jewish society, in the wake of which Orthodox Jews had to confront the enormity of the destruction wreaked by the Nazi Holocaust in Europe, the reconfigured geography of a Jewish diaspora now inclined toward the English-speaking world (especially the United States), and the new reality that came with the birth of the modern, secular state of Israel, organized ideologically and institutionally as the “Jewish homeland” and proclaimed as a reversal of the centuries-old condition of exile. Ironically, while the Holocaust had precipitated the annihilation of the majority of European Jewry, it also provided new opportunities for reconstruction and reinvention, injecting new vigor into various strands of Jewish Orthodoxy, not least the Haredim. Once transplanted to foreign soil, the uprooted survivors of the European disaster not only managed to rebuild—demographically as well as institutionally—but were able to flourish in new ways. The history of Agudath Israel of America is particularly instructive in this regard. Founded in New York in 1939 (after a failed attempt in 1922),⁴⁴ the American chapter was given new life thanks to the arrival of survivors from eastern Europe, who helped build a considerable network of public relations and political lobby groups, sectarian schools and yeshivot, and periodical publications, in Yiddish (*Dos Yidische Vort*, since 1952) and in English (the *Jewish Observer*, since 1963), as well as sponsoring publishing initiatives with (ideologically, if not directly) affiliated publishing houses, the most prominent example of which is, in fact, ArtScroll.

Host societies such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia thus offered the Haredim new opportunities for activism and social mobility and the benefits of a relatively deregulated religious marketplace, allowing for the accumulation of new forms of economic, political, and cultural capital. As evident from the case of Agudath Israel of America and, more broadly, the array of European-styled schools and yeshivot founded by Haredi Jews in the post-World War II period, migra-

tion actually enhanced the capacity of Haredi rabbinic authorities to form organizational structures to which affiliation and degree of commitment could now be determined freely by the individuals involved, and for which distinct rules and directives could be formulated that would be binding upon those committed members alone. No longer encumbered by the exigencies of competition with “moderate” elements of the mandatory consistorial bodies to which European Jews had belonged, the postwar generation of Haredi Orthodox elites were able to reposition themselves as an institutionally and intellectually autonomous vanguard, claiming to represent the exclusive, uncorrupted, and authentic version of Jewish identity and practice, both in Israel and in the English-speaking Jewish diaspora.⁴⁵

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the Haredim were largely preoccupied with the establishment of their own neighborhoods, schools, synagogues, and communal institutions. These activities were undertaken in the face of considerable opprobrium heaped upon Haredi rabbis, ostensibly for having contributed to the casualty count because they had been known for discouraging Jews within their communities from supporting the Zionist project or from migrating out of Europe, or for otherwise failing to actively resist the Nazi onslaught.⁴⁶ Haredi society also labored under the shadow of (retrospectively hasty) predictions that the Haredi way of life was simply too ill equipped to offer a viable means of Jewish survival in the postwar global order. In the English-speaking world in particular, the combined forces of suburbanization, upward economic mobility, and a growing confidence that Jews could enjoy a secure place within the hospitable conditions of legally sanctioned religious pluralism and state-sponsored multiculturalism gave little impetus to the legitimacy of Haredi cultural practices and sources of rabbinic authority in the wider circuits of public life.⁴⁷ By contrast, modern Orthodoxy, committed to what Samuel Heilman has called a strategy of “contrapuntal accommodation,” seemed far more adept at negotiating between the imperatives of maintaining Jewish tradition and of securing economic, cultural, and political success.⁴⁸ However, by the late 1960s it had become clear that the Haredim were defying the odds placed against them. They had not only survived but matured into a well-organized bloc, increasingly willing and able to exercise influence in the institutional and cultural domains that lay beyond their communal boundaries, and thereby enjoying an increasingly disproportional impact on the course of public life, not least in the English-speaking Jewish diaspora.⁴⁹

To conclude, the contemporary Haredi enclave is often described as a society of scholars, centered on the yeshiva and its rabbinic leadership and populated by male students and their families, whose lives are organized according to the religious ideal of full-time, lifelong Talmud study. At the same time, this kernel of yeshiva culture is inseparable from a larger, capillary architecture that surrounds the Haredi enclave and defines its various portals of access to the outside world. In fact, through the development of mobile affinity networks, and through the increasingly routine activities of outward-oriented agents, the contemporary Haredi community finds itself in intimate rapport with the economic, political, and communicational contexts of “semi-” and “non-Haredi” Jewish public culture and with the even larger arrangements of territorial nation-states and transnational flows that shape the contemporary global order. One important arena of exchange is defined by the steady pressure placed upon the yeshiva to secure the financial means for its continued existence. In both Israel and the diaspora, Haredi communities struggle to meet such needs through participation in narrowly circumscribed occupational niches so as to minimize contact with the outside, “secular” world) and through a gendered hierarchy of labor, according to which women are considered “freer” to seek paid employment, since, unlike men, they have not been mandated to study Talmud.⁵⁰ At an institutional level, yeshivot themselves are relentlessly driven to attract investment from philanthropists and government agencies or through grassroots fundraising. These pressures have only increased in recent years, commensurate with an exploding population of yeshiva students, giving rise in the Haredi community to conditions of growing economic precariousness and, in the worst of circumstances, to a pervasive discourse of fatalism and a new premium placed on the heroism of poverty.⁵¹

An equally powerful dynamic shaping the relationship between the yeshiva-centered Haredi community and the larger public sphere comes with the growing sense among Haredim that their survival, let alone their success, is tied to their ability to establish a foothold within non-Haredi fields of culture and politics. So, for instance, one can trace a growing preoccupation among Haredi intellectuals with “nonobservant,” “lapsed,” or “assimilated” Jews, sometimes referred to in Orthodox parlance as *tinokos shenishbu* (children raised in [gentile] captivity). Since the late 1960s, the religious mandate to rescue such “lost souls” has been articulated through a movement known as *kiruv r’hokim* (lit., “bringing clos[er] those who are far”).⁵² This *kiruv* movement is dedicated to bringing into the Haredi fold nonaffiliated or marginally affiliated Jews by inducing them to become

ba'alei teshuva (masters of return or repentance), that is, Jews who will voluntarily affiliate with the Haredi community, its precepts, its discourses, and its cultural practices.⁵³ Although their numbers are statistically minute, *ba'alei teshuva* play a crucial symbolic role within the Haredi community itself, namely to produce consensus among Haredi interlocutors that “victory is on their side.”⁵⁴ On these terms, successful converts are paraded as the spoils of a war against secularism and assimilation, and the language of rescue and reclamation serves to legitimate increasingly intensive missionary efforts launched into the non-Haredi world. *Kiruv* activists perform such work by orchestrating a variety of encounters with non-Haredi Jews through such diverse offerings as Hebrew lessons, public lectures, impromptu invitations to Shabbat dinners in Haredi homes, crash courses in Jewish history, and even revival meetings in sports arenas. Not surprisingly, *kiruv* efforts have also been manifested through channels of mediated communication, such as radio shows, circulating audiocassettes, the Internet, and, of course, the distribution of print matter, including editions of key liturgical works designed especially for the novice reader (an arena of publishing in which ArtScroll has in fact played a pioneering role, as we shall see in future chapters).

Alongside the aforementioned army of teachers, pulpit rabbis, and other outward-oriented emissaries of Haredi society, it is therefore crucial to note the role played by institutions such as ArtScroll. Acting as both conduits and filters, such mediating agents perform the work of connecting insiders and outsiders, and in so doing they redefine the very distinctions between inside and outside. And, given the high value Jewish culture has placed on the written word, publishing houses merit special attention. They are synecdoches of Haredism’s expanded presence in Jewish public life, evincing the double logic of authority and accessibility that drives this expansion.

THE SCRIPTURAL ECONOMY: THE YESHIVA WORLD
AND THE BOOK TRADITION

The making of many books is without limit, and much study is weariness of the flesh.

ECCLESIASTES (12:12)

As I have suggested, Haredi Orthodox Judaism can be characterized by its emphasis on scholastic and legalistic approaches to Jewish textual sources

and by its overarching effort to organize, specify, and extend knowledge about legitimate conduct and about the true workings of the social, natural, and cosmic order, as derived from sacred books. This form of religious “scripturalism” is radical and uncompromising in its promotion of continuous, intensive engagement with canonical Jewish literature and in its stringent application in all arenas of life. In Clifford Geertz’s classic formulation, based on his comparative study of Islamic modernization in Morocco and Indonesia during the late 1960s, the rise of scripturalism involves a shift in the sources of intellectual and religious authority from the guardians of custom to an elite of textual experts, who have taken it upon themselves to distill the infinite varieties of local knowledge and everyday conduct into an explicit, rationally ordered system of knowledge and codified behavior.⁵⁵ In the case of Haredism, one can identify a comparable shift whereby a new scholarly elite has been empowered to exercise authority through its proclaimed monopoly over the true meaning of Jewish texts and through its assertion that these texts must take precedence over all other sources of religious authenticity.

Among other things, this scripturalism has fueled what one might call a “Judaicization” of knowledge, that is, an attempt to impose “Torah-true” standards of verification upon all knowledge claims, religious and scientific, past and present, speculative and practical. This epistemological stance is vividly illustrated in a recent ArtScroll publication, *Our Wondrous World: Wonders Hidden below the Surface*, by Rabbi Avrohom Katz. “The more one studies Torah, the stronger the conviction that the vast, infinite, interconnected edifice that Torah comprises is the work of an Infinite Intelligence,” Katz proclaims at the outset of his discussion, which consists of a series of short essays on the miraculous designs of hydraulic machines, birds’ beaks, and human hands and on the divine genius standing behind processes of photosynthesis, cellular mitosis, and the engineering of petroleum-based consumer goods.⁵⁶ Such knowledge about the structure of the entire universe is based upon a scripturalist assertion that the Jewish canon is itself unquestionably self-authorizing, inerrant, internally consistent, and comprehensive. As succinctly formulated by Rabbi Mordechai Gifter (1915–2001), head of the Telz Yeshiva in Cleveland, Ohio, and a foremost Haredi authority of the post-World War II period, “God’s Torah may be explained only in light of Torah.”⁵⁷ This repudiation of “non-Jewish” sources of authoritative knowledge can also be characterized as one of the founding motives of the ArtScroll press. As Rabbi Zlotowitz argued, in his preface to *The Megillah: The Book of Esther*, the very first ArtScroll publication:

It must be made clear that this is not a so-called “scientific” or “apologetic” commentary on the Megillah [The Book of Esther]. That area has, unfortunately, been too well-covered, resulting in violence to the Jewish faith as well as to correct interpretation. It is in no way the intention of this book to demonstrate the legitimacy or historicity of Esther or Mordechai to non-believers or doubters. *Belief in the authenticity of every book of the Torah is basic to Jewish faith, and we proceed from there.* It comes as no surprise to me—nor should it to any Orthodox Jew—that the palace of Shushan, as unearthed by archaeologists, bears out the description of the palace in the Megillah in every detail; nor do we deem it necessary to prove, by means of “Persian borrow-words,” nor by whatever means, that the Book was, indeed, written in that contemporary period. Rather, the aim was a traditional commentary reflecting the Megillah as understood by Chazal [the ancient sages]. No non-Jewish sources have been consulted, much less quoted. *I consider it offensive that the Torah should need authentication from the secular or so-called “scientific” sources.*⁵⁸

As Rabbi Zlotowitz’s text makes clear, *scripturalism* refers not only to the unchallengeable authority of sacred Jewish texts as sources of knowledge but also to the ways Haredi knowledge seekers have accorded a commensurate form of authority to their teachers, the most trusted readers of those texts. In fact, the master-disciple relationship cultivated in the yeshiva provides a model for the spread of what in Haredi circles is known as *da’at Torah* (knowledge of Torah): a specifically charismatic source of religious, intellectual, and legal authority that permeates the Haredi enclave. Having been trained in the traditions of the yeshiva, and having proven themselves as masters of textual exegesis, leading teachers and scholars of the Haredi world are seen to possess esoteric knowledge that authorizes them to issue *ex cathedra* pronouncements in the realm of halakhah and in all other matters of everyday conduct, “their sole authority being their position as rabbis immersed in the study of Torah.”⁵⁹ They are known as the *gedolim*: the great Torah sages of the yeshiva world, who stand at the pinnacle of an army of students, cultural brokers, and other agents responsible for mediating their *da’at Torah* through the production, promotion, distribution, explication, translation, vulgarization, application, and defense of Haredi interpretations of Jewish sacred texts.

We shall have occasion later to consider more carefully the tacit assumption that scripturalism is typically a product of great social upheaval: a response to the lived experience of such things as wars, political revolutions, colonial conquests, or the industrialization of rural economies, or, in

the case under consideration here, a product of the destruction wreaked by the Nazi Holocaust and the transplantation of survivors to a new location in the Jewish diaspora. Future chapters will also shed light on the communicational, technological, and institutional conditions, and the lived experiences, that shape this apparent “victory of the academy over the laity.”⁶⁰ Among other things, I shall devote particular attention to the contexts of reception, where this laity is imagined, constituted, and daily reproduced as a reading public through the work of negotiation among authors, readers, and intermediary agents, such as teachers, booksellers, librarians, pulpit rabbis, and, not least, the material agency of the books themselves. In the remainder of this chapter, I wish to clarify the conditions under which this scripturalist social logic has come into being.

To understand the rise of scripturalism within Orthodox Judaism and, more broadly, within the transnational Jewish public sphere, one might begin by tracing the institutional development of the modern Haredi yeshiva. Its prototype is found in the yeshivot of nineteenth-century eastern Europe, most famously the model academy founded by Reb Chaim of Volozhin (Lithuania) in 1802.⁶¹ The Volozhin yeshiva was revolutionary in its efforts to accumulate knowledge based on the intensive study of canonical Jewish texts, to accord such study the highest possible religious significance, and, on these terms, to precipitate a dramatic transformation in the aim and purpose of Jewish education.⁶² For much of Jewish history, Jewish education and scholarly pursuits took place in local houses of study that catered to the needs of the immediate environment, producing a lay population and its religious and intellectual leadership on a local scale.⁶³ The traditional institution of the *heder* (primary school) aimed principally at integrating students into the life of the synagogue and the community, providing familiarity with the basic elements of religious obligation and conformity with communal law.⁶⁴ By contrast, the Volozhin yeshiva drew in students, teachers, and financial support from widely dispersed sources, yet was directly responsible to none of them. It housed a relatively autonomous coterie of male students and scholars, insulated from the everyday material world, whose loyalties lay, not with neighbors, parents, or the local rabbinate, but rather with the yeshiva itself and its hierarchy of teachers and learned sages.⁶⁵

As a center for cultivating the uninterrupted, unending work of *Talmud Torah lishma* (the study of Torah for its own sake), the yeshiva provided an infrastructure for the production of what Menachem Friedman has described as “a tempered elite which saw its aim and purpose in absolute—‘heroic’—dedication to the ideal of Torah study as expressing Judaism in its

fullness, and to the yeshiva as the core from which Jewish existence would draw sustenance.”⁶⁶ Having arrogated onto themselves the responsibility to define all matters of legitimate conduct, yeshiva teachers proclaimed they were simply upholding historically sanctioned approaches to the Jewish canon. In practice, this often entailed identifying what they regarded as Jewishly inauthentic, inadequate, or corrupt: not least, the customs, rituals, and standards of observance of Jewish law as practiced in the communities from which students originated.⁶⁷ By subjecting local custom to systematic critique, Haredi rabbinic elites at the same time elevated the political and even the cosmic significance of everyday behavior. Even the most mundane acts could now be defined as potential expressions of loyalty to the authority of the yeshiva and commitment to its ongoing struggle to remain “Torah-true.”

Over the course of the nineteenth century, Volozhin provided a model for the spread of yeshivot in Lithuania and thence across much of eastern Europe.⁶⁸ After World War II, the surviving members of these yeshivot were transplanted to new contexts in Israel and in the English-speaking diaspora, where they established new academies, often named after those institutions that had been destroyed in the war.⁶⁹ One striking trend that developed in the aftermath of this transplantation was the rapid growth in number and size of yeshivot: in part a product of the high fertility rate among the Haredim, but also a reflection of the changing function of the yeshiva within these reconstituted communities of “Torah-true” Jews. Whereas in times past the yeshiva had been considered the purview of only a small, scholarly elite, after World War II it became a mechanism for broad social inclusion, designed to accommodate the expressed desire of Haredi leaders that *all* boys should dedicate their lives to studying Talmud in yeshiva, moving from the *yeshiva ketana* (the “little *yeshiva*,” i.e., primary school), to the *mesivta* (secondary school), to the *kollel* (the yeshiva for adult men). A parallel development in Jewish education for girls and women saw the rapid growth of institutions devoted to the rudiments of religious life and observance of Jewish law, on the argument that modern Haredi women could not be trusted to have received adequate instruction from parents or other informal sources. In both Israel and the diaspora, this included institutions such as Bais Yaakov (a.k.a. Beth Jacob), a federation of primary and secondary schools for Haredi girls closely affiliated with Agudat Israel, as well as *midrashot* (seminaries for adult women’s education in Torah), and women’s study circles and other types of part-time instruction sponsored by local synagogues and community institutions.⁷⁰

An unsurprising consequence of this ever-expanding circle of students devoted to the study of sacred literature was a new premium placed on the written text. For yeshiva students, their families, and growing numbers of Jews within and beyond the Haredi community, Jewish books increasingly came to be seen as guarantors of instruction and as sources and touchstones of all forms of religious authenticity. In an influential study of contemporary Orthodox Judaism, Haym Soloveitchik has described this transformation in terms of a larger shift from “mimetic” to “textual” modes of pedagogy. Knowledge and patterns of practice acquired from parents, friends, or neighbors—and even from local rabbis—by imitation and through habituated practice has been supplanted by knowledge codified in texts, particularly texts produced by and for the yeshiva world. Such texts epitomize and dynamically shape the Haredi community’s “tireless quest for absolute accuracy . . . [and for] faultless congruence between conception and performance,” as evident in the efforts of Haredi scholars to systematically organize and fix in written form the entire range of mandatory, acceptable, and forbidden forms of Jewish behavior, including the routine practices of eating, dressing, working, and praying.⁷¹

In the case of the contemporary English-language Jewish diaspora, ArtScroll can be singled out as perhaps the most important purveyor of such works, although it is by no means the only publisher devoted to this literary output (other significant publishers in this field are Feldheim, Kehot, and Targum Press, not to mention the publishers in Israel whose Yiddish- and Hebrew-language works are exported abroad). In fact, ArtScroll has published dozens of texts that impart an understanding of the minutiae of Jewish law and legitimate conduct from a Haredi perspective. These include the press’s popular “Halachah” series, featuring works that outline such things as the proper observance of the Sabbath and other Jewish festivals; the rules and procedures for keeping a kosher home; the proper care of religious articles; monetary issues, such as the regulations concerning accumulating interest or charitable giving; and summations of the laws of *niddah* (women’s menstruation). Other ArtScroll texts offer advice to spouses, parents, adult children who must care for aging parents, and those experiencing bereavement or depression, along with many other guides to daily living. Such texts exemplify the way Haredism has developed as a mode of conceiving and performing all aspects of Jewish life “by the book,” the contents of which are derived from and authorized by the scholarly elite of the yeshiva world.⁷²

Of course, ArtScroll is not the first publisher to produce code books, and contemporary Haredi communities are not the first to make use of them.

Written works designed to distill the basic principles of Jewish law and to codify legitimate conduct have a long history in the Jewish tradition, most famously, perhaps, in the examples of Maimonides' twelfth-century *Mishneh Torah* or Rabbi Yosef Karo's sixteenth-century *Shulhan Arukh*, both of which became staples in the Jewish canon and still today are considered authoritative among both Haredi and non-Haredi Orthodox Jews. But as Soloveitchik argues, for much of history Jewish "custom was a correlative datum of the *halakhic* system [and] on frequent occasions, the written word was reread in the light of traditional behavior."⁷³ In support of the legitimacy of family routine and local custom, rabbinic authorities made frequent use of a Talmudic principle of legal reasoning that standards of acceptable behavior could be determined by going to "see what the people are doing."⁷⁴ In the contemporary situation, however, this relationship between the text and everyday experience has been reversed. Legitimate conduct is no longer measured against "what the people are doing" but only against increasingly rigid and stringent interpretations of textual codes. This posture of indifference (if not outright disdain) toward unreflectively received patterns of behavior is perhaps unsurprising in the light of Haredi society's experiences of displacement, the interruption of personal memories and familial traditions, and the proliferation of risks presented by the widening cultural opportunities and choices available in the new diaspora contexts. For yeshiva enclaves that had been transplanted and newly constituted in the aftermath of war, and faced threats from a larger culture of moral relativism, hedonism, and secular individualism, "the book took the place of the community, which had been left behind."⁷⁵

We should add that what is unique about this form of text-centrism is not the Haredi community's sense of dislocation and precariousness, since, after all, Jewish history has been shaped by millennia of upheavals and migrations. Rather, the institutional and material conditions for the production and dissemination of text-based knowledge are what makes the contemporary situation so peculiar. One side of this story, we have already seen, can be traced through rising rates of literacy and textual competence among diverse Jewish constituencies, thanks in part to the spread and influence of educational institutions such as the yeshiva. The growth of Haredi yeshivot has in fact precipitated an increased likelihood that knowledge-seeking Jews will come into contact with Haredi interpretive approaches via the circulation of their texts and also through the diffusion of Haredi-trained teachers into non-Haredi institutional domains. Yet an equally important dimension of the rise of Haredi-based text-centrism is

rooted in technological and material changes in the very modes of textual production and circulation, particularly with regard to print commodities and their reading publics. In fact, the past century, especially the post-World War II period, has seen a dramatic growth in the production and distribution of printed manuals, practical guides, and instructional handbooks explicating observance of religious codes, aimed explicitly at a lay audience.⁷⁶ Rising rates of production have not only extended such texts to new classes of readers but also precipitated new techniques, temporalities, and locations of reading, from houses of study and worship, to the domestic sphere, and even onto the human body in motion, such as through the creation of portable editions of code books that can be incorporated into “the ‘worship gear’ the devout carry with them as part of their prayer routines, to be read in the interstices of liturgy.”⁷⁷

Code books represent only one part of an even larger—and steadily growing—terrain of Orthodox Jewish book culture, encompassing diverse literary genres, fields of production, systems of circulation, and reading publics located both within and outside the Haredi enclave. The ArtScroll booklist, which currently boasts over one thousand titles in print, provides an ample illustration of this diversity. It includes the key sacred texts for which ArtScroll is best known, such as their prayer books, Bibles, rabbinic commentaries, and of course, the *Schottenstein Talmud*, each of which is available in a range of formats. But also included on the ArtScroll list are numerous encyclopedias, reference books, historical monographs, biographies, children’s stories, cookbooks, adventure novels, self-help and pop psychology books, popular science books, and works of “ethical inspiration.” As we shall see in greater detail in Chapter 2—where I shall paint a more detailed picture of the literary field of production and the public culture in which ArtScroll books are located—ArtScroll’s embrace of this generic diversity throws into sharp relief the larger operative principles upon which Haredi intellectual and religious authorities must depend in their effort to infuse the entire universe with their Torah-true knowledge and to communicate this fullness to an indeterminate, mediated audience of insiders and outsiders.

Haredi scripturalism must therefore be viewed as more than simply a product of shifting attitudes toward the written word. It is also an effect of the expanding production and reach of the books themselves. As we have seen, in centuries past, the proportion of members of the Jewish community devoted to intensive textual study was greatly restricted. So too was their access to texts tightly circumscribed by such material factors as the

high cost of paper and the limited technological capacities for reproducing, distributing, and preserving books. For much of the history of diaspora Jewry, local elites were able to study, interpret, and apply the Jewish canon only on the basis of what was available to them locally. Typically, this consisted of a limited library collection, supported by wealthy patrons of the community and augmented by the occasional arrival of new books transported by merchants and itinerant students or by other textual matter that circulated through available epistolary networks and postal systems.⁷⁸ Without the benefit of a mass print industry, the spread of Jewish books was thus arduous, fragmentary, and highly selective.⁷⁹ Starting in the nineteenth century, however, with the introduction of mass-reproduction print technologies, Jewish readers were afforded access to increasingly extensive bodies of material that would have been unknown or at best vaguely familiar—but in any event largely inaccessible—to previous generations of readers.⁸⁰ By the post-World War II period, the industrialization of book production had reached such a level that Orthodox publishing houses could begin to make their names by anthologizing, redacting, and widely distributing Talmud commentaries and other rabbinic literatures. It has in fact been one of the principal aims of ArtScroll to make available a vast range of Jewish religious texts—from the very familiar to the very rare—enabling local institutions, families, and even individuals to have direct possession of a library, the contents of which could rival, and even surpass, any of the great historic libraries of Jewish centers of learning.

In this expanding field of production and circulation, it has become possible for readers to gain access to texts that hitherto were available only in archives, university libraries, or private collections, thereby “reclaiming much that has been forgotten in both the Sephardi and Ashkenazic Talmudic heritages.”⁸¹ Such reclamations have led, quite literally, to a reconstruction of the Jewish canon itself. By forging new modes of connection between the present and the past, they have made “forgotten” or “lost” Jewish texts readily available to contemporary readers (a process that has been even more dramatically accelerated since the rise of computer-based technologies for digitizing texts and making them available on searchable electronic databases), thereby opening up a “universe of Talmudic commentaries to those who are unable to devote a lifetime to visiting libraries and examining manuscripts around the world.”⁸² This combination of comprehensive breadth and ease of access has defined the emergent conditions of possibility for the circulation of knowledge and the exercise of religious authority. Specifically, it demarcates the ways Haredi forms of

authority can be felt beyond the direct presence of rabbis, teachers, and other visible agents, by being sedimented into the structured activities of collecting, preserving, and reading Jewish books. As Heilman astutely observes, “The current book-oriented generation, inundated by and possessing more and more texts—both virtual and printed—has a far more direct encounter with these books. Surrounded by them in their homes and their synagogues and even on their computers, so proud of their competence in them, which is enhanced by the translations and new access points, this new book-oriented class of Orthodox Jews is not likely to mount a revolt against their own libraries.”⁸³

FROM ENCLAVE TO PUBLIC CULTURE

We must ask ourselves how many neshomos [souls] have we lost because we have refused to use more effectively the weapons that have been used against us. Just as in modern war, rifles are not an adequate defense against aircraft, so too must we arm ourselves with the same weapons used by the enemy.

ALEXANDER ZUSHA FRIEDMAN

“The Fundamentals of Agudath Israel”

As we have seen, the yeshiva provides the key institutional setting for the propagation of Haredi religious authority, concentrated in the hands of its cadre of elite Talmud sages, the *gedolim*. By virtue of their occupation as disinterested scholars, working in a restricted field of intellectual production, the *gedolim* are accorded the greatest respect, and their word carries the greatest authority as the purest possible distillation of the meaning of Jewish sacred texts. In the words of the Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, 1838–1933), the Polish *rosh yeshiva* and one of the most important founding figures of Agudat Israel and of the Haredi movement as a whole, “The person whose view [*da’ato*] is the view of the Torah [*da’at Torah*] can solve all worldly problems, both specific and general. However, there is one condition attached. The *Daas Torah* [*da’at Torah*] must be pure, without any interest or bias. However, if there is a person who possesses *Daas Torah* but it is intermingled even slightly with other views from the marketplace or from the newspapers, then this *Daas Torah* is turbid, intermingled with dregs. Such a person cannot penetrate into the heart of the matter.”⁸⁴ However, to communicate this putatively pure and disinterested knowledge, Haredi intellectuals must avail themselves of the existing

terms of social address. To have influence, their words must be able to forge sustainable bonds with diffusely located students, followers, interested lay audiences, and even intellectual and religious competitors. This constraint is symptomatic of the structure and character of all modern fields of politics and culture, where the industries, technologies, and symbolic economies of mediated communication delineate the horizons of action in which “the masses” are made to appear. The very possibility of having influence is tied to the performative principles of becoming visible and of reaching out to others and winning their assent within a cacophonous arena of competing voices and images and within generalized conditions of spectacle, distraction, and of readily dissolving attentions.⁸⁵ This is the public culture within which Haredi scholars and intellectual producers must labor to attract and retain a following and to legitimate their intellectual, religious, and cultural authority.

The strategic importance of being able to control the resources of mediated communication has been acknowledged within Haredi circles for some time. As succinctly stated by one contributor to an early edition of the *Jewish Observer* (the English-language journal of Agudath Israel of America), “The ability . . . to master the new media has become the key to success—or failure—to win the allegiance of the masses. . . . Jewish leadership is in the hands of those who can best make use of the new techniques of communication.”⁸⁶ The mastery to which this author refers depends, in the first instance, on the success of Haredi Jews to redefine the terms by which they have been represented in the larger public sphere. Through polemical modes of address, Haredim seek to rescue Orthodoxy from the obloquy heaped upon it by its detractors. So, for instance, Rabbi Avi Shafran, public affairs director for Agudath Israel of America, calls upon his fellow Haredim to “utilize the Anglo-Jewish press—through carefully written letters to editors and articles—to reach the non-Orthodox laity and counter what their leaders are telling them and to present Torah-perspectives clearly and properly. . . . The larger Jewish world needs to hear our voices.”⁸⁷ Through such forays into the public sphere, Haredi intellectuals have proven themselves equally aware of the ideolects, styles, and modes of address that are necessary for competent participation in modern media fields. This is colorfully illustrated in an anecdote recounted by Rabbi Nis-son Wolpin, a former editor-in-chief of the *Jewish Observer*:

When I was new at the desk of *The Jewish Observer*, I had the privilege of driving one of our leading *Roshei Yeshiva* home from a meeting of the

Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah [the supreme governing body of Agudat Israel]. At the session, the members had deliberated over a very sensitive topic, and during the ride home, I asked my esteemed passenger how I should treat the subject in the pages of the magazine. He replied: "It's important that your message be read, and that it be fully and clearly understood. Use the methods of advertisers. Copy advertising style: short articles, short paragraphs, words that are not too difficult." At first, I was taken aback. It struck me that the *Rosh Yeshiva*, celebrated for his intellectual genius and poetic gift of expression, was talking down to me. After some thought, however, I realized the justice of his counsel. Advertisers constantly check themselves as to whether their message is reaching the people. If they buy, then the message is being read and understood. If not, it's back to the drawing board. No other area of writing is exposed to such constant testing and evaluation.⁸⁸

To "reach the people," Rabbi Wolpin warns, authoritative proclamations must speak a language the people can readily understand, whether this be advertising or some other mode of popular address. Such an attitude stands on the shoulders of a more incremental, historical shift away from what might be construed as the more "traditional" attitudes toward mediated communication, and in particular the participation of Jews in larger fields of print-mediated publicity. Indeed, for much of the history of print, Jewish rabbinic elites stood Janus-faced, from one perspective lauding the promises of this technology to facilitate the production and dissemination of sacred works, and from the other bemoaning the ways print increased the opportunities for contact with a hostile world of "foreign ideas," threatened to undo the "customary" structures of communal, religious, and intellectual authority.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, despite the ambivalence of rabbinic authorities, it is possible to trace a steady and growing involvement of Orthodox Jewish intellectuals in print-mediated arenas of public culture, as reflected, for instance, in the initiatives to publish popular manuals, ethical works, biographies, and other printed works starting in the late eighteenth century. By the early twentieth century, sectors of the Orthodox intelligentsia were devoted to the production of a series of flourishing daily presses aimed at large sectors of the Orthodox population.⁹⁰ And by the post-World War II period, Orthodox involvements in the daily press, in periodical publications, and in book publishing had increased exponentially, especially in Israel and the United States, the two most important sites of production for Orthodox literature. This growth in production is directly related to the consolidation of an expanding, transnation-

ally situated constituency of Orthodox Jewish consumers, able to express demand, not only for canonical texts, but also for newspapers, journals, and other forms of popular literature, such as history, fiction, popular psychology, and children's books.⁹¹ In all these ways, a growing premium on accessibility—of “reaching the people,” as Rabbi Wolpin puts it—has shaped the ways modern Orthodox intellectuals and religious leaders seek to legitimate and consolidate their authority.

The mission of publishing houses such as ArtScroll cannot be understood without reference to this longer history of privileging the “accessibility” of messages and of engaging both insiders and outsiders on such terms. Indeed, ArtScroll's massive output provides a compelling illustration of how Haredi cultural mediators today must negotiate between their urge to faithfully represent the “true” meaning of Jewish texts, as authorized by the Haredi yeshiva elite, and their need to make such meanings apprehensible among diverse readerships located both within and outside the Haredi world and encompassing a range of competencies and levels of familiarity with canonical Jewish literature, as well as varying degrees of reading ability in the original source languages. At the same time, the contemporary field of literary production imposes upon all Haredi publishing houses the expectation that they will reach their audiences by operating within the constraints of financial viability and reliable market conditions, in part by overtaking competing sources of religious and intellectual authority, embedded in the literatures produced under the auspices of modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and secular Jewish institutions, as well as other academic, university, and trade publishers that cater to the modern Jewish reading public. As we have already seen in this chapter, with the release of the *Schottenstein Talmud* and its public consecration in such venues as libraries, museums, and mass rallies, ArtScroll has proven itself to be highly adept at handling the instruments designed to secure success in the media field. Of course, it is another matter altogether to say whether and how such campaigns to make Haredi messages both authoritative and accessible actually work on the ground, within an arena of competing publishers, literary agents, and authors and within the diverse, local contexts of reception for ArtScroll books. That is the subject of the next chapter.