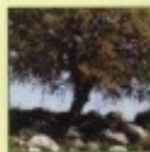


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# THE HARDI COMMUNITY

and  
Environmental  
Quality

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Jerusalem, 2003

**The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies**  
The Center for Environmental Policy

**Research Series No. 8**

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ISSN 033-8681

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The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies  
The Hay Elyachar House  
20 Radak St., Jerusalem 92186

Printed by: Ahva Press, Jerusalem

# *Haredi* Community and Environmental Quality

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## Background

A widespread image about *Haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) neighborhoods is that they are environmentally neglected. Apart from the physical and social characteristics of poverty, the environmental neglect is often perceived as typifying *Haredi* religiosity, as though the ultra-Orthodox have no real interest in aesthetic and landscape values. In contrast, there are new *Haredi* communities and suburbs where cleanliness is maintained and careful attention is paid to green areas and to environmental quality. The question thus arises whether something in the *Haredi* character is responsible for the community's attitude toward the environment, or whether, perhaps, that attitude stems from other factors, such as overdensity and poverty.

In various spheres, the *Haredi* community separates cultural and moral values from instrumental aspects of life. In the moral realm, Torah study and observing its precepts are of supreme importance. Everything else, whether part of the moral or the instrumental sphere, is likely to be of a lower status. The attitude toward environmental quality in *Haredi* religiosity is not clear, and its place in the *Haredi* order of priorities requires examination.

The behavior of the *Haredi* community suggests that in the moral dimension it has severed itself from contemporary Western culture but is ready to take advantage of its instrumental aspects. Thus the *Haredi* society will not recognize "environmental values" as being a moral concept with its own intrinsic value, but will accept arrangements involving environmental preservation for utilitarian reasons. Similarly, at the instrumental level, too, the *Haredi* community is coping with tasks that it considers of existential importance for its continued social and cultural existence—such as housing,

education, and guaranteed income—and these concerns may relegate environmental issues to a lower priority.

### *Goals and questions of the study*

There are thus three main research dimensions: the **theoretical dimension**, which examines whether *Haredi* religiosity has a principled position in regard to environmental concerns; the **practical dimension**, which investigates the current situation of the quality of the environment in *Haredi* areas; and the **operative dimension**, which proposes methods to enhance awareness of the environment within the *Haredi* community.

## **The Theoretical Dimension**

### *Attitude of Jewish law and the Haredi society toward the environment and environmental quality*

It bears emphasizing that the present study seeks to examine whether and to what degree *Haredi* religiosity espouses a principled position vis-à-vis quality of the environment. Here it is necessary to be precise and distinguish between concepts: the attitude toward the **environment** and the attitude toward **environmental quality** are not identical; and, similarly, a distinction must be drawn between the attitude of *Haredi* religiosity toward the environment and the attitude of Judaism toward the environment, as it emerged and was given expression throughout Jewish history in writings, rules, customs, and worldviews.

Countless chapters of the Bible deal with the day-to-day experience of mankind's relationship with the environment. This motif is also discernible in many commandments and distinctly environmental imperatives. The halakhah literature abounds with rules and teachings that relate directly to man's attitude toward the environment.

On the other hand, it is impossible not to be aware of the seemingly negative, or at least disregarding, attitude of the Jewish communities in the Diaspora toward the environment. We are thus confronted with two seemingly contradictory phenomena: **one**, an awesome multidimensional description of natural phenomena, notably the act of creation itself, and

mankind's attitude toward nature in the Jewish sources; the **other**, the fact that in practice the Jews shunned this approach.

There are a number of possible explanations for this internal conflict:

### **1. The absence of a land**

During its lengthy exile, the Jewish people lacked a territory—a land under its control and responsibility. Clearly, a people without a land cannot forge attachment to and a relationship with its current surroundings, as it lacks a psychological bond with them and views them as a temporary domicile while aspiring to its true home elsewhere. In the case of the Jewish people, the desire to return to Zion produced a sense of alienation among the Jewish communities in the Diaspora, and people tend not to look after surroundings in which they feel out of place. It was the gentiles, who ran the local government, who were responsible for the immediate environment beyond the domain of the individual, in terms of legislative and behavioral arrangements.

### **2. Exclusive focus on the world of the halakhah**

Another explanation for this disparity derives from the roots of the worldview of halakhic Jewry and the “world of Torah” that evolved from it over hundreds of years, becoming today's world of *Haredi* Judaism.

Since the destruction of the Temple, the world of Judaism has considered itself to exist “solely within the confines of the halakhah” and has devoted itself completely to Torah study and upholding the commandments. This is a world of abstract thought, which disdains the petty cares and vanities of this world—indeed, disdains whatever is not connected to or does not further Torah study. Hence the unconcern and reservation about the material dimension, which does not further the supreme cause of Torah and its precepts. Even with regard to livelihood there is a dialectical, multifaceted approach, with the prevailing trend in recent decades being to turn away from the existential, from the tribulations of earning a living, in favor of reliance on the public sphere. Even when the world of Torah addresses the world outside and the subject of economic subsistence, it views them as instruments to achieve the true goal: Torah and commandments.

### 3. Urbanism

The roots of today's *Haredi* society lie in the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe, which flourished in a distinctly urban environment. The religious centers, the yeshivas, the Hasidic courts, and the community's milieu, especially the Jewish creative force, were concentrated in the cities and towns. This does not mean we should ignore the Jewish communities in the villages and small towns, but the general way of life and worldview were fashioned in the urban environment. This unequivocal attachment between the life of the community and its surroundings constitutes another element in understanding the *Haredi* community's attitude toward its surroundings. As a distinctly urban society, the *Haredi* community was effectively cut off from values of nature, landscape, and environment. In this it was no different from other urban communities or from the experience of urban life and cityscapes in Europe. Many European cityscapes are devoid of greenery. They are dense and crowded; the buildings, both public and residential, abut one another; and gardens, parks, and other green areas are fenced off. This is particularly so in old cities and in their core, from which they originated and evolved (examples are Paris, Prague, Amsterdam, and Manhattan, among many others). The *Haredi* society, whose patterns of development were set in an urban milieu, has followed the same pattern in Israel, pursuing the same way of life and creating the identical forms of community structure to which it was accustomed in Europe.

### 4. Conservatism

On a scale between conservatism and liberal openness, the *Haredi* community is definitely located on the conservative side, right of center. *Haredi* voting patterns, political leanings, and identification lean sharply toward the right. This phenomenon corresponds with the approach of religious societies in other countries, which also tend to be politically right-wing and conservative. In other words, an examination of the *Haredi* society's attitude toward the environment will necessitate additional tools and a broader viewpoint in the context of its general worldview.

Observing the attitude of different societies to environmental issues, we find that support for environmental protection is usually identified with open,



liberal, left-wing views. In contrast, the *Haredi* society shows right-wing, conservative tendencies, accompanied by insularity and separatism. In any country, such a community will display little affinity for environmental subjects that are of a distinctly “leftist” character, even though they are depicted as universal.

***Man and the environment: On the question of mankind's disposition in the universe***

The approach to the question of whether mankind is the center of creation ranges from the anthropocentric view, according to which mankind is the be-all and end-all, and everything else—including nature and the environment—is subordinate; to naturocentric conceptions, according to which nature is an entity in its own right and has a moral dimension equal to that of mankind. Indeed, an extreme naturocentric approach holds that nature is nobler than mankind. In this view, it is nature that is the ultimate purpose, while mankind is merely its tool and servant, with the duty to preserve and cultivate nature. This approach maintains that the right of existence of a natural environment—forest, lake, or boulder—is inherent and not dependent on mankind: Nature is not an instrument to fulfill people's needs.

This ostensibly extreme point of view has no place in the Jewish conception. It turns out, however, even within the framework of the “classic” Jewish viewpoint we find an approach that seems to be naturocentric.

Still, there is a fundamental difference between the tension that prevails between the anthropocentric and naturocentric approaches as they exist in the secular, humanistic conception, and the seeming tension within the framework of the Jewish point of view. Even if we take the approach that “all other things are a goal unto themselves,” the purpose of this divine revelation to man, as expressed in the midrashic literature and in the Book of Job, is not to instruct man “to preserve nature”; it is, rather, to put him in his place and teach him nullity, modesty, humility and abnegation vis-à-vis God.

Even if the *Haredi* public takes a purely instrumental attitude toward the environment, this can be seen as a basis for practical cooperation between the *Haredi* community and the general urban population. However different the



normative moral attitude toward the physical world is within different groups, the practical and ecological implications of environmental hazards apply to the entire urban area and affect the entire the population, irrespective of opinions and beliefs. The high intensity of land usage in the city and the proximity of residential neighborhoods can create common environmental interests, even if they do not derive from common values.

### *The environment and the sacred space*

Theoretically, we should expect to find geographical differences in the attitude of the *Haredi* population toward the environment in different places, the main disparity being between the Land of Israel and the Diaspora communities. The Land of Israel, in the well-known words of the Mishnah, is “the most sacred of all lands” and mandates rules of behavior that set it apart from all other places. So complex are these rules—“precepts dependent on the Land”—that some Haredim do not immigrate to Israel for fear of failing in one of the commandments. Are the special behavioral demands or the special attitude relating to the Land of Israel meant to include also a special approach to its environmental quality? Even a brief discussion of this question requires that we consider the implications of concepts such as the “holiness of the Land” and the Jewish people’s attachment to the Land of Israel.

The aspiration to religious completeness is the aspiration to fulfill properly the precepts that a Jew has the duty to observe. As many of these precepts are “dependent on the Land,” they are observed only in the Land of Israel and nowhere else. It follows that the aspiration to religious completeness is also an aspiration for the Land of Israel, as there is no completeness of the precepts outside the Land. Thus the decision of extreme Haredim not to settle in the Land of Israel—precisely because of the commandments that are “dependent on the Land”—constitutes a form of reversal of the original status of those precepts. Does this have implications for the concept of the environment and its status in *Haredi* eyes?

The destruction of the Temple, the exile, and the devastation of the Jewish community in the Land of Israel snapped the continuity of observance of the commandments that are dependent on the Land, and thereby effectively deprived the Land of the expressions of its holiness. The religious leadership

in the Diaspora faced an extremely difficult task. On the one hand, it was urgent to rehabilitate the community and religious life of the exiled people and not allow it to fall into the delusion that the return to the Land of Israel was imminent; while on the other hand, it was necessary to preserve the attachment to the Land, even in the remote lands of the exile. The disjunction between love of the Land and religious attachment to it, and the rehabilitation and cultivation of the community's religious life in exile was liable to produce a viewpoint that could wrench the Land of Israel—emptied of the commandments dependent upon it—from concrete “territorial life” and shift the epicenter of the attitude toward the Land to the level of a religious idea, even as territorial alternatives were being created at the level of reality. Environmental sensitivity could vanish between these two poles.

It is not necessarily the canonical literature that is crucial in a discussion of the *Haredi* community's attitude toward quality of the environment. We should look, rather, to the relevant current instructions for day-to-day life in the space where the community conducts its life. *Haredim* are taught that regard for place and surroundings are a function of their content: the quality of the space is determined by its content. The secular settlement project in the Land of Israel is perceived as a negative factor. Settling in the Land as such is insufficient to atone for secularism. The sacred *Haredi* space is pitted against the secular space. Manifestly, this does not refer to some abstract sanctity that has a magical effect on its surroundings, but to a reality of personalities, institutions, and rules of behavior that together shape the character of the space.

### *Aesthetic and instrumental dimensions of environmental protection and preservation*

On the face of it, there should be no connection between the extreme advocates of the environment (fundamental environmentalists, greens, and their other epithets) and neighborhood cleanliness and environmental quality in Me'ah She'arim or Bnei Brak. The former are engaged in the rite of nature preservation—protecting natural landscapes and restricting human activity in them—while the latter's interest lies in the quality of urban life in a space of intensive human activity. However, human consciousness does not make this

distinction; it links different environmental causes, and as we shall see later, the recoil in the face of fundamental environmentalism extends also to other environmental matters.

The halakhic literature contains passages dealing with the beauty of the urban space and distinguishing between its instrumental and aesthetic meanings. The instrumental meanings apply wherever Jews live, as they relate to the rights of the neighbors and the tenants in the land assets; whereas the moral-aesthetic meanings become valid only in the Land of Israel, for whose beauty its Jewish owners are responsible. It would appear, then, that the exile is to blame for the relative absence of environmental awareness among religiously observant Jews.

At the same time, there is a prevailing view that nature and the environment are not values per se and that there is an unequal relationship between the value of human beings and the value of their surroundings. The espousers of this view maintain that the Jewish approach is anthropocentric. The environment and nature are intended to serve man, who is more than one "creature" in nature. The study cites in detail these arguments and their sources. This approach does not rule out the possibility that it is good for humanity to strike a balance in its attitude toward the environment—for its own sake as well as for the environment and the entire society. In contrast to this Jewish approach, secular ecology generally interests itself in nature, aspiring to preserve the character of a certain entity known as "nature." Its emphasis is on the aesthetic. Some Jewish thinkers see this as a kind of "worship of the land," a form of paganism that is among both the most ancient and most recent forms of idol worship.

At the same time, the practical aspects of Jewish religious practice and secular ecology can be mutually compatible, even when they are separated by a theoretical gulf.

The question, then, is what economic or other price the society is willing and needs to pay to protect nature and the environment. In the ecological context, this involves not only the balance between man and external nature, and the balance between the needs of the individual and the present and those of the society and the future, but also a psychic balance between man's demands and his obligations. The morality of Judaism rests solidly on a

foundation of restraint, self-control, and frugality. Without this foundation, all the ecological efforts in the world will be in vain.

In other words, it is not the environment itself that is the value: it is value-neutral. However, preserving and cultivating the environment for the benefit of people and their future well-being can raise moral questions, as this approach entails decisions involving fundamental values.

### ***Attitude of the Haredi community toward environmental quality as reflected in interviews***

The reciprocal relations between the members of a community and their surroundings are affected by their socio-economic situation and influenced by the community's leaders and spiritual luminaries in every generation and every place. Consequently, it is necessary to get the opinion of professionals and others who are involved in the community's day-to-day life, and notably in the planning, construction, maintenance, and development of the urban infrastructures. Physical, social, and cultural needs, together with halakhic guidelines shape the built-up space in the *Haredi* community and the manner in which the residents address that space. To gain an understanding of these processes, we spoke with many people who are involved in shaping the *Haredi* space in its diverse senses, and we here summarize their comments.

The first group we interviewed consisted of planners who work in the *Haredi* sector, even if they themselves are not *Haredi* and in some cases are not even religious. In their everyday work these planners intertwine general planning principles with the distinctive needs and features of the *Haredi* community. Naturally, various environmental questions arise in their work, and they can attest to the attitude their *Haredi* clients show toward these subjects.

Two conflicting conceptions emerge from these interviews. According to one conception, the *Haredi* population has no interest at all in environmental quality and is totally indifferent to planning principles and rules. Their only interest is to satisfy their needs in terms of housing and the accompanying public structures (educational and religious). According to the second conception, the *Haredim* take an open attitude toward the environment, are interested in its protection and in open, green areas, and are ready to pay for

them in terms of environmental planning. The disparity between the two views is apparently due to the attitude of the planners and the different *Haredi* groups they worked with and to their random experience. At the same time, these differences also reflect a dynamic situation of change in the *Haredi* community's attitude toward the environment, giving rise to divergent and conflicting opinions.

The *Haredi* community requires allocation of public areas on a larger scale than other sectors of the population. This may come at the expense of leisure and vacation areas. According to the planners, affirmative action should be considered with regard to these land allocations, based on the special needs of this particular population. Facilities such as a Talmud Torah (rabbinical elementary school), synagogue, and mikveh (ritual bath) are considered elementary needs of the *Haredi* population. If land availability is limited and its usage is competed for by basic needs such as these, it is clear that playgrounds, gardens, and the like will be given a lower priority than basic religious needs.

A conspicuous feature of *Haredi* neighborhoods is the absence of cultivated private gardens. The critical factor here is probably socio-economic. Large families do not have the time, resources, or ability to invest in luxuries of environmental cultivation. Undoubtedly the lack of an environmental tradition also contributes to this lacuna.

The exceptions to this rule are the new immigrants (*Haredi* and religious) from the West, mainly the United States, who have a higher socio-economic level. They show a marked interest in public and private gardens and parks.

Everyone is aware of the disconnection between the *Haredi* community and environmental issues. One reason for this is technical, but it has profound social and cultural ramifications: most of the rallies, demonstrations, and protest activities about the environment are held on Shabbat. The implications are obvious. First, the *Haredi* (and religious) population cannot take part in events that desecrate the Sabbath, even if they identify with the cause. Second, and perhaps more deeply, when environmental issues are constantly bound up with Sabbath desecration, the *Haredi* consciousness associates environmental awareness with the trampling of the Jewish

tradition. If to this we add the gap between the instrumental approach to the environment and the perception of nature as a value, it becomes clear that Haredim are likely to be sharply anti-environmental.

Haredi neighborhood committees are involved in environmental struggles that affect the quality of life in their immediate area and place of residence. True, this activity boils down to no more than concern for the population's "inner courtyard," but it can attest to an incipient awareness about environmental subjects of immediate interest.

It is clear from all of the above that in the *Haredi* sector it is important to take note of a special scale of values that relegates environmental matters to a secondary place, if not lower, as opposed to subjects that are perceived to be of religious and cultural value.

Residents of Bnei Brak can enjoy green areas outside the municipal boundaries of their city in the form of parks located within Metropolitan Tel Aviv or nearby. Nevertheless, the mayor of Bnei Brak is looking for sites where green areas can be created within that city, too.

The landscape architect of the Bnei Brak Municipality notes special features in the *Haredi* relationship to the environment. Her main, categorical perception is that the *Haredi* public has a fundamentally different attitude toward the environment than the general public: Haredim do not treat the environment as a value per se or in a quasi-religious manner, as environmentalists do. Their attitude is strictly instrumental. The architect also identifies a number of flagrant faults in the *Haredi* society's attitude toward the environment.

Uniquely, *Haredi* residents make use of halakhic reasoning in order to **prevent** environmental development. For example, a religious ruling invalidated a playground in a public park because it was said to be noisy and violate modesty. Sculptures were not installed on the grounds of "vision damage." Such arguments are never invoked to **encourage** environmental development.

Another category of individuals whose knowledge and experience are important for this study consists of public leaders in the *Haredi* community, even if they are not environmental professionals. They maintain that a distinction has to be made between two levels of discussion with respect to

quality of the environment. The first level is the immediate environment: cleanliness of the streets and the neighborhood in general, an area set aside for games, the quality of the buildings, and so forth. The second level is the universal one: the greenhouse effect and the hole in the ozone layer, the water problem, preserving animal species, and so on. The Haredim treat the two levels differently. They have an interest in the first level, as it affects the quality of their lives, but their interest in universal environmental issues that do not affect them directly fluctuates according to the subject. Thus, they take an interest in the greenhouse effect and the ozone layer, which can affect the lives of people everywhere. However, they are opposed to the green movements, which are perceived as being anti-Jewish, and they object to the perception of the environment as a value per se, as this leads to protecting animals or landscape at the expense of urgent human needs. Such attitudes are considered anomalous and disproportionate from the human point of view—a new religion founded by the rich and sated.

In *Haredi* areas the appearance of the streets is a serious problem: “They clean their homes and throw all the garbage outside.” Experience shows that if the municipality cleans and renovates the streets and installs sidewalks, the residents continue to maintain cleanliness. Maintaining cleanliness in public spaces depends above all on the municipality: if it removes the garbage on a regular, frequent basis, it does not pile up and the residents keep the streets clean. The high population density and the demographic structure of the *Haredi* population generate large amounts of refuse, which must be removed frequently. If the municipality invests in cleaning and in garbage disposal, the residents show their appreciation by assisting in the effort.

In the sphere of environmental education, the *Haredi* population has a problem with nature outings, which the rabbinical leadership does not encourage. Generally there are no organized outings above elementary school age.

In a move that appears revolutionary, Rabbi Mordechai Karelitz, the mayor of Bnei Brak, persuaded the rabbinical leadership that planning and construction laws, along with environmental and traffic laws have sources in the halakhic literature, though the quantitative measures cited in the sources must be adjusted to the present-day situation, “because of public regula-



tions.” In this manner, planning, construction, transportation, and environmental laws received halakhic sanction. As the subject was explained to the public, land usage regulations are addressed in the halakhah, but the measures have to be adapted to today’s conditions. Thus, a normative system that the *Haredi* residents set little store by was “annexed” to the world of halakhah and received binding validity.

This is an enormously important development, one that transcends the subject of the environment. One of the characteristics of the fundamentalist foundations of *Haredi* religiosity is its attitude toward the written letter of the halakhah irrespective of the society and the period in which it originated. Adaptations to “today’s conditions,” albeit solely in the quantitative context, might be an opening to other adaptations. In the environmental context, it is an opening that makes it possible to “project” religious legitimacy on practical principles (with the emphasis on practical) of environmental protection.

### *Attitude of the Haredi community toward environmental quality as reflected in the Haredi press*

The *Haredi* media, both written and electronic, have undergone a considerable expansion in recent years. In addition to “establishment” newspapers that are published by *Haredi* parties or groups, which are under strict rabbinical supervision, independent papers have sprung up that lack this authoritative supervision. They exercise self-censorship to ensure that their content does not deviate from the community’s norms. Basically, the *Haredi* press does not consider itself a news source but an educational platform. Whether deliberately or by the nature of the medium, these publications also shape public opinion within the *Haredi* community. Issues that the *Haredi* papers address become part of the community’s public agenda, whether by the guidance of the rabbinical leadership or at the journalists’ initiative. The treatment of environmental issues in the *Haredi* press, in terms of the frequency with which they are raised, the place they are given in the newspapers, and the way they are dealt with can tell us much about the status of the environment on the *Haredi* public agenda today.

The very fact that environmental issues come up frequently in the *Haredi* press attests to awareness of the subject and its importance. The

contemporary *Haredi* public is not divorced from the general discourse in the country. The issue of environmental quality is part of that discourse, as it affects everyone, irrespective of one's opinions and beliefs. Haredim are no less concerned about environmental issues than any other group, and this is reflected in their press.

At the same time, the press does not neglect its “educational” mission. The environment is not considered a value in itself but a “platform” through which to inculcate cultural content and values and to initiate discussion of subjects that serve interests of the *Haredi* community or are considered important for other reasons. Thus, environmental issues are “recruited” in the service of information about health; overcrowding is translated into the immediate need of the *Haredi* population for public areas; and road building in residential areas becomes an opportunity to complain that Haredim are not consulted on planning issues that affect them.

This last matter finds expression in various contexts. The planning authorities are receptive to feedback from diverse population groups in different neighborhoods, but—according to the Haredim—they ignore the *Haredi* population and do not allow its representatives to explain their position on planning that affects them directly. This may be due to a (mistaken) evaluation by the authorities that the *Haredi* community is indifferent to planning issues and that even if it wants to intervene, its representatives lack the requisite knowledge and qualifications. This assumption is wrong on both counts: Haredim are drawn into political systems and bureaucracies and as such show an interest in planning and environmental issues that are related to their neighborhoods and communities. Their responsibility for these matters also induces them to expand their knowledge in this sphere and disseminate it within the community.

Part of the quasi-environmental education in the *Haredi* press is mobilized on behalf of an ideology that is critical of Zionism. A case in point is the National Water Carrier, which in its first incarnation entailed the draining of the Hulah Lake and marshes. This project was the zenith of Israel's development projects in the late 1950s. Draining a lake and diverting the course of a river constitute a change in the order of creation. The Haredim accused the Zionist movement of undermining the Jewish world order by

erasing religious traditions and supplanting them with different ideologies. Shapers of *Haredi* public opinion are now pointing to the idea that has been raised of re-flooding parts of the Hulah as proof that the Zionist attempt to intervene in the country's natural formation failed. That failure also sheds the correct light on other Zionist projects, they maintain. This is of course an opportunity for low-level criticism. In sum, though, the message that emanates from the *Haredi* press overall is basically no different from any other environmental message—the need for human modesty and care when intervening in the environment and reshaping it—with the addition of religious themes and messages.

## **The Practical Dimension**

### *Examination of environmental quality in the Haredi space*

Urban quality of the environment affects a large proportion of the *Haredi* population. A survey of written sources does away with the supposition that the different lifestyle of the *Haredi* community reduces the need for open areas. On the contrary: the features that set the Haredim apart from the general population, such as a high birthrate and residential density, mean that open areas are an urgent need.

The approach that emerges from the studies is that the *Haredi* population wants to improve environmental quality in its neighborhoods. True, the social and religious essence of the residential area is of paramount importance. In other words, the overriding consideration in choosing a place to live is its geographical proximity to the community and its institutions, and not environmental conditions. However, from the point of view of awareness of environmental hazards such as dirt, neglect, and a lack of open areas, there is no difference between the level of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) vis-à-vis environmental quality displayed by the *Haredi* population and the general population.

A more intense presence in the public space (children and adults in playgrounds and on the street), accumulated garbage, and a dearth of cultivated gardens create a sense of environmental overload and overcrowding about which the *Haredi* society is aware and critical.

### ***The Haredi population and open areas in Jerusalem***

As part of the study, a comparison was carried out between a number of neighborhoods in Jerusalem in order to obtain a picture of the population's attitude toward public open areas in the vicinity and from this to infer the overall attitude toward environmental values. Following a preliminary examination of the elements that go into creating this attitude, it turned out that a distinction had to be drawn between different approaches, some of them singular, displayed by particular population groups or locales. Some of them are amenable to characterization, measurement, and objective quantification, though others lend themselves only to subjective examination and evaluation.

### ***Methodology***

Three levels of the distribution of open areas were characterized: two extreme levels—areas with a high level of greenery—and, at the other pole, neighborhoods showing a flagrant absence of greenery. Between the two poles are interim levels, referring to areas with a moderate level of greenery.

### ***Results***

*Areas of a high level of greenery.* The most prominent of these areas are the Jewish “garden neighborhoods” that were planned and built in the early twentieth century and neighborhoods of affluent Arabs—low houses surrounded by gardens. Thanks to a combination of historical-planning background and a high socio-economic level, these areas have stood out in terms of their greenery in the Jerusalem map since 1973 and in up-to-date aerial photographs.

*Areas of a low level of greenery.* The map and the aerial photographs show that there are very few open and green areas in and around the Old City area and in the city center. The population density in the Old City continued to rise until the beginning of the nineteenth century and the subsequent move by the Jewish population out of the walled city into what is now known as the “city center.” The overcrowding in the Old City, with its narrow, winding alleys, precluded the creation of open areas and green spaces. The first

Jewish neighborhoods that were built outside the Old City, in the middle of the nineteenth century (the “city center” area), were planned to house a relatively dense population because of the high demand for land, and their streets are narrow. This situation has hardly changed to this day: the city center is crowded, the streets are narrow, there are few open areas and little vegetation, and the socio-economic status of the neighborhoods there is relatively low.

*Arcas of intermediate levels of greenery.* The neighborhoods that were built in Jerusalem from the end of the 1960s, and especially the modern neighborhoods of the 1980s and 1990s, are in the intermediate category in terms of their level of greenery and display modern standards.

### **Conclusions**

The level of development of open and green areas in different neighborhoods stems from the historical-planning background and the conditions under which the neighborhood was built, and is commensurate with the population's socio-economic level. In the old, crowded neighborhoods of the city center, where the population is of a low socio-economic status, the level of greenery is blatantly lower than in other parts of the city. The absence of open areas and green spaces heightens the sense of a densely built-up area. In contrast, veteran garden neighborhoods whose residents have a high socio-economic status appear as a deep green on the maps. The other neighborhoods are at various intermediate levels of green, while in the modern neighborhoods (those built in the early 1980s) more open areas and vegetation are discernible.

A correlation was found between the level of greenery and the character of the neighborhood at the time of its founding, the background to its establishment, and the socio-economic status of the residents. On the other hand, **no correlation was found** between the religious character of a neighborhood and the level of greenery. Nor was any connection found between a neighborhood's religious character and the amount of open space it contains, though there is a clear-cut connection between the age of a neighborhood and the amount of its open areas.

*Scale of developed open areas in relation to population size.* This parameter evaluates the relation between the developed open areas—playgrounds, gardens, squares—and the size of the neighborhood's population; that is, the amount of developed open public areas in relation to the number of their users. The location of the neighborhoods on this scale shows that veteran neighborhoods, in which the population has a high socio-economic status, are at the top of the list, and that crowded neighborhoods where the residents have a middle or low socio-economic status are at the bottom. Even though the amount of open areas relative to the size of the neighborhood is higher in these neighborhoods, their overcrowding brings about a very low ratio between developed open areas and size of population.

Haredi neighborhoods tend to be very densely populated because the families are large. Because of the low ratio between developed areas and population size, these neighborhoods are located at the bottom of the graph. In contrast, in established religious and *Haredi* neighborhoods, a high ratio exists between developed open areas and population size. In other words, no connection was found between the fact that a neighborhood has a religious character and the ratio of developed open areas to population size.

### ***Conclusions***

At the overall city level, no connection, however faint, appears to exist between a neighborhood's *Haredi* character and the other quantitative parameters relating to urban open areas; that is, the amount of open areas in relation to the size of the neighborhood and the size of the population, and their degree of development. The clear-cut connection relates mainly to the socio-economic level, with a high correlation found between the ratio of open areas in a neighborhood to the level of development of these areas, and the statutory situation of open areas relative to the neighborhood's socio-economic level.

## **The Operative Dimension**

### ***Conclusions and policy recommendations***

The following recommendations and outlines should be taken into account by planners and policy makers dealing with environmental development in the

*Haredi* sector and with environmental policy in general. Understanding the totality of the interconnections and the complexity that mark the *Haredi* community's attitude toward the environment will be helpful in every discussion about these subjects.

Overall, the study shows that the quality of the residential surroundings and activity of the *Haredi* population suffers from a range of profound distresses. Some of them stem from objective conditions of overcrowding, the character of the land usage, and the demographic structure of the *Haredi* population. Others stem from lack of awareness of the *Haredi* community itself or of various bodies about the special needs of the Haredim. To improve the quality of the environment in the *Haredi* community, we recommend a multifaceted environmental policy that will address different facets of the public and its institutions, authorities, and leaders. We have no pretension of trying to change any of the customs, traditions, and culture of *Haredi* society. Our only aim is to improve its environmental quality and create awareness and a positive approach to the subject, which will lead to cooperation between the *Haredi* public and the general public on these issues. The conclusions of the study prove that the *Haredi* public and its leadership have an interest in this improvement and are ready to take action to achieve it.

Upgrading the *Haredi* public's ability to cope with environmental problems depends greatly on its **environmental awareness**. By this term we refer to recognition of the importance of the proper and correct functioning of everything that goes to make up the natural and man-made surroundings amid which the community lives, and readiness to take action to correct functional flaws. Such awareness includes the community's insistence on its right to special qualities that are consistent with its culture and its distinctive needs, and knowing how to acquire them. Environmental consciousness can be heightened simultaneously both from within the community and from the outside. We recommend the following possible modalities in an effort to heighten *Haredi* awareness of the environment and to improve its quality.

### *The authorities vis-à-vis the community*

Shaping, cultivating, and managing the living space require the cooperation of the community and the authorities. We have seen that this cooperation is



vitiated by problems of two-way lack of understanding. The authorities do not always understand the needs of the *Haredi* community, and in many cases the community lacks access that would enable it to influence the policy of the authorities. This situation needs to be changed. The following are three main ways that could bring about the desired change.

**A. Addressing questions to rabbis:** The aim here is to interest the rabbinical leadership in environmental issues. In the case of every action that will generate an environmental change in a *Haredi* locale, the relevant authority should address an appropriate question to the rabbis who lead the *Haredi* community. Putting an environmental issue that requires a halakhic solution to the rabbinical leadership will create an opening for the integration of a Jewish conception in shaping and organizing the community's surroundings and create halakhic legitimation for addressing environmental issues. The rabbis are like to respond willingly to this challenge, provided the questions are well formulated and deal with a genuine concrete problem, not with empty questions of theory. Of course this also entails a risk. Asking rabbis questions is not a quiz show, and the questioner has to be ready for various possibilities, some of which may be unexpected.

**B. Public accessibility to decisions:** The *Haredi* media might be able to serve the authorities as a channel for transmitting information about planning and environmental quality. Like any other public, the Haredim need information about the legal routes available to them to give expression to their needs and desires (and, of course, to their objections as well) about plans relating to their area of residence. Another reason for the lack of accessibility to environmental issues is the *Haredi* public's suspiciousness of the authorities. On the other hand, it has already been proved—inter alia in studies cited in this work—that in *Haredi* local governments, in situations in which the environmental interest is clear and immediate, *Haredi* residents are quite capable of organizing and demanding their rights. This approach is likely to gain momentum, and as more environmental issues are dealt with in the wake of *Haredi* requests, the *Haredi* public will become increasingly motivated to become involved and aware about environmental subjects. An important step in this connection is to put *Haredi* residents directly in touch with the

planning and environmental units in local governments, without the mediation of *Haredi* politicians.

**C. Differential environmental policy:** Different groups behave differently in their surroundings. These behavior patterns, which stem from demographic, socio-economic, and cultural differences, are reflected in environmental quality. A policy aimed at maintaining a reasonable level of environmental quality needs to adapt itself to the relevant variables involved. For example, the frequency of street cleaning and garbage collection needs to be coordinated with the rate at which dirt and garbage are produced in a given area, rather than setting a uniform frequency for the whole city. This task devolves on the municipal authorities. When the residents of a neighborhood take note that their particular environmental conditions are being properly addressed, they will want to continue to preserve the level of environmental quality that has been achieved.

### *Environmental awareness of the community*

Intensive activity needs to be carried out within the *Haredi* community to heighten environmental awareness. Such activity can emanate from the *Haredi* public itself, as we showed in this study, and this phenomenon should be encouraged. In this connection, the following are the main points to be emphasized:

*Shaping public opinion.* The *Haredi* media—written and broadcast—are highly diversified and have a wide and enthusiastic audience. They wield a considerable influence on their target audience, and evidence abounds that they shape public opinion in the *Haredi* community. One testimony of this is the tremendous feedback these media outlets get from their audience.

Part of the process of influencing public opinion should be to ground environmental issues in the Jewish sources. This does not mean the pointless citation of disconnected or fragmented sayings, which make no impression on the listeners, but the practical linking of these concepts to day-to-day life from the halakhic aspect.

*Education.* The term “education” is extremely broad and includes everything referred to in the preceding section. In this context, we are referring to the formal education system: schools, Talmud Torah institutions, and yeshivas, as well as informal educational activities in youth groups (the counterpart of the youth movements in the non-Haredi population). Girls schools and a number of new yeshivas in Bnei Brak touch on environmental issues in their curricula. Integrating themes of nature and environmental quality in the *Haredi* education system will make it possible to familiarize the majority of the community’s members with the subject in their formative years and also go a long way toward legitimizing it. This thematic integration is relatively simple to accomplish in girls schools, where the curricula are based on a utilitarian and instrumental approach. As such, tolerance vis-à-vis nature and the environment can be perceived as instrumental. The problem is more acute in the Talmud Torah institutions and yeshivas. The studies there focus mainly on the Babylonian Talmud and its commentators and barely touch on additional aspects of Jewish thought. Thus, the school program leaves no room for subjects such as nature and the environment, even if they are derived from the sources of Judaism.

The social change that the *Haredi* community is undergoing has made the *Haredi* woman an important agent of change. Her economic and social status is different from what it was in the past. In the future, her awareness of environmental issues will affect the entire community. Therefore, even if some people view the subjects of nature and environmental quality—“which are earmarked for women”—as non-prestigious, this attitude will change in the future. Moreover, the growing tendency in the yeshivas, despite rabbinical reservations and even opposition, to use school breaks for nature outings is a fine opportunity to integrate subjects related to the protection of the environment in the preparations for the outing, even if only as a byproduct of essential guidance and instruction involving basic safety measures, which border on *pikuah nefesh* (the saving of life). It will be impossible to stop the new trend among young Haredim to go on outings and get to know the land. Ultimately, their teachers, too, will accept this development, and the need to prepare them for these outings in terms of safety and security will be recognized as crucial. This preparation presents a good opportunity to

introduce them to other subjects involving knowledge of the country and the environment, though these should be well grounded in the Jewish tradition and sources.

## **Afterword**

The attitude of the *Haredi* community toward the environment is one element of the multifaceted *Haredi* way of life. It should be seen as one aspect of a complicated and complex totality of existential consciousness, and as part of the change that the *Haredi* community has been undergoing over many years.

These developments take on greater significance against the background of the sea change the Jewish world has experienced in the past two centuries. This cultural and existential transformation has moved the *Haredi* world from its physical and mental place in Eastern Europe to new centers in Israel, the United States, and Western Europe, and has confronted it with dilemmas of an entirely new type. The *Haredi* society finds itself in a new reality of an open, transparent world that is exposed to information and other stimuli and to a new political and social reality: the existence of the State of Israel, the independence and self-awareness of women, and a technological revolution that has implications for almost every sphere of life. The attitude toward the environment is part of these new developments, one element in the multiple changes with which the *Haredi* world must cope in the new era.

The present study examined only the *Haredi* community in the Land of Israel, focusing on the communities in Jerusalem in the present time, which reflects only the past decade. Yet even this narrow perspective demonstrates the potency of the process of change, and if we want to get a sense of its larger meaning we must place the results of our work on a longer axis of time. (In any event, the crystallization of the attitude toward the environment would appear to be a reaction to the unfolding events and demands the *Haredi* community is facing, rather than an autonomous initiative deriving from interest in the subject per se.)

This is the overall background against which the study should be examined. The new perspectives and signs of change in the *Haredi* world's reaction to environmental issues are part of the social-cultural transformation that the *Haredi* public has been undergoing for the past few generations. It is

therefore impossible to stop and describe a static situation that reflects a given moment. The *Haredi* society is caught up in dynamic processes caused by the circumstances of recent generations, and even though it is naturally conservative and abhors change and innovation, it cannot simply stand aside and hope that the developments will pass it by.

We make these points in the face of the ambitions and attempts (which are highly naïve) to bring about a revolutionary change in the *Haredi* public's attitude toward the environment. On the contrary, excessively assertive and aggressive activity will cause the community to retreat into itself and bring about results that are the opposite of those being sought. The hoped-for change will be the result of a slow and gradual process, as an inseparable part of the historical development of the *Haredi* communities within the Jewish people.