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FOUNDATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF MODERN ORTHODOXY

Modern Orthodoxy, as represented by Yeshiva University, the Orthodox Union, the Rabbinical Council of America, and similar organizations, is a significant factor in American and world Jewry. It is, in many ways, the ideological glue that holds the diverse groups of American Jewry together.

As the bearers of the world view that encompasses both Torah and Mada, complete loyalty to Halakha and intimate acquaintance with the best of contemporary science and humanities, Modern Orthodoxy is always under sustained pressure from both sides, Right and Left. It is under demographic and consequently political pressure by an increasingly triumphalist Haredism, from the Right, and assimilationist and non-halakhic movements from the Left. This pressure has a paradoxical effect on Modern Orthodoxy: on the one hand, we are gripped with apprehension as we see some of our children veer off to the Right and some to the Left, with consequent fearfulness about our future. On the other hand, it has inspired us to greater activity and has resulted in increased creativity of a number of organizations and institutions in Israel, and thus offers grounds for greater self-confidence.

Often, such groups are frustrated by financial needs that, objectively, are not overwhelming but burdensome to the leaders of the groups and severely limit their influence. If they were helped in a discreet and timely manner, they could contribute mightily to the strengthening of Modern Orthodoxy in the United States.

What is true of the situation in America, is doubly true of the State of Israel. There, the problems are much more acute and complex. But the potential for successful achievements is far greater.

It is therefore imperative that resources be available for focused assistance (not ongoing budgetary support) to those entities that, with a limited influx of funds, would be able to contribute to the enhancement of Modern Orthodoxy everywhere. Yeshiva University/RIETS now have an opportunity to take a leadership role in that effort. We have long been frustrated by the limitations of our work in Israel. True, we have an ongoing presence via the Gruss Center in Jerusalem and the highly successful Jay and Jeannie Schottenstein and S. Daniel Abraham Programs. But these are activities on behalf of Americans who choose to study in the Holy Land, not of Israel itself. The growing importance of Israel in world Jewry, especially the predicted superiority in demography as well as in pure Jewish energy, means that men and women of vision must dedicate themselves not only to assuring the role of Israel militarily and economically, but also spiritually, religiously, and educationally.

In the best of all possible worlds, Yeshiva University would open a comprehensive branch in Israel, offering full undergraduate and graduate programs. But dreaming of the impossible dreams distracts one from attaining real successes. We will not, at least for the foreseeable future, be able to build another Yeshiva University in Israel.

But that does not mean that we should abandon any efforts to make a significant contribution to Israel as such. The need for Modern Orthodoxy in Israel is overwhelming; there is no other meaningful way of bridging the gap between religious and secular save by having a strong middle group that can mediate between the two. For the sake of both Yeshiva University and Israel, we must seek a creative solution to our problem. And that means forming a foundation that would strengthen and encourage those various Modern Orthodoxy groups who are struggling, often heroically, to enhance Modern Orthodoxy in the State and in its society. Many of them are doing marvelous things but are prevented from doing far more – all for the want of what is really minor amount of support. They are our surrogates, and their success will be our success.

It is therefore proposed that the **FOUNDATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF MODERN ORTHODOXY (FAMO)** be founded that will identify and support such groups and projects as part of a comprehensive effort to enhance Modern Orthodoxy all over the world, with the greatest emphasis on Israel.

The following are just a sample of the kind of groups we ought to consider. Not all of these are equally needy, and some are more attractive than others, but they all represent the *kind* of efforts we would support. And there are many more like them.

ERETZ HEMDAH – a forward-thinking Kollel which requires army service as a prerequisite.

RABBI RASSON ARUSSI -- Beth Din of Rasson Arussi.

TZOHAR – mostly young Israeli Rabbis who want to make Judaism more “user friendly” for the new generation.

SIACH YITZCHAK – a new kind of Hesder Yeshiva teaching Talmud in the context of a post-modern world.

MATAN – training women in areas of Halakha and other Judaic studies on a high level

NISHMAT – offers advanced Talmud education for gifted young women, preparing them as specialists in areas of Halakha dealing with women’s issues.

MIBERESHIT – a new group which aims at introducing basic Judaism to youngsters -- especially from secular schools -- throughout the country.

BET MORASHA – a school for advanced rabbinic studies in the spirit of Yeshiva University.

THE DAVID CARDOZO ACADEMY – a school for serious adult students, emphasizing Jewish thought and philosophy.

THE BETH DIN OF AMERICA – a court of Jewish law, known for its competence, accessibility, and integrity, dealing both with domestic issues such as divorce and with monetary disputes.

Our efforts, especially in Israel, must be truly apolitical. We must not attempt to control any other organization or institution, but only to assist and make them more effective in advancing the vision of Modern Orthodoxy and Torah Umadda. In Israel that means service in the IDF, the celebration of Yom Haatzmaut; active support for the Zionist vision, and full support for Modern Orthodoxy in any of its various forms.

In order to avoid another bureaucracy, FAMO would not encourage requests by potential beneficiaries. Instead, it would proactively explore areas that could benefit from its help; request of knowledgeable people to assist in such identification; and consult with other foundations as to their experience and advice. The Foundation would be headed by an Advisory Committee consisting of seven people, including Mr. Morry Weiss as Chairman and Dr. Norman Lamm as President. Other members would be chosen for their prominence in the community, such as President Richard Joel of Yeshiva University, or for their proven ability to assist the Foundation financially, their compatibility, their commitment to Modern Orthodoxy, or their creative ideas for the functioning of the Foundation. FAMO would work as an affiliate of and in close coordination with Yeshiva University, helping to ensure the health of its infrastructure in the Jewish community, even while retaining its own autonomy.

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