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The Theme of Moderation in Modern Orthodoxy

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The Theme of Moderation in Centrist Orthodoxy
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I begin on two contradictory notes, one apologetic, the other not only not apologetic but anti-apologetic. The apologetic note concerns my uneasiness in using the term Centrist Orthodoxy, but it is a term which I prefer principally for one reason, which I shall elaborate presently.

Critics of the term assume that Centrist indicates that we locate ourselves at some midpoint between orthodoxy and assimilationism, and claim that territory as our religious home. But that is nonsense. Only slightly less absurd is the idea that centrist orthodoxy is the mid-point between Satmar and the few intellectuals who occupy the ground called the Orthodox Left. That is also inaccurate. It is no compliment to our intelligence to imagine that we who declare ourselves Centrist walk around the religious terrain with a yardstick, calipers and a calculator measuring the exact distance between Neturei Karta and Humanistic Judaism - so called - in order to locate the exact middle or centre. We are not, and do not aspire to be ideological geographers or spiritual statisticians who search out the exact centre between right and wrong, religious and non-religious, mitzva and avara, and settle upon that as our religious goal. It may be wrong, but I submit that our centrism is not really that simple minded and religiously asinine.

What of the title we have been called all along, Modern Orthodoxy? I am uncomfortable with that label because it is a combination of two highly infelicitous words. One is arrogant, modern: I'm modern, that makes me better than anyone else in the past. The other is inaccurate because orthodoxy implies ideological blindness and constricted thought, and that is not correct.

Of course there are those who say that we should do away with all adjectives and simply identify ourselves as orthodox jews, period. It does away with the whole problem of labels, or it seems to. In fact if

we did that that would leave 90 percent of this audience and all those who have come to the Symposium as the only orthodox jews without an adjective. There are Chassidic Jews, there are Chabad Jews, there are Lithunian Yeshiva World Jews, there are Torah Im Derech Eretz Jews, there are Religious Zionist Jews, there are Poale Mizrachi Orthodox Jews; so maybe the solution to the problem is we should all declare ourselves - We are Anonymous Orthodox Jews!

In truth, the real name we ought to choose for ourselves if we had to, the best name, would be Dati, Dati Orthodox Jews. Dati implies a halachic commitment, it carries with it no pejorative baggage such as modern, and it is a term used for orthodox jews in Israel who are approximately what we stand for in the Anglo-Saxon countries.

I say I am apologetic because confusion about one's identity is a sure sign of adolescence, and a comprehensive point of view without a clear name exposes its ideological immaturity. If I do not have a name, if I am uncertain of myself, I am not really grown up. Therefore, despite my preference for the term Dati Orthodoxy, I stick with the word Centrist as a tentative designation because it implies something which I consider terribly important, and about which I am anti-apologetic, and that issue is Moderation. Moderation is, I believe, the most essential of the five, six or seven distinguishing characteristics of what we call Centrist Orthodoxy.

One of the difficulties with this self-definition is that the crown of moderation is claimed by many pretenders. Most religious movements in our contemporary community consider themselves moderate; I think even the Satmar consider themselves moderate, compared to their more violent right wing they are. And everyone can point to rival positions on either side of them. But that is not the kind of moderation I have in mind.

Today I shall not speak about anything that is controversial, I am not out to be too contemporary, I want to understand. We speak of

moderation, of the importance of it. We know that it is not around very much. I want to understand it and invite you in this adventure of my own reflection on the theme of moderation.

In order to clarify what it means, it is important to sketch briefly the theory of the mean, or the centre, or the middle, in the thought of one of the greatest Jews of all time, Maimonides, or the Rambam. It was Maimonides who established the as a principle of Judaism the idea of moderation when in his Mishna Tora, in Hilchot Da'ot, as well as earlier in his commentary on the Mishna, the Shemoneh Perakim, he elaborated his doctrine of a Middle Way, a Derech haBeinonit or a Derech haEmtza'it as the judaised version of Aristotle's Golden Mean. The mean or centre for the Rambam is the Right Way, HaDerech haYeshara. It is the virtuous way, Derech haTovim, and most significantly, it is the Way of the Lord, Derech HaShem.

Every disposition or facet of character can be plotted along a line going from one extreme to another. Let us take two examples. The first is how we deal with money. One can be at one extreme miserably greedy, at the other extreme extravagant and a squanderer. Some place in the centre, in between parsimoniousness and exuberance, or exorbitance, is the intelligent, moderate, sane way of handling one's money. That is the middle way, which the Rambam gives.

Another example, concern for one's own wellbeing. At one end is cowardice. At the other end is a foolish boldness that is unnecessarily dangerous. The middle is a moderate, sane form of courage. Courage is in between cowardice and foolish self-exposure to danger. That is the doctrine of the mean for the Rambam, and that is the basis of a theory of moderation.

However, this doctrine of the mean as the basis of this moderation is open to attack on several grounds. First, and this is something that comes to mind immediately, there may be objections to our use of the doctrine of the Rambam because the Rambam, Maimonides, when he

writes of the doctrine of the mean, of Derech haEmtza'it, writes of individual character, not of national or social policy. He is writing about personal dispositions, how to create a fine character. He does not talk about religious outlook and ideology.

Second, the criticism is not only about my use of the Rambam in this respect, but about the Rambam himself, and that is that the theory appears to be highly artificial, a kind of mathematical approach to life and character which really should be more existential than arithmetic. Now does moderation or moderationism mean that one must be, shall I say, bloodlessly parve, always right down the centre, never getting angry, excited, revolted, indignant, no matter what the provocation? The truth is when we think about it, this arithmetic approach of the Rambam appears flat, emotionally inhibiting, passionless and uninspiring. I hope the Rambam will forgive me and wait a few moments!

Let me respond to these two criticisms in order. The first was how can we use his theory extrapolating from the personal and ideological, the second that the theory itself is flat, too arithmetic. First question: by what right do we apply Rambam's theory of the mean, haDerech haEmtza'it, to our global matters of Jewish policy when he is speaking only of individual character training? Now it is true the Rambam does write primarily, and even exclusively, of moral dispositions and not of political conduct. But there is good reason to believe, and accept that the broad outlines of his doctrine of moderation apply as well to the social, and political and religious spheres, and it is legitimate to extrapolate from individual character to communal character and to ideology. First, why not? Before anyone says no, why not? There is no prima facie reason to assume that because the Rambam exemplifies his principle by reference to things such as handling money, or courage, to personal or character dispositions, that it does not apply to collectivities, to society, to the community, to the people, the nation. In fact I believe there is

less justification for mass extremism than there is for individual imbalance.

Second, the Rambam's own historical record reveals that balanced approach to communal problems which while often heroic is not extremist. For example, he had a hard line about heresy. He excluded a large number of people from the fraternity of Israel, the patrimony of Israel, "These people have no portion in the world to come", he organises a very strong hard line. LeMaaseh, when it comes to practice, we find that he is much different. His attitude for instance to his contemporary Karaites who are opposed to halacha is rather conciliatory, and he does not apply to them the strictures of halacha that he outlined earlier.

Third, and this is very important, and my best proof. The Rambam refers to a specific verse which upon further investigation reveals very significant insights. He gave several names to the Middle Way, but he is Derech HaShem, the Way of the Lord, and he cites the following verse:

Quote in Hebrew

"For I have known him" - Abraham - "to the end that he may command his children and his household after him that they may keep the Way of the Lord to do righteousness and justice".

If that is what Derech HaShem means, this implies clearly that Maimonides identifies the Derech HaShem as something that goes beyond personal character. Maimonides' Middle Way of moderation is not just a restatement of the ethical views of the Greeks, of Aristotle, but rather it is a profoundly religious doctrine, saying that the Middle Way is the Derech HaShem, is the Divine Way, and seeing moderation as an act of Imitatio Dei, of imitation of G-d; that just as we are to imitate G-d in being kind and moral and generous and considerate and

sensitive, so we must be like G-d in being in this sense moderate. This is what leads to a world which is Tzedaka and Mishpat, just and moral. And that is essentially the legacy of one generation to the next, "to the end that he may command his children ... after him".

Consider the context of this verse, which Rambam sees as a source of moderation. When was this verse said? It was said right after the very beginning of the story of the evil of the two infamous towns S'dom and Amorra. Preceding this verse we hear of the angels looking upon S'dom as Abraham accompanies them on their way, and G-d says, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I intend to do, because he is to become the father of a great and mighty nation, and all the nations will be blessed in him. For I have known him" - or as the Rambam says, 'I love him' - "to the end that he may command his children and household after him". What do we see here? That G-d wants Abraham to exercise his quality of moderation, the Derech HaShem on G-d himself, as it were, and that is fantastic. G-d asks Abraham to apply the Derech HaShem to HaShem, praying to HaShem to moderate the extreme, the decree of destruction on S'dom and Amorra. And he almost succeeds. He bargains his way down in typical Middle Eastern fashion from 50 tzadikim to 40 to 30, 20, 10, less than 10 he did not want to take a chance. What follows is the immortal passage of HaShem informing Abraham that he did not want to destroy the two wicked cities.

Now surely the Derech HaShem, the Way of the Lord, here refers to more than personal temperance alone. The doctrine of moderation here is set in a larger context of Avraham Avinu's office of blessing to all the peoples of the earth, his heroic defence of the wicked cities of S'dom and Amorra which symbolise the very antithesis of all he stands for. He was not worried about getting too close to them. They were the opposite of everything he taught, and preached, and lived, but his great concern was to save them, to ask G-d to be moderate in dealing with them. A more political or communal example of moderation and temperance, of tolerance and sensitivity, is hard to come by, and yet

for the Rambam this is the Derech HaShem. So the Derech HaShem, moderation, has the widest and broadest implications for all of life.

Let me now come to the second charge, against the Rambam himself, and that is that moderation, moderationism, is too arithmetic, too artificial. If moderation always means taking the two extremes, going right smack down the middle, then it does not allow for creativity, it does not allow for exceptions, it is artificial, it is arithmetic; it is not existence, it is not really living. Some thirty or more years ago I remember attending a Convention of the Rabbinical Council of America in Detroit. The speaker on that occasion was my Rabbi, my teacher, Rabbi Joseph B Soloveitchik shlita, may the Almighty grant him a recovery. The burden of his remarks was that we err in assuming that the Rambam is prescribing an arithmetic approach to da'ot, to dispositions, to character. Rather he said, the Rambam's approach is far more subtle and dynamic. He does not insist that we always go right in the middle. Rather, said the Rav, what the Rambam means is that one can go from one extreme to the other as the occasion warrants it, as long as in sum and on the average one keeps to the centre. Moderation does not mean that on every question I listen to the two hardliners on either side and I come back someplace in the middle. No. It means on the average I have got to be there. It does not mean that on every question I must do so. I remember being enchanted by this interpretation because I had long been disturbed by the flatness of what I thought was the Rambam's approach to moderation, but I could not agree with the Rav because I just did not find it in the Rambam, and I was worried that he was making a mistake in interpreting Maimonides. However, I learned a long time ago never to dismiss an opinion of Rabbi Soloveitchik without a great deal of thought, so I gave it thirty years of thought, and I have come to the conclusion that he was right, and I should like to explain it.

According to Maimonides, in man's natural state nature and nurture combine to place his personality someplace off centre on each spectrum band of character. No one is born with a perfect knowledge of

how to handle his money. Some people are born too sparing, too spendthrift, too fearsome or too bold, too reckless. Nature does not naturally incline us to moderation. The probability that all elements that go into the composition of one personality will incline him or her to the exact centre. the probability approaches zero. Highly unusual. Rather, moving to the centre, which means moderation, is always an act of deliberate and conscious choice affected by the exercise of intelligence and intellect. This is what the Rambam writes:

Quote in Hebrew

"Therefore, our earlier Sages instructed us that a man should always weigh and measure his dispositions" - his personality, his character - "and direct them to the middle way ..."

The key to character for the Rambam is not the mean as such. No. It is the weighing, the measuring, the directing. Critical for the Rambam is the conscious use of reason, rather than following nature blindly and supinely. In other words, the process of arriving and determining one's character is more important than the results. The results are fairly irrelevant. It is rather the dynamic quality, the creative quality of rationally weighing and assessing, out of freedom, and out of freedom deciding and choosing: 'what am I going to make of myself?', a profoundly human act of self-determination of one's own character; 'what am I going to make of my life?' That self-determination is what the Rambam means by the Derech HaShem, and that is how we imitate G-d, because G-d created the world out of freedom, as an act of choice, and if we make an act of choice using our minds, thinking, that makes us moderates no matter what we choose, because as we shall see, certain elements must go into that choice.

The mean itself is not absolute. The Rambam has many exceptions. Anger is an exception. One is supposed to be very restrained when it comes to anger. Humility is an exception; there are various means. The Chacham is right in the middle, the Chassid more of an extreme.

Whatever. The principle of moderation is simply not a mindless application of arithmetic to the formulation of character. Indeed the Rav, Rabbi Soloveitchik, is completely correct. The Rambam's outlook is dynamic. It encourages us to go from point to point, as long as we do so with complete awareness of the options. Not to go because I feel I want to go here and I stay there. Examine all the options, provided the options I am choosing are all within the consensus or agree with fundamental outlook. When I want to make a decision, say, on communal policy, I will consult all extremes, the extremes not including anti-semitism, not including the views of Jews for Jesus. These are outside the purview. So within the larger purview to consult all options, and as long as we are eventually and ultimately expressive of the position of the centre, this becomes the Derech HaShem.

The Rambam's Centrism is therefore different from what the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, meant by the Golden Mean. The Rambam means one engages all possibilities, both extreme positions and all that comes out of it, and out of this clash of opinions, out of this dialectic, there emerges a choice that is determined freely by a person's will and intellect rather than congenital character structure, personality structure.

This interpretation is at the least reasonable, because it demands that we use our minds. It prevents our being enchained by emotion, by impulse, external authority, social pressure. Moreover the weighing and the measuring, consulting all options before coming to a decision, as long as they do not violate this elementary consensus, paradoxically means the moderate is in some ways more extreme than the extremist. The extremist has one extreme. The moderate before coming to a decision must consult both extremes, and think, and then come to a decision.

I believe, b'Emuna shelema, that this kind of dynamic, really creative or radical moderationism leads us to a more certain grasp of the truth of Tora than a narrowly focused insistence on one value or one view alone. In a quaint comment on the Hebrew alphabet, the

Talmud in Shabbat 104 tells us that every letter stands for something. It is an Aggada, and it says something very interesting. When it comes to the last two letters of the alphabet the Talmud says Shin stands for Sheker, falsehood, lies. Tav, the last, stands for Emet, because Aleph-Mem-Tav, truth, ends with the letter Tav. What is the difference between sheker and emet? The Rabbis say:

Quote in Hebrew

Sheker is bunched together: in the alphabet Shin-Kuuf-Resh, which spell sheker, are close together. It is a narrow focus. Emet, truth, Aleph is the first letter of the alphabet, Mem is the middle, Tav is the end. If one takes only a narrow view, if one is exclusively focused on one view, one will achieve penetrating depth, but depth at the same time that it achieves depth also distorts, there is no perspective, no breadth, and without breadth then sheker, one is liable to come to a false conclusion. Whereas if one takes a wider broader scope, one goes from one extreme to the other, Aleph to Tav and the middle Mem - which stands for moderation - then one has Aleph-Mem-Tav, which covers the whole territory. That gives one perspective and even if one goes off the beaten track one will be pulled back to a way that allows one to be within the realm of truth.

I submit that this Moderationism has not only general relevance to Halacha, I think it lies at the heart of every great Posek or halachic decisor. A Posek is not a computer in human form who accesses an halachic database for the relevant opinions and offers them out as is without any minority of views, without insight into the unique human situation of the one who poses the question. A true classical Posek gathers all the authorities, all the extremes, all the minority views, all that comes between them. He relates them to the question or dilemma that is presented to him, and not only in a general way - for that one can be a Rosh Yeshiva. But as a Posek, as a decisor, as a judge, rather than as a professor, he has to relate it to the existential uniqueness of the situation. Someone comes to me with

a she'ela, I not only must consult the halacha; I must know who, what, when and where. Whom are we speaking of? What are the specifics of the situation? I must make judgements that cannot be trusted and trusted to a computer, so that an examination of the literature will yield generally a number of opinions, authoritative opinions, and a real Posek is never automatically a maykil or a machamir, lenient or stringent. Rather he understands the situation and is informed by the over-arching goals of Tora and the values that the Tora seeks to implant in the community. He will not, I believe, except in the most communally harmless of cases, seek "to fulfil all opinions", because that generally means that the most stringent recorded opinion always prevails. If it is something to do with whether a chicken is kosher or not, so be it. If it has to do with the destiny and life of a human being, so be it not.

This weighing, and measuring, and consideration of all viewpoints is the halachic implementation of moderationism. This is the way a Gadol acts. Let me give an example of how a Gadol can take a theme that I frankly would never dare if I were to pasken a she'ela, because I am not a gadol. I came across something this Passover; some people may think it trivial, I think it is great. It is by the Netziv, R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, the last great Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin, and within the past year or so we have celebrated his hundredth Yahrzeit, the centennial of his death. In one of his works, Meromei haSadeh, there is recorded a tshuva, the responsum that he wrote 103 years ago to his son, the great Rabbi Hayyim Berlin, who was not much younger than he. His son apparently was very stringent with regard to Maror on Pesach, the bitter herbs. He insisted that everyone had to eat a certain amount; he prefigured contemporary days, he anticipated what is happening today, he said that everyone had to eat a whole bunch of maror, and not only maror, the salad leaves, but chrane, the Jewish atom bomb. Everyone had to eat it, and eat a whole bunch of it. His father heard about it. Rav Hayyim Berlin at this time was a great rabbi, a gadol, and his father writes to him as follows:

Quote in Hebrew

"What his Honour, my son, may he live and be well, says: to eat chrane, I do not understand why you do not use salad" - Romanian lettuce - "as most authorities say that is good enough. And why should we be stringent to make people eat something like a sword cutting across the throat. 'Its ways are ways of pleasantness', the ways of the Tora are the ways of pleasantness, and certainly the night of Pesach, after people have fasted, and after they have been drinking wine, to make them have something as harsh as chrane, according to my humble opinion, my son, my distinguished son, should change his custom" - eat salad and forget about the chrane. 'Its ways are ways of pleasantness'.

It is not an example of extremism. It shows how in psak halacha too one has to have breadth and to know how to choose, and know how to consult - even as general a principle as 'Its ways are ways of pleasantness'.

So we have no apologies about the Maimonidean teaching of moderation for our policy of moderation in our time when it is so necessary, so noticeable by its absence. Extremism is rampant in our times and there are good reasons for it, unhappily. There are good reasons to it. These new expressions of zealotry are a reaction to so much of contemporary life that is vulgar and reprehensible and ugly, and there is so much vulgarity in our community. It is hard to fault those who reject the whole thing, who throw out the baby with the bathwater with unconcealed and indiscriminate contempt. But it is not good enough. The baby still is valuable. Moreover extremism is psychologically more sad(?) on both sides. Psychologically more satisfying? No. Extremism is easier to handle intellectually. It does not require making fine distinctions. It does not impose too much of burden of subtlety and evaluation. Simplism and extremism often go hand in hand. But one must always bear in mind what Nicholas Murray

Butler once said, that the extremes are "more logical and more consistent, but they are absurd".

Permit me to share an example of extremism on both sides that I personally experienced about six weeks ago. I was in Yerushalayim for Purim, that period; I attended the Prime Minister's Solidarity Conference. It was Ta'anit Esther, the day before Purim, actually in Yerushalayim two days before Purim, and the synagogue I attended had given me the wrong information about Shacharit, I walked out angry, hailed the first taxi and went to the Kotel. I come to the Kotel and there is a riot and I see the following. On the right side, in the ladies' section, there are a number of feminists wearing kipot and taleitim and with a Sefer Tora, and a number of Charedi ladies remonstrated with them very sharply and powerfully. On the other side of the mechitza the Charedim are gathering, and they are standing up on chairs and shouting: "Resha'im, resha'im". And one of them who apparently had mastered the English language a moment earlier said "Go home, go home, go home." Then it started. A few of the Charedim broke through the mechitza and ran towards the women. The Ministry of Religion's guards ran to tackle them, and for a moment I could not stop laughing. It reminded me of a football game gone whacky with many balls in play and tackling taking place all over the place. The guards were good, they stopped them. But one may broke through with a tallit over his head, picked up a chair, tossed it in the air, it fell in the midst of the women and one of them was taken to the hospital. At that point I was fed up, I had reached the limits of disgust, I could not bear it, I ran inside to the lower level and I put on tallit and t'fillin. As I finished putting on my t'fillin I suddenly felt sick. I looked up, next to me was a tall jew with a long white beard and I spoke to him in Yiddish, I said, "Reb Yid, Ich bin crank", "I feel sick"; I was afraid that if I was to faint he might think I was drunk or whatever. "No" he said, "you're not sick² - quick diagnosis. "What then?" "Tear gas", and I started to choke. I realised. It appeared the police had come, thrown tear gas, it had filtered in, had no place

years when they could not, they have established the norms. I am a guest and it is incumbent upon me as a matter of religious courtesy to abide by those norms."

I told those young reform students that when I was a practising rabbi, someone had asked me whether he could attend a barmitzva in Temple Emmanuel. I had said no, but he had gone. He came back and I asked him what happened. He told me he had decided to go, he felt guilty, and to wear his yarmulke. I said "And what happened?" He said "the usher came and tapped me on the shoulder and said 'Here the custom is not to do so. Either take it off or leave.'" He said "What do you think of that, Rabbi?", and I said "they are right. That is their custom. If you do not like it, leave. If you want to stay you take off your hat."

How can we survive as a people if during the time of the intifada, on the eve of Shamir coming to Washington to meet with the new Administration, at a time when the Prime Minister had called a Solidarity Conference, the charedim cannot contain themselves merely by shouting and have to act violent, take the extreme road to make a point? The women, granting them their point of view, I am not judging them one way or the other but let us say they are right in what they want, nothing better to do than to impose themselves upon people one day a year against people who are there all the time and who feel offended by it? This is the kind of extremism we could well do without. Both fail to understand that the kind of life we live, one must constrain oneself, one must understand the other point of view. One need not follow it, but there has to be understanding and moderation.

One of the greatest of the pre-World War II gedolim often unknown, often underrated, Rav Yosef Engel ztl once said the following. The Midrash says on the words of Bereshit "And G-d saw everything that he had made and behold it is very good". And the Midrash says, in a shocking statement, me'od zeh mavet, death. Death is very good.

to escape, and within a moment about thirty or forty people were there with me in tallit and t'fillin choking, because of the tear gas.

Comedy and tragedy always comingle and looking at that scene, a pun occurred to me. The men, the Charedim, thought the women were creating a den of iniquity, and the women thought the men had a den of inequity. But after this I am walking, very troubled, and two chardeim get hold of me and say they recognise me, "Reb Lamm, a chillul HaShem. Go back and tell them how these women have disgraced this holy place." "Really?" I say. "I think you disgraced this holy place. You break people's necks and break heads. Violence is darcha shel Tora?" They looked at me like crazy. They did not understand what I was talking about. I walk further, I wait for a taxi and I am accosted in a friendly way by two young men with small kipot. It turns out they are Reform seminary students studying in Israel whom the women had brought along as their unterferer, their guards, and they recognised me too. "What do you think, Dr Lamm?" "What do you think?" You see, middle of the road you get hit by everybody! I said "I think you people are crazy. I think you are absolutely mad, and you are at fault." "Why?" And they were willing to listen. And I told them. "You people, the women, all of you, want to come here to make a point about equality. You are entitled to your opinion. No one is arguing. But since when is a religious service, something spiritual, equality before G-d, accompanied by a New York Times reporter?", whom they had brought along and who splashed a picture on the front page of the New York Times. "And since when is it a mitzva to prove your equality to go ahead and create a riot? There are no places in Yerushalayim where you can davven by yourselves? And if you will say the Kotel belongs to all of us, I agree, but where is derech erez? I have not seen Reform men come here and make a minyan to davven bareheaded. They have the courtesy to know that if you come to a place where other people are there often, and regularly, then they establish the norms. You come as a guest, and when I come to the Kotel I come as a guest, and my charedi friends who are there for shacharit, mincha, ma'ariv, every day for some two thousand years, eighteen hundred years except for those few

What in heavens name does this mean? Rav Yosef Engel says the following, and it kind of summarises everything I am trying to say:

Quote in Hebrew

"Every me'od - every 'very' or 'very-ism' leads to death". Extremism is destructive. This was said not by a modern Centrist - those who go 'very very' are in trouble.

It is this moral recoil from the danger of extremism, the absurdity of extremism, of simplistic solutions, that as a Derech HaShem we absolutely must attempt to implant in our community. It is this Derech HaShem which is not just a matter of prudence, but a religious principle.

It means that every policy we take requires re-thinking. A moderate may never always give a moderate answer, because then he fails to think, he just measures. To weigh and to measure means to consider every problem afresh, and sometimes one may have to go to an extreme. It will be an extreme decision, but not an extreme misdecision, because one does not consistently follow one extreme at all times. One must re-think every problem as it comes us. And then what one does, what we do if we practise this kind of moderation, will require of us reason, intellectual competence, and not necessarily be dictated by some abstract mathematical formula.

Therefore, I believe that it is a major, major error to ascribe to this kind of moderation spinelessness or indifference. In today's environment, authentic moderation may appear to be, as it often does, an aberration, or at worse a lack of commitment. But that is not what moderation is or should be. It is not the result of guile, of politics. It is not the result of indifference, it is not the result of prudence. It is sacred principle.

It is not a parve form of orthodoxy, although I admit too many modern orthodox or centrist orthodox often give that impression. Moderation must never be a case of ideological wimpishness. Deliberation, thought, are all part of coming to a decision, but having come to a decision one must put one's whole heart into it. Napoleon once told his generals who were doubtful about conquering Vienna, "If you want to take Vienna, take Vienna. Think first, but having made your decision, all your heart and all your soul and all your might must go into that decision." The problem we have with moderation is either we do not think, or we do not stop thinking. But there comes a point when thought must give way to action, and when the neshama, the soul, must be grabbed up and put into the whole process.

I say to all of us, to all of you, to all of us, not to be disheartened by our minority status within World Jewry. Large numbers of Western Jews are marrying out and leaving the fold; it is a terrible, terrible problem. Within orthodoxy the more right-wing groups are experiencing a phase of confidence and growth, and may that increase be'Esrat HaShem and may we increase. We should not be deluded by the thought that numbers determine truth, or that those who are now triumphalist will necessarily triumph over the long haul. No one knows.

To conclude. Two days after the Symposium we celebrate Lag B'Omer, the yahrzeit of the great Tanna, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. The Zohar tells us the following tale about his death, which speaks volumes to us. The Zohar says the day that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was dying he was arranging his affairs. His Hevra - the Cabbalists, the Tannaim - came in to visit him, to bid him farewell. The house was full; people coming in to say farewell to Reb Shimon bar Yochai. Reb Shimon was lying in bed, he opened his eyes, took a look and saw the house was full, wall to wall. What was his reaction? He began to weep, and he said: 'Once before I was deathly ill and I thought I was going to die. Only one person came to see me, my great disciple Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, and when he came to see me I felt that a flame was enveloping him

right before me. That flame of his holiness remained with me all these years. Now I see that the house is full, but there is no flame.'

All the numbers in the world will not help if there is no fire in the belly. Being a majority is meaningless if there is no flame and there is no warmth, no hearts, no neshama. If there are only numbers - I do not care if it the United Synagogue, the Rabbinical Council, the Orthodox Union, the Federation - call it what one will. If all we have is numbers, we are in deep trouble. Numbers alone, even a full house, means nothing. It is a cause for weeping. Unless we have the fire, the commitment, the depth of dedication and love which will make a Rabbi Shimon smile again and feel that that flame is there and ready.

The Derech HaShem that was imparted to Avraham Avinu on the eve of the great cataclysm of antiquity has got to remain our guiding principle, provided that we do it with dedication, with belief, with emuna - in the highest sense of the word, with courage - the willingness to risk not only criticism but abuse. Then we will make a major contribution to Tora Judaism and to Israel in these volcanically unstable times.

I believe be'Emuna Shelema in the marriage of moderation and passion, of fairness and fervour, of deliberation and dedication, of reasonableness and resolve, of a cool head and a warm heart. Let us stop being defensive and apologetic, and silent and apprehensive, and shy. Moderation is the Derech yesharim, the way of those who aspire to march straight towards the goal of all Am Yisrael lovingly re-accepting the Tora, re-establishing a Shalom amongst all Jews, and eventually among all the world.