Chapter 3
If I Am Only for Myself, Who Am I?

Volunteering and Righteousness in Judaism

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Introduction

When I was asked to contribute to this anthology with an article on religion and volunteering in Jewish tradition, I had to devote some time to pondering what such an article might focus on. Both terms seemed problematic from a traditional Jewish point of view.

Let us start with "religion". When we take as our point of departure such pairs as "religion and volunteering", "religion and politics", "religion and sexuality", etc., then our primary assumption is that these two things are separate and can be related to one another. Sexuality, politics and volunteering are NOT part of what we define as religion, although we recognize that religion can be a value system and a set of traditions that can influence groups and individuals into assuming views concerning, for instance, what proper sexuality is, what political values a just society should be based upon and what the value of volunteering might be. When we use such pairs, we conceive of religion as something quite narrow, largely connected with faith, ritual behaviour and perceptions of the supernatural. In other words, a definition that fits most neatly with mainstream Protestant Christianity in a modern, secularized society. It is then fitting to recognize that with respect to the bulk of the history of humankind, this is not a suitable definition of the concept religion. A far more common view has been to understand religion (or related terms referring to this phenomenon that is so hard to define) as a much more broad term, referring not only to ideas about supernatural and ritual practices but also a set of values and prescribed behaviours for every facet of life, both of the individual and of the group.[1] This is definitely the case with the majority of forms of Judaism that have emerged throughout history.

[1] The difficulties concerning the use of the term religion is a long-standing debate within the field of Religious Studies, see for instance most recently Schalk (2013).

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With this broader definition of religion, the term "volunteering" also becomes problematic. A minimal definition of volunteering would be to do something voluntarily, without being paid for it. Many of the things that in modern scholarship are treated under the heading "volunteering", such as, for instance, caring for the poor and sick, would in Jewish tradition fall under the heading of *mitzvah* meaning "commandment". This means that, from a Biblical point of view, it is not something that you are doing voluntarily, out of the goodness of your heart, but rather something you are commanded to do, on a par with keeping the Sabbath and circumcising your male children. Already in the Talmud, however, the term *mitzvah* rather means "good deed", something that earns merit, and not just a commandment that should be kept by all, which makes it more compatible with the discourse on "volunteering" (Rothkoff 2007a).

Judaism as a religious tradition also presents its difficulties when compared to other religions. Being Jewish is not determined by beliefs or behaviour but by lineage (or conversion). Where you locate yourself on the diverse map of Jewish identities, however, is determined by your adherence to prescribed practices. This means that it is not your religion that moves you to fulfill the commandments, fulfilling the commandments is the most important part of your religion. It can perhaps be compared to different ways of understanding parenting. One way of understanding parenting is that you care for your children because it is your duty as a parent. Another way of seeing it is that it is caring for your children that makes you a parent, rather than just the biological or legal status.

From an outsider's point of view, living your life according to traditional Jewish law may seem daunting, with its attention to minute details in life: what to eat, how to dress, how to interact with other people, when to work and when to rest, how to have sex, how to comply with the ritual life and compulsory prayers, etc. An insider's point of view can be different: All those things provide opportunities for a person to recall his or her Jewish identity as belonging to the Jewish people and being in a covenant with God. Once again returning to the analogy of parenthood: The everyday duties of parenting can be onerous but they also serve to remind us of the joy and privilege of being a parent.

In spite of this, there are of course similarities between voluntary work for the needy in Jewish and non-Jewish traditions. As a minority, Jews have always been influenced by their non-Jewish surroundings. For instance, in the Middle Ages, much charity work was done by various charitable societies that collected contributions from fellow Jews, in a similar way to comparable societies in the Christian world. Likewise, middle-class Jewish women in the nineteenth century dedicated their time to charitable organizations just like their non-Jewish counterparts (Berman et al. 2007). Still, there are some particular characteristics in Jewish tradition which are visible in religious volunteerism today.

The title of this chapter comes from a longer quote, attributed to the first century rabbi Hillel. "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am [only] for myself, who am I? If not now, when?" (Mishnah Avot 1: 14). It is found in one of the most well-known and beloved texts in Jewish tradition, *PirqeAvot*, *The sayings of the fathers*. It seems to express the necessity of combining caring for one's own needs

and caring for the needs of others, and that this duty is incumbent upon each and every individual, in each generation.

In this chapter, I discuss three important commandments in Jewish tradition that all deal with caring for the needs of others: caring for the poor, the dead and the sick. I will discuss their textual background, how they have developed in rabbinic and medieval times and how they have translated into what might be understood as religious volunteerism in the Israel of the twenty-first century. I will focus in particular on voluntary work initiated and performed by members of Israel's ultraorthodox (Haredi) community. The situation in Israel differs from that of diaspora Jewish communities in the rest of the world in two important aspects: (1) The state of Israel is the only country in the world where the Jews are a majority. It is therefore interesting to analyse how values and structures concerning charity and voluntary work that have been formed in a minority situation have developed in Israel. (2) Israel is the country in the world with the highest percentage of Haredi Jews in the population. The discussion on these particular voluntary organizations cannot therefore be transferred directly to Jewish diaspora communities that form a small minority in their countries and contain a much smaller percentage of Haredi Jews.

Volunteerism in Israel

When you sit at a regular Jerusalem bus stop, you can let your eyes wander over a number of notices for organizations seeking *mitnadvim*, volunteers. According to the umbrella website Volunteering in Israel, there are 24,000 volunteer organizations in Israel (http://www.ivolunteer.org.il/eng/).

In his article "Reflections on the voluntary non-profit sector in Israel. An international perspective", Ralph M. Kramer distinguishes three major international trends during the decades after World War II:

- An increase in the number and type of voluntary non-profit organizations (VNPOs)
- That governments use them to a higher degree, which leads to a mutual dependency
- A fading of the boundaries between the public and private sectors (Kramer 1994, p. 255)

All three trends are visible in Israel, and increasingly so since the publication of Kramer's article.

Kramer identifies three characteristics where VNPOs in Israel differ from those in most other countries:

1. Unlike in other countries, the formation of VNPOs in Israel predates the formation of the state. Many such organizations were founded already during the British mandate, as part of preparing for the creation of a Jewish state. Since such organizations were founded by different Jewish groups with different visions

of the future state, it also helps explain the continued presence of two separate streams of volunteerism in Israel: one (orthodox/ultraorthodox) religious and another secular. At the beginning of the existence of the state, volunteerism decreased momentarily, as many people felt that these responsibilities should now be assumed by the state. Soon, however, voluntary activities were on the rise again (Jaffe 1991, p. 196). This long-term perspective means that some of the VNPOs provide more stability in their services than the state. The policy-making process in Israel on matters of welfare and health generally lacks long-term planning, partly due to the political situation with a rapid succession of unstable governments and a multitude of political parties and alliances, some of short duration (Yishai 1990, p. 226). Many voluntary organizations, however, are short-lived; almost 60 % last less than 10 years. If they make it past the 10-year mark, however, they can show impressive longevity (*Israel's third sector at a glance* 2007).

2. There is a characteristic blurring of the boundaries between public and private, state and society and religion and state, where the state is involved in every aspect of society and religious groups exercise great influence over government, national as well as local.
3. Unlike VNPOs in Europe, those in Israel depend to a large extent on economic contributions from abroad and are therefore not as dependent on contributions from their own government. Still, a particular tactic often employed by Israeli VNPOs is to "create facts on the ground", meaning that they initiate projects which they later expect the government to help finance (Kramer 1994, p. 257 f.).

The third sector in Israel is large. During the 1980s, when volunteerism grew in many countries with diverse welfare systems and political cultures, this happened in Israel as well (Kramer 1994, p. 255). A study published in 1985 showed that the expenditure of VNPOs corresponded to almost 8 % of gross national product (GNP), which was twice as much as, for instance, in the USA or the UK. VNPOs provided more than half of the social services (Kramer 1994, p. 255). A study of non-profit and nongovernmental organizations from 2002 shows that the third sector had been growing continuously since the 1990s, its expenditure in 2002 corresponding to 13.3 % of Israel's gross domestic product (GDP) (*Israel's third sector at a glance* 2007).

In a survey done in 2006, 16 % of the respondents were at that moment volunteering and 28 % had done so in the past. The average amount of time given was 11 h per week (Bar-Ilan and Azoulay 2012, p. 1148). The rates of volunteering increased by 40 % between 1996 and 2006 (*Israel's third sector at a glance* 2007). A new survey from 2008 showed that nearly half of the adult population (48 %) "participated in volunteer-related activities, both formal and informal". The most important motive for volunteering was, according to the respondents, that "volunteering makes for a better society" (85.1 %). The statement "Volunteering corresponds to my religious beliefs" (Haski-Leventhal et al. 2011) was agreed by 39.6%.

Of particular interest for this study is that the religious Israelis, and in particular the Haredi community, stand out in the statistics with a much higher rate of voluntary activity, as well as monetary donations to VNPOs, than the rest of the Israeli

public. This is also noteworthy because it goes against another demographic characteristic that the rich tend to volunteer more than the less affluent (*Israel's third sector at a glance* 2007). This pattern is also known from other contexts (Hustinx et al. 2010, p. 422). The Haredi community, however, has a high percentage of poor families (see below) yet are the ones that volunteer the most among Jewish Israelis. This seems to indicate that Haredi religious identity is an important factor that contributes to the willingness to volunteer.

This contradiction is also substantiated by another recent study of the founders of non-profit organizations in Israel. It shows that there are two distinct groups among the founders: The founders of nonreligious organizations tend to have a level of education and income that was significantly higher than those of the founders of religious organizations (Ben-Nun 2010).

The Haredi Community in Israel

Religion in Israel is anything but a private matter. Religious parties influence government policies, all matters of family law are administered by religious authorities and paid for by the taxpayers and religious institutions, holy sites and places of religious education are maintained and operated, at least in part, with taxpayers' money (Jaffe 1991, p. 201). This also means that the particular lifestyle cherished by the Haredi population would not be possible, were it not for state subsidies and exemptions.

The Haredi community makes up 6–10% of the population. It is however, growing as a proportion of the Jewish population due to its birth rates (on average 7.7 children per family, compared to 2.6 for the Israeli population as a whole).

The Haredi community life centers around the yeshiva, the institute for religious learning. All adult men belong to a yeshiva and are ideally required to spend as much of their time there as possible, preventing them from working in regular jobs as well as from serving in the army. The ideal for members of the Haredi community is to live their entire life within their community with as little contact with the non-Haredi world as possible, since it is perceived as having a negative influence (Stadler et al. 2011, p. 140 f.). The Haredi women receive a more secular education and do not have access to the yeshivot, thus usually being the principal breadwinners of the Haredi families.

Although members of the Haredi community see themselves as the continuation of an unbroken Jewish tradition, in reality the idea that all men should study full time for the better part of their adult lives is something unique in Jewish history. That has been a privilege granted only to a select few in earlier epochs (Stadler 2009, p. 39).

Among non-Haredi Israelis, there has been a growing animosity against the Haredi community. They have been seen as parasites because they do not serve in the army nor participate in the labour market, which makes them dependent on subsidies from the state (Stadler 2009).

The animosity is mutual as Haredis feel hostile towards non-Haredis. Nurit Stadler, an Israeli sociologist who has conducted 10 years of fieldwork among

Haredi yeshiva students, describes the Haredi's view of themselves in relation to the non-Haredi Jewish world thus:

> Haredi members regard anyone who accepts the legitimacy of modern culture as being essentially anti-Jewish and therefore a potentially contaminating influence. Haredim [Hebrew plural for members of the Haredi community] rationalize their scriptural choices by seeing themselves as the elite whose piety will save all Jews (Stadler 2009, p. 9).

There are numerous volunteering associations in the Haredi community specializing in various kinds of charitable work: helping the poor, orphans, widows, sick, disabled, etc. (Stadler et al. 2005, p. 634). As stated above, the members of the Haredi community rank well above other Israelis in their tendency to volunteer.

Sociologist Richard Shure has pointed to three factors that tend to enhance volunteering:

1. Individual and group norms
2. Sense of empathy
3. Guiding universal principles (Shure 1991)

All three would seem to fit with the Haredi example. Their lifestyle is to a great extent determined by group norms. The fact that in many cases they are both recipients and providers of the voluntary services would serve to strengthen the sense of empathy with the people being helped through the voluntary service. The strong religious identity of the group would provide the guiding universal principles that would be conducive to volunteering.

Various scholars have, during the last decade, pointed to what seem to be radical changes in attitudes within the Haredi community. This is seen, for instance, in an increased interest in doing military service or working in regular jobs, using new technology like computers and DVDs, and participation in voluntary organizations that would entail contacts with the non-Haredi public (Stadler 2009, p. 50 f.). The examples I will discuss can be seen as signs of these changes.

Caring for the Poor

I remember a sermon I heard in a Jerusalem synagogue in 2001. The country was suffering from the economic effects of the Al-Aqsa intifada, the Palestinian uprising. Tourism had plummeted due to the unstable security situation. Some countries had started to recommend their citizens not to visit the region. The Israeli newspapers were reporting an increase in the number of Israeli children under the statistical poverty line. In this liberal, progressive synagogue, some of the members had decided that they needed to get involved in the fight against poverty, and they started by investigating what was already being done. I recall how the rabbi told us of his surprise when he discovered that the work towards alleviating poverty in Israel was totally dominated by Haredi organizations. His explanation: The ultraorthodox had kept the traditional Jewish community structure which existed everywhere in the diaspora prior to the formation of the state of Israel, where the

community as a whole was responsible for caring for their needy. The present lack of more progressive or secular Jews in this field, he explained, was because: "We somehow expected the state to take care of that."

The Hebrew Bible stresses in many passages the responsibility to provide for the poor, for instance: "The poor will never cease from the land. For this reason God commands you: 'You shall surely open your hand to your brother, to the poor and the needy in your land'" (Deut. 15: 11). Among those that are frequently mentioned as in need of aid are the orphans, widows and strangers (Deut. 14: 29; 16: 11, 14; 26: 12, 13).

The Hebrew Bible also institutes a system designed to prevent exaggerated differences between rich and poor, the sabbatical year. Every 7th year, the land shall rest and no crops shall be planted. During that year all debts are also cancelled (Lev. 25: 2–6; Deut. 15: 1–6). Every 50th year is a jubilee year when slaves shall be freed and all land shall return to its original owners (Lev. 25: 10).

The Hebrew word that comes closest to charity is *tsedakah*. Its connotations are, however, different from the word charity. Charity comes from the Latin word *caritas,* meaning "love". Charity in Christian tradition has meant voluntary acts done on behalf of the needy out of love. *Tsedakah* on the other hand comes from the root צדק meaning "to be correct". This means that charity in Jewish tradition is understood as "the correct thing to do", "justice". The word is also related to words like *tsaddik* "righteous one", meaning that to be righteous is to do what is right, amongst other things, to give to the needy what is needed. Righteousness in Jewish tradition does not therefore merely require one to refrain from doing what is evil but also to do what is good and required and to constantly pursue justice (Jacobs and Szubin 2007; Levitats 2007, p. 569; Friedman 2003).

Tsedakah is seen as something that benefits the needy, the giver, and ultimately the whole (Jewish) world. It is said to be as important as all of the other commandments put together (Babylonian Talmud, BT Baba Batra 9a). It causes the giver's sons to become wise, wealthy and learned (Babylonian Talmud, BT Baba Batra 9a). It atones for sin and hastens redemption (Baba Batra 9a and 10a).

During the Middle Ages, the forms that charity took in the Jewish communities became more set:

1. Every community collected money in a charity box (*kuppah*).
2. The needy also received other gifts, for instance clothing and food, the latter often through a soup kitchen (*tamchui*).
3. There was an association for burial, the *chevra kaddisha* (more on that below).
4. There was an association for visiting and caring for the sick, *bikkur cholim* (more on that below) (Ben-Sasson and Levitats 2007, p. 572).

In the so-called Genizah documents, found in a repository in the old synagogue in Cairo, reflecting Jewish life around the Mediterranean between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, charity plays a prominent part. Collecting charity was the privilege of the leader of the community, and being able to do so was a sign of good leadership. The collection of charity was done in a ritual setting, accompanied by the taking out of the Torah scrolls from the tabernacle in the synagogue and the reading of

special prayers. It also served to reinforce hierarchies within the community since the size of each donation was announced publicly (Frenkel 2009, p. 361).

Back to the present and the organizations fighting poverty in Israel today. Poverty is a problem that has grown in Israel during the past decades, partly in the wake of the deterioration of the economy during the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The 1970s was the golden age of the Israeli welfare state when new social security programs where launched and benefits increased. The expansion ended in the 1980s (Rosenhek 2011, pp. 71, 76). Starting in the year 2000, Israel went through a radical transformation of its welfare system resulting in drastic cuts, for instance in children's allowances, income support and old age pensions. From 2000 to 2003 the rate of poor families (with a net income of 50 % or less of the national median net income) rose from 17.6 to 19.3 %. Among large families (four or more children) it rose from an already high 41.8 to 48.9 % (Silber and Sorin 2006, p. 253 ff.). The changes in the welfare system should not only be connected to a strained economy but also to the increased influence of neoliberal ideologies that support individualism, privatization, deregulation and reduced government spending (Rosenhek 2011, p. 76).

A comparison between the new non-profit organizations that were registered between 1996 and 2005 shows that the section dealing with welfare and health has grown, compared to earlier periods, as a response to the harsh economic conditions and the decreased commitment on behalf of the government in this area (*Israel's third sector at a glance* 2007).

This means that if Haredi organizations bear a large share of the work against poverty in Israel, the Haredi community also constitutes a large proportion of the recipients of various form of aid, since Haredi families are most likely to be among the bulk of those large families that have such a high rate of poverty. This means that the Haredi voluntary work among the poor is to a large extent directed towards members of their own community.

Caring for the Dead

Haredi volunteers do not merely care for the living though. An area where members of the Haredi community come into contact with the non-Haredi Israeli world is in the care for the dead.

One of the most well-known Israeli, religious volunteer organizations is called ZAKA. It comprises about 1500 volunteers, most of them Haredi men, who assist in the rescue and recovery of victims of sudden death, for instance in terror attacks and natural disasters.[2] The abbreviation stands for *zihui qorbanot ason* ("identification of victims of disaster"), and whereas regular emergency teams focus on aiding the wounded, ZAKA members also painstakingly gather all scattered body parts,

[2] According to their webpage, ZAKA also has a "minorities unit" that is formed by members of non-Jewish groups, "especially the Druses of the north and the Bedouins in the south", that can assist in performing the same services for members of their groups.

including blood, in order to give the victims a proper Jewish burial. The members themselves talk about their work as *chesed shel emet* ("true kindness") since they regard the service they provide a true kindness in the sense that the victims they assist in burial will never be able to repay them nor even express gratitude (www.zaka.org.il, Hebrew, www.zaka.us or www.zaka.org.uk, English).

The members of ZAKA are trained not only in the ritual aspects of their work but also in the scientific aspects of identification of bodies and body parts, for instance through finger prints, dental records and DNA.

ZAKA functions in Israel but has occasionally sent delegations to other countries where Jews have been killed in terror attacks. ZAKA also organizes volunteer lawyers who assist bereaved families in matters relating to "honouring the dead", for instance legal action in order to prevent autopsies or dealing with bureaucracy and legal authorities in order to shorten the time until the funeral.

One would expect the service provided by ZAKA to be problematic for its volunteers for three main reasons:

- *Haredi seclusion:* Members of the Haredi community generally prefer to have minimal contact with the non-Haredi public. Unlike most Haredi volunteering organizations, ZAKA do not focus on the members of the community.
- *Torah studies:* Haredi men are expected to spend their time exclusively on Torah studies, and any interruption of their sacred studies is considered to be a sin (Stadler et al. 2005, p. 627). Members of ZAKA, however, must be ready to abandon their studies at any time, for instance if there is a terror attack that demands their service (Stadler 2006, p. 847).
- *Purity/impurity:* From a traditional Jewish point of view, any contact with a dead body renders a person ritually impure (Heilman 2001, p. 25).

When the organization was first founded in 1995, many religious leaders of the Haredi community condemned ZAKA as a sin, claiming that the fact that the volunteers interacted with persons and organizations outside of their own group was a threat to the Haredi community (Stadler et al. 2005, p. 624). Over time, however, this has changed.

Scholars have explained the willingness to volunteer for ZAKA and the now benign attitude of the Haredi leadership in ways that should probably be seen as complimentary:

- ZAKA has been seen by non-Haredi Israelis as "good" Haredis, which has improved the status and image of the group in the eyes of other Israelis. Stadler has therefore interpreted the involvement in ZAKA as another type of "national service" in the eyes of the Israeli public and of the volunteers themselves, and as something that compensates for their refusal to participate in the mandatory military service. Some of the volunteers also express this idea themselves (Stadler et al. 2005, p. 637).
- The representatives of ZAKA themselves, however, rather cite religious reasons for their service, talking about showing care for all human beings as well as expressing Jewish solidarity (Stadler et al. 2005, p. 635).

- The work in ZAKA can be understood as a way of constructing a form of pious masculinity, which differs from the ideal of the pious Torah scholar and resembles ideas associated with the courageous soldier among the non-Haredi public (Aran et al. 2008).

The development of ZAKA could be seen as an extension of another field where the Haredi community holds an exclusive position in Israel: that of burials. The intricate demands of Jewish law when it comes to the handling of corpses require a high level of expertise. This area has therefore become an exclusively Haredi domain in Israel where they have established traditional communal burial societies that handle the burials of all Jewish Israeli citizens (Stadler et al. 2005, p. 628). The task to escort the dead to their graves is considered as a great *mitzvah* (meritorious deed), so great that it even warrants the interruption of Torah studies (Stadler et al. 2005, p. 632). These two services taken together have elevated the Haredi community in Israel to an exclusive position as specialists on death.

One important aspect of Jewish burial traditions is that the body is to be buried as intactly as possible, which explains the labour ZAKA dedicates to collecting and identifying fragments of bodies at sites of terror attacks and disasters (Stadler 2006, p. 841).

In interviews, ZAKA volunteers stressed three religious interpretations of their service:

1. A comparison between dead bodies in a terror scene and a burning Torah scroll
2. The commandment concerning respect for the dead (*kvod ha-met*)
3. The concept of "true kindness" (*chesed shel emet*) (Stadler 2006, p. 844)

The informants explain the gathering of the body parts through the logic of the sacrificial system of the Temple (Stadler 2006, p. 847). Stadler does not comment further on this but it is possible that this should be connected to another feature of Israeli religious discourse on the victims of terrorism: that they are martyrs, claiming for instance that they have died *al qiddush ha-Shem*, for the sanctification of God. Concerning Jewish martyrs there is a long-standing tradition, going back to the Middle Ages and the persecutions of the Jews during the First Crusade, to portray the death of the martyr in sacrificial terms (Roos 2006).

In the Middle Ages the association responsible for burial was the most influential one in the Jewish community, so much so that the generic name *chevra kaddisha* ("holy society") in time came to refer exclusively to this association. (Ben-Sasson and Levitats 2007, p. 572). During the High Middle Ages there were generally several different associations in a community, each responsible for the burial of its own members. In the sixteenth century we find sources that mention associations responsible for the burial of all Jews in the community (Rabinowitz and Goldberg 2007, p. 81 f.).

The most important task of the *chevra kaddisha* was to prepare corpses for burial according to the appropriate laws and making sure the body of the dead was treated with proper respect. Membership in the *chevra kaddisha* was considered to be an honour. Women were not allowed to be members, nor bachelors, that is, not until

the modern era, and then only in progressive branches of Judaism (Rabinowitz and Goldberg 2007, p. 82).

The service of the *chevra kaddisha* is sometimes referred to as *gemilut chasadim* "the bestowal of kindness". This is the most general of Jewish virtues towards others since it encompasses all forms of kind deeds done on behalf of a fellow human being. In the Mishnah it is mentioned as one of the three pillars of Judaism that serve to uphold the world, beside Torah and prayer (MishnaAvot 2: 1). *Gemilut chasadim* is a broader term than *tsedakah*:

- *Tsedakah* can only be given with money or other material things, *gemilut chasadim* can also be services.
- *Tsedakah* can only be given to the poor, *gemilut chasadim* to poor or rich.
- *Tsedakah* can only be given to the living, *gemilut chasadim* to the living or the dead. (Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 49b).

Already the eleventh-century commentator Rashi denotes the paying of respect to the dead as the only truly altruistic *gemilut chasadim*, since the giver cannot hope that the recipient might one day do him a kindness in return (Levitats and Rabinowits 2007, p. 428).

Recruitment to ZAKA has some similarities to recruitment to a *chevra kaddisha*. The volunteers must be married. It is a position of honour and the recruitment is selective. Not everyone is perceived to "have what it takes" (Stadler et al. 2005, p. 630).

ZAKA is guided by rabbis who instruct the volunteers on the ritual aspects of their work but who also make decisions on matters of Jewish law when that is required. For instance, as regards working on the Sabbath, at first the rabbis only allowed the assistance to survivors, not the removal of bodies. Since then the position of ZAKA has changed and they now also remove bodies on the Sabbath, citing *kvod hamet* ("the honour of the dead") as an overriding principle that allows this (Stadler et al. 2005, p. 631).

Stadler also connects the development of ZAKA to another trend that is visible in the Haredi community. The community, which traditionally has been largely anti- or at least a-Zionist, is becoming more nationalistic and more inclined towards contributing to the state of Israel, as can be seen, for example, in a growing tendency to do military service and work in regular jobs (Stadler 2006, p. 840; Stadler et al. 2008).

Caring for the Sick

One final area where Haredi volunteers are also active is in the care for the sick and the example we will discuss is the organization Yad Sarah. Yad Sarah ("Sarah's hand") is the largest non-profit organization in Israel, organizing more than 6,000 volunteers, both Haredi and non-Haredi. It provides a wide range of services, one of its main goals being to care for sick and elderly in their homes rather than in institutions (www.yadsarah.org; Mann 1997).

Yad Sarah was founded in the 1970s, originally in order to loan medical equipment to persons and families who needed them, for instance vaporizers, crutches and wheelchairs. In the foundation narrative of the organization, it all started when the founder Uri Lupolianski had to borrow a vaporizer from a neighbour for his sick child. Realizing the scarcity of vaporizers, he bought a couple in order to be able to loan them to other families. From there the services expanded.

Yad Sarah has grown during the beginning of the twenty-first century in response to the reduction in the support for the needy provided by the state. Reports have indicated that during the past decade every other Israeli family has been helped by the organization (Stadler et al. 2011, p. 149).

The duty to visit the sick, *bikkur cholim*, was one of the traditional duties incumbent upon the Jewish community as a whole. God himself visited Abraham when he was recovering from circumcision and all Jews are commanded to follow this example (Rothkoff 2007b). According to the Talmud, this was one of the good deeds that produced rewards in this world, and even more so in the world to come (Babylonian Talmud Shab. 127a). Merely visiting was not considered enough to fulfill this *mitzvah*; one should also try to meet the material needs of the sick person (Rothkoff 2007b).

In the webpage of Yad Sarah, however, there are no references to *halacha*, *mitzvot* or to Jewish traditions generally concerning the responsibility for caring for the sick. Instead, terms like "mutual social responsibility" and "warm humanity" are used in their vision statement. The organization was not named after the matriarch Sarah, wife of Abraham, but rather after the founder's grandmother who died in the holocaust ("Yad" can mean either "hand" or "memorial". Yad Sarah may therefore also be translated as "Sarah's memorial"). The fact that the public image of the organization is so much less religious and less connected to Jewish tradition than ZAKA should probably be ascribed to the fact that they employ many non-Haredi volunteers and also provide long-term services to many non-Haredi, nonreligious and even non-Jewish families.

Its founder Uri Lupoliansky, however, does connect the services to Jewish charitable traditions:

> Judaism teaches us to respect and care for every human being, created in the image of God. But the Jewish concept of chesed goes beyond that: We should actively seek out ways to help. (Coopersmith and Simmons 2003)

> One of the most fundamental ideas of a vibrant Jewish community involves the idea of voluntarism on all levels. It is the spirit of the dedicated volunteer that has bound the Jewish community together through the centuries…In Jerusalem, the Yad Sarah organization, which supplies every level of service to people with special needs, represents one of the shining examples of voluntarism. (Article in The Jewish News Weekly, 30 May, 2003, quoted in Stadler et al. 2011, p. 150 f.)

Yad Sarah has expanded into the international arena, developing aid programs and courses in Angola, Cameroon, Jordan, South Korea and China. They also sent aid to the survivors of hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005 (Stadler et al. 2011, p. 152).

Whereas ZAKA is an exclusively male organization, Yad Sarah also organizes women volunteers and is therefore an important source of contact with the non-Haredi world for Haredi women. Yad Sarah is yet another example of how members of the ultraorthodox Jewish community break their seclusion and begin to interact with secular Israelis, in a way which is still perceived as acceptable according to the value system of their community.

Fundamentalist Influence in Modern Societies

Stepping back and viewing these three types of voluntary work, we can note a shift towards a greater interaction with the non-Haredi public. Whereas many of the organizations that work to alleviate poverty mainly work within the Haredi community, the work of ZAKA and Yad Sarah benefits all Israelis, Haredi as well as non-Haredi. Through voluntary work in organizations like Yad Sarah and ZAKA, the members of the Haredi community have increased their contacts with non-Haredi Israelis. Such volunteer organizations have also served to improve the image of the Haredi community in the eyes of non-Haredi Israelis and, in part, to counter accusations of parasitism.

It is interesting to note that in this development, the Haredi community in Israel have increased their influence in Israeli society in a way which much resembles developments in other contemporary fundamentalist and/or militant religious movements, for instance the Hizballah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine and the Hindu-nationalist movement in India (usually referred to as *hindutva*, "Hinduness"). These movements have stepped in and provided basic social services such as health, welfare and education in situations where the state has failed to provide adequately for its citizens. This increased influence has in turn paved the way for increased political influence resulting, for instance, in Atal Bihari Vajpayee, leader of the Hindu-nationalist party BJP having been elected prime minister three times and in Hamas winning the Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006 (Knudsen 2005; Flanigan 2006). Similar strategies have been employed by organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the orthodox religious party Shas in Israel, both of them eventually gaining major political influence. Shas became the third largest party in the parliamentary elections of 2006 and the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate Mohamed Morsi was elected president in 2012 (Davis and Robinson 2009).

The relationship between charitable organizations and religiously motivated fundamentalist/militant groups can be understood in different ways:

1. Charitable work and fundamentalist/militant movements can be seen as two ways of addressing the shortcomings of a given society, for instance in providing for the needs of a minority.
2. Charitable work can be a way of gaining wider acceptance among groups that would otherwise not support a fundamentalist/militant cause but who become dependent on the services they provide (Flanigan 2006).

In this connection we can note that in 1994 Yad Sarah was awarded the Israel Prize, the highest civilian honour given in Israel and that in 2003 its founder, Uri Lupolianski, was elected the first Haredi mayor of Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, relations between the Haredi and the non-Haredi population have been notoriously tense. The Haredis make up a growing proportion of Jerusalem's population, about one third in 2005 (Erlanger 2005). Jerusalem is also one of the two cities (with Tel Aviv) that have the highest concentration of non-profit organizations (*Israel's third sector at a glance* 2007). The election of a Haredi mayor would probably not have been possible without the increased Haredi influence in Israeli society and their improved image, partly as the result of these voluntary organizations.

Conclusions

The extent of the voluntary services offered by Israeli Haredis in three areas: Caring for the poor, the dead and the sick provides clear examples of how premodern Jewish traditions of volunteerism have translated into new forms in the present. It represents a religiously anchored response to the failure of the secular Israeli state in providing its citizens with basic services. At the same time, this voluntary work has increased contacts between the Haredi community and the non-Haredi public, and improved the image of the Haredis in the eyes of many non-Haredi Israelis. Also at the same time, the work of these voluntary organizations have extended the influence of the Haredi community on Israeli society as a whole and its work could be compared to that done by other fundamentalist religious movements, which, over time, has paved the way for increased political influence as well.

Utilitarian analyses of volunteerism often stress the benefits for the volunteer: What rewards can he or she expect from this apparently altruistic act: from individuals, from society and from God (Haski-Leventhal 2009, p. 274). This perspective can help in understanding the tendency among Haredis to volunteer. The short- and long-term rewards expected are clear. There is a tradition of reciprocal help within the Haredi community, so the giver of help may someday be the receiver of help from a voluntary organization. Voluntary work enhances the status of the volunteers within Haredi society. In addition to this, the work of these volunteers benefits the image of the Haredi community among non-Haredi Israelis, which in turn could also provide rewards for the whole of the Haredi community. Finally, there is a theological understanding that a pious life, for instance by fulfilling the commandments of caring for the poor, the sick and the dead, will provide rewards in this world as well as in the world to come.

Another key to understanding Haredi volunteerism is provided by the discipline of social psychology which has related volunteering to community: Volunteering strengthens a sense of community, and a strong sense of community is also a factor that tends to increase the likelihood of a high index of voluntary work

in a group (Haski-Leventhal 2009, p. 279). The Haredi community is characterized by the marked presence of reciprocal services. Members of the community help each other and feel a responsibility for one another. Since charitable work is seen as a sign of piety, the community also provides a framework that awards status to a person who engages in such work. The extension of its charitable services outside the Haredi community, as seen in the examples above, can also be understood as a way of expanding the community. Instead of primarily caring for members of the Haredi community and avoiding contacts with non-Haredis, this new tendency can be seen as a way of including all of the Israeli population in the perceived responsibility of the Haredis. This blurring of the boundaries between Haredis and non-Haredis can also be seen in the growing involvement of Haredis in politics, the labour market, the military services and other aspects of Israeli civic society. It is possible that these are signs of a gradual shift in strategy on the part of the Haredi leadership. Instead of closing the community to external influences, there is a greater acceptance of contacts with non-Haredi Israelis, which may be based on a strategy of trying to steer Israeli society as a whole more towards Haredi ideals, such as, for instance, keeping the Sabbath or observing separation between the sexes. Such a strategy would be logical since the Haredi portion of the population is growing.

One final aspect that needs to be taken into account is the question of volunteering and identity. Research has shown that religious affiliation tends to increase the tendency to volunteer. Religious affiliation strengthens the feeling of community and that very community reinforces the value of volunteering and of charitable works (Haski-Leventhal 2009, p. 283). In accordance with what I argued in the beginning of this chapter, performing charitable acts is seen as an integral part of Haredi religious identity. Performing such acts therefore confirms one as belonging to the Haredi community. You do not do what is right because you are Haredi. Doing what is right is what makes you Haredi. Confirming the value of such acts by awarding status to those who perform them also ensures that this value continues to be upheld.

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