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Meaning Making Under the Sacred Canopy:  
The Role of Orthodox Jewish  
Marriage Guidebooks

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# Meaning Making Under the Sacred Canopy: The Role of Orthodox Jewish Marriage Guidebooks<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

Marriage guidebooks for Orthodox Jews in Israel have become increasingly popular over the past few years. Previous research has shown that Jewish Orthodox Israelis are exposed to liberal Western ideals about romantic love and gender egalitarianism while continuing to uphold conservative family values. To gain insight into how leaders of Orthodox Jewish groups deal with these conflicting meaning systems, a representative sample of thirty guidebooks written for Religious Zionist and Ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel was analyzed by using a qualitative grounded theory analysis. The books were found to reject romantic love and gender egalitarianism, emphasizing instead the notions of other-focused giving and an essentialist gender partnership. The authors of these books also offer religious meaning systems focused on the interface between God and couples that we term *marriage theologies*. We offer a typology of five marriage theologies, which endeavor to infuse even the most mundane aspects of marital life with sacred meaning. This reenchantment of marriage plays a central role in recalibrating the religious meaning system in response to the secular Western culture surrounding it. The diversity of marriage theologies means that differential meaning systems can be offered to a wide range of Orthodox couples, from moderate to highly conservative and from idealistic newlyweds to disillusioned long-married couples.

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<sup>2</sup> [{{AUTHORS: If you wish to add a note about equality of your respective contributions, it should be placed here.}}](#)

A visitor to Israel's annual Hebrew Book Week fair in Jerusalem, where hundreds of stalls sell Hebrew books to mixed crowds of secular and religious people, might notice an interesting trend among the religious book stalls: The traditional volumes embossed with golden writing on their dark covers known as *sifrei kodesh* (literally, "books of holiness") that once dominated the stalls have been supplemented by a wealth of distinctly different-looking colorful guidebooks on every aspect of daily religious life. A closer look reveals that many of these titles cluster around two topics: how to achieve a happy marriage and how to educate children.<sup>3</sup> As a psychologist and a sociologist studying Orthodox Jews in Israel, we were intrigued by this phenomenon. Why are these books being published in such volume? What messages do they convey to their readers? What might this genre teach us about family regulation in a 21st century religious society?

In this article, we focus on Hebrew-language religious marriage and family guidebooks that are published and sold in Israel. Through an in-depth qualitative analysis of thirty such books, we will demonstrate how Orthodox ideologues and leaders attempt to debunk secular liberal notions about the desirability of romantic love and gender egalitarianism in marriages and offer instead various marriage theologies, which we identify and present as a typology. In these books, a re-rejection of romantic love and gender egalitarianism converges with the promotion of other-focused behavior and gender essentialism to imbue the institution of marriage with what is intended to be a higher religious meaning as part of the religious communities' ongoing struggle with secular values.

#### *THE MEANING OF FAMILY, THE MAGIC OF ROMANTIC LOVE*

Researchers have noted that conservative religious groups pride themselves on promoting so-called family values (Davidman and Stocks 1995; Lehmann and Siebzehner 2006). The claim that adherents enjoy better marital relationships than their secular counterparts do is often made by fundamentalist preachers and appears to resonate with their followers (Davidman 1991; Hardcare 1993). Bellah (1985) and Swidler (2001) identified a Christian fundamentalist ethos of marriage that, in contrast to other prevalent American marriage ideologies, calls on the couple to sacrifice for the sake of maintaining family unity. However, the marriage ethos in other religious communities has received less scholarly attention.

Psychologists of religion have increasingly emphasized religion's role in creating meaning for individuals and communities. Beginning with the notion of

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<sup>3</sup> No precise statistics are available on the popularity of such books, but pundits describe a boom in the Orthodox book industry, a large part of which they attribute to the proliferation of guidebooks of different sorts, including family and marital guidebooks (Ettinger 2012).

meaning making as a defining human activity, researchers have pointed to re-ligion's role in symbolically representing complex sets of experiences, which in turn enables a sense of purpose, coherence, and unity (Emmons 2005; Hood, Hill, and Spilka 2009; Mattis 2002; Pargament 1997; Park 2005; Silberman 2005). In the multidimensional and fractured existence of contemporary Western society, which can be experienced as chaotic and confusing, the role of religion in meaning making is often portrayed as the solution, since it imparts an especially coherent and overarching sense of meaning (Davidman 1991). However, we suggest that for some groups, the role of religion in meaning making is better viewed as part of the problem: Religious individuals who are embedded in wider non-religious cultural milieus may actually experience an overabundance of meaning systems that do not mesh well. This may lead to a different sort of meaning making—not the creation of order out of chaos, but the reordering of multiple meaning systems that occurs when traditional and taken-for-granted symbolic systems are disrupted or challenged (Mattis 2002). The experience of Orthodox Israeli Jews in contemporary Israel may be a case in point because they are informed simultaneously by traditional, modern, and postmodern value systems. Meaning making for them focuses on the need to recalibrate values and symbolic relationships to arrive at a newly meaningful and authentic religiosity. One sphere in which such processes are particularly salient is that of family and marriage.

In the sphere of family and marriage, religious views seem to be threatened by contesting meaning systems. In popular opinion, the term *family values* is often identified with religion, whereas romantic love is typically perceived as secular in nature. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995: 170) go so far as to describe romantic love as a “latter-day religion,” while Illouz (1997: 29) contends that in the 20th century, “romance replaced religion as the focus of daily life.” If this is the case, then the question of how religious societies deal with the allure of romantic love among their followers is of special interest. Other central cultural constructs to which religious individuals in Western societies are exposed include the therapeutic and feminist discourses, both of which affect marital relationships (Illouz 1997, 2007; Swidler 2001).

Various scholars have described how, despite attempts to disengage from secular society, religious groups are affected by Western cultural constructs, which they accommodate at some times and reject at others. Moreover, the very act of rejecting modernity can be viewed as a modern act, setting latter-day fundamentalists apart from the traditional communities to which they consider themselves heirs (Eisenstadt, 1999). Romantic love, feminism, and therapeutic discourse may all challenge and threaten traditional religious understandings of the family. Schielke (2009) describes how in Muslim Egypt, images and attitudes

regarding romantic love garnered from Western and Egyptian media coexist un-easily with the Islamist revivalist agenda. Stadler (2009) describes how the feminist discourse has infiltrated Ultra-Orthodox society, and Yaffe (2009) de-scribes how the therapeutic discourse introduced by secular social workers has affected Ultra-Orthodox kindergarten teachers. Through the narratives that they offer, the marriage manuals that we analyze provide a glimpse into the mechanisms utilized by religious leaders to reorganize these various, at times discrepant, systems of meaning.

Although this article focuses specifically on Orthodox Jews in Israel, we believe that its implications are relevant for wider circles as well. In alternating between the broad theoretical and local levels of analysis (Geertz 1974), we not only examine how theories of meaning making, marriage, and modernity apply to this case, but also consider some lessons gleaned from it that might apply to other Western religious contexts, such as identifying marriage theologies and their role in religious meaning making.

#### *THE CONTEXT: ISRAELI ORTHODOXY AND THE CHALLENGES OF MARRIAGE*

Religious sectorialization plays an important role in Israeli Jewish society. Most Israeli Jews identify themselves as belonging to one of four social-religious groups: the secular (44–51 percent of the population), the traditional who respect religious authority but only partially observe religious law (*halacha*) as dictated by Orthodox rabbis (30–39 percent), the Religious Zionists<sup>4</sup> (henceforth RZ, 10–15 percent), and the Ultra-Orthodox (henceforth UO, 7–9 percent) (Asher, Ventura, and Phillipov 2008; Guttman Center for Surveys 2012; Israel Central Bureau of Statistics 2009). The UO and RZ both of whom are considered to be Orthodox, purport to fully observe *halacha*, but differ socially and ideologically. UO ideology rejects both modern values and Zionism, while RZ ideology attempts to combine adherence to *halacha* with a “modern” lifestyle and embraces the Zionist movement as the harbinger of religious redemption. Socially, the UO are an enclave community (Sivan 1995). They live in close quarters, do not enlist for military service, and have a low level of workforce participation, as many of the men study instead in religious institutions of higher learning (*yeshivot*). This article focuses on the writings of authors who belong to these two groups.

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<sup>4</sup> Religious Zionists, also known as National Religious, are often viewed simply as the Israeli corollary to the American Modern Orthodox, but as Liebman (1995) has shown, there are important differences between the groups. In Israel, the term *Modern Orthodox* is used to apply only to the liberal wing of Religious Zionism.

The UO and RZ may be further divided into subcategories. The three main groups within the UO sector are known as Hasidim, Litvaks (literally, Lithuanians, also historically known as Misnagdim), and Sephardim. The first two groups are of Eastern European origin. The differences between them are based on an 18th century split that had both theological and class origins. Today, the differences are more subtle and have to do with traditions of study, prayer and social organization, the Hasidim tending to be farther removed from general society and more conservative than the Litvaks. *Sephardim* is the religious term used to describe UO Jews of non-European origin,<sup>5</sup> who formed a new ethnic category in UO society around the middle of the 20th century. One of the unique characteristics of Sephardic Ultra-Orthodoxy is that its leaders are respected by both UO and traditional Sephardic Jews. Each of these groups has its own educational institutions and religious leaders.

Another useful way of classifying religious subgroups is by their level of extremism (Liebman 1983). Among UO groups, some Litvak groups are more moderate, and others are more extreme in their stringency and rejection of modernity. Hasidic groups tend to align on the extremist side, and Sephardim tend to be found on the moderate side, owing to their mixed crowd of adherents.

Among RZs, the boundaries between subgroups are not as clear-cut, but the differences between the more radical extremists and the moderates are considerable. Radical RZs, or Emuni, as they prefer to be known (literally, “of the faith”) (Fischer 2012), are often highly politically active in an attempt to hasten messianic redemption by settling all parts of the land of Israel and aspire to strictly observe *halacha*, much like the UO. Moderate RZs, also termed *Modern Orthodox*, are less strictly religious, believe in integration between modernity and religion, and are more politically moderate (Asher Cohen 2005; Geiger 2001).<sup>6</sup> Ethnically, Religious Zionism is mixed and includes Jews of Sephardi (non-European) and Ashkenazi (European) origin.

The separatist UO sector is often termed *fundamentalist* (Friedman 1991; Stadler 2009). Among the RZ sector, which, like American Modern Orthodoxy, is generally considered nonfundamentalist, since it attempts to integrate modernity with tradition, some researchers have described radical RZs as fundamentalist

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<sup>5</sup> The term *Sephardim* originally referred to Jews who had been expelled from Spain in 1492, most of whom fled to North Africa and West Asia, where they dominated the local Jewish communities. In modern-day Israel, the terms *Mizrahim* and *Sephardim* are used interchangeably to denote Jews of non-European descent. The term *Mizrahi* is used in government and academic circles, but within religious circles, the term *Sephardim*, which connotes a specific religious tradition, is preferred (see Lehmann and Siebzehner 2006). We chose to use the emic term out of respect for the community, as other scholars of religion have been doing.

<sup>6</sup> The majority of RZs fall somewhere between these ends, often passively supporting the political principles of the radical RZs while not adhering to religious law quite as strictly.

because of their messianic activism (Aran 1986), while others have contested this definition (Fischer 2012).

A word of explanation is called for regarding our decision to include RZ and UO sectors in a single study, since researchers often consider these societies separately, owing to major lifestyle and ideology differences between them. For the purpose of this analysis, however, they share two important attributes: The first is a common worldview that consecrates tradition and attempts to protect the eternal from the transiently modern while at the same time being inevitably influenced by—in fact, being a part of—the very culture they are rejecting (Ravitzky 2006; Sagi 2006). For this reason, both groups need to deal with secular Western discourses such as feminism that are having a tremendous impact on their communities and are sometimes viewed as a threat. The second common attribute is a stringent orthopraxis stemming from a shared commitment to *halacha*. Thus the two groups are similar enough that they can be considered together for a single study. We note this while recognizing the important differences between them, which are also addressed in this article.

Nearly all Orthodox religious authorities believe gender segregation to be vital for creating an ideal society that is an alternative to what they consider a sexually libertine, morally depraved secular culture. The level of stringency regarding gender segregation is a central marker of belonging to distinct Orthodox groups. In nonradical RZ circles, adult men and women associate freely, but varying degrees of separation are maintained in schools and youth movements. In UO society, the separation is farther-reaching and includes public events and spaces (Caplan 2003; Heilman 1992).

It is therefore not surprising that RZ and UO groups have very different courtship norms. Because UO men and women are not to associate with each other at all outside of family circles, matchmakers, parents, and teachers play a vital role in arranging marriages for couples. Once a couple has been set up, the amount of contact that is allowed between them before marriage varies (Lehmann and Siebzehner 2009). Many Hasidic couples do not date at all but rather meet once in the home of one of the two families (Heilman 1992). Litvak UO allow the couple to go out on several dates in a public setting (Lehmann and Siebzehner 2009). RZ courtship is very different: Young men and women may meet each other independently, and dating can go on for months before the couple decide to marry or break up (Engelberg 2011).

Since many of the differences between nonreligious and religious guidebooks pertain to the role of women in marriage, we offer a description—albeit generalized—of what a UO marriage might look like from the wife's perspective, followed by a description of a typical RZ marriage.

A 17- or 18-year-old UO girl who rarely in her life has spoken to men outside

her family will meet a man by an arranged match, have at most a few conversations with him, and marry him shortly afterward. She will have had little sex education and no sexual experience. The couple will endeavor to consummate the marriage on the wedding night and will make an effort to conceive as soon as possible and to bear a large number of children; the current average is 6.5 children per UO family (Hleihel 2011), but families with 10 children and more are quite common. Often, the woman's husband will study at a yeshiva for most of the day, and she will support the family financially as well as caring for the house and children. Her sexual relations with her husband will be regulated by *niddah*, a series of laws that center on the menstrual cycle and prohibit sexual relations and physical contact between the couple for approximately twelve to fourteen days of each menstrual cycle. The young wife and mother will observe utmost modesty within the home and outside it, covering her hair, arms, and legs at all times. As prescribed by UO values, her material life will probably be very modest; 56 percent of the UO live below Israel's poverty line (Pfefferman and Malchi 2010). At the same time, this woman is likely to meet non-Orthodox women at her workplace or in public places. Although she lives in an enclave community, she will probably be aware of such concepts as romantic love, self-fulfillment, materialism, and feminism. How does she deal with this alternative marital landscape? How does she frame the meaning of her own marital life? As Berger (1969) notes, religious groups that are minorities have to struggle harder to maintain their meaning system in light of the general societal ethos. Identifying the meaning systems that inform UO couples therefore becomes important.

The RZ woman's experience will most likely be rather different. After graduating from a religious high school and volunteering for national service, she may study in a women's higher seminar and attend a university. She is likely to marry a religious man of her choice at some time during those years; most RZ women marry by their early twenties (Engelberg 2011). She will probably expect to combine career and family. As in the UO case, this couple will observe the laws of family purity. The couple might defer having children for a few years, but in most cases, a large family is begun soon after marriage, although with 4.5 children on average (Feniger and Shavit 2011), it will not be as large as the UO family. The challenges facing the RZ woman are somewhat different from those facing her UO counterpart. Modern Western values are as much a part of her culture as religious ones are. Her challenges involve fitting the two together by managing conflicts between feminism and halachic Judaism or between Western values of self-fulfillment and religious values of setting family, community, and God before self.

The growing popularity of marriage guidebooks in the RZ and UO sectors of religious Israeli society points to their increasing role in offering religious

guidance in this sphere. Readers commenting in religious Internet forums about these books refer to them as “saving marriages” and even as “life-savers,”<sup>7</sup> making it all the more intriguing to analyze how this occurs.

#### *THE CASE STUDY: ORTHODOX MARITAL GUIDEBOOKS*

The genre of personal guidance books has become so popular that it may be defined as a mass phenomenon (Butler-Bowden 2003), and the topic of marriage and partnership is especially prevalent. Clearly, the increasing numbers of Jewish Orthodox guidebooks in general and marital guidebooks in particular are in some measure a reaction to the popularity of the nonreligious books in the genre (Brenner 2005). Some of the content of the Jewish-Orthodox books is drawn directly from this literature, especially with regard to relationship-improving techniques (Davidman and Stocks 1995; Finkelman 2011). However, much of this content has its own distinct patterns and themes.

The first popular guidebooks for modern Orthodox Jewish couples were published in the United States in the late 1970s (Zlochower 2007); they began appearing in Israeli RZ circles a decade later. The illustrated covers, catchphrases, directive form of writing, therapeutic language, and case-study examples that characterize these books led us to classify them as marriage guidebooks adapted for special populations rather than as traditional religious books whose subject matter is marriage. Their increasing popularity and proliferation may be seen as signs of greater interest in, and perhaps a stronger need for, guidance on intimate relationships in Orthodox circles today. As an illustration of this need, highly popular RZ Rabbi Yuval Cherlow estimated that among the 20,000 mostly anonymous halachic questions to which he has responded online, some 40 percent deal with intimate relationships (Cherlow 2007; Sheleg 2003).

In the UO sector, marriage guidance books evolved somewhat differently. Originating in lectures and courses for UO women on marital relationships, the material gradually became available in recorded and written media, which greatly increased its audience. Whereas in the past, messages about marital relationships in UO circles were transmitted privately and orally by parents or teachers, they now began to be aired in the public sphere. Today’s writers are considered experts on relationships in UO society (Caplan 2007).

It would be inaccurate to describe religious marital guidebooks as a genre that sprang up *ex nihilo* at the end of the 20th century. In the first place, two UO “manuals” were published in the mid-20th century; they are considered classic texts that inspired many of the more recent publications. Second, some of the

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, <http://www.bhol.co.il/forums>.

rhetoric in contemporary books is based on much earlier materials, such as the anonymous monograph “A Holiness Letter about the Intention of Coupling” from 13th century Spain as well as ancient Talmudic and biblical sources. However, whether traditional or innovative in format, the books that we analyzed have unique features that distinguish them from their precursors.

The content of this literature has just recently begun to be analyzed. Stadler (2009) identified an influence of the feminist discourse on the model of UO piety that is expounded in marriage guidebooks written for Litvak UO yeshiva scholars that encourage scholars’ involvement with their families. Caplan (2003) analyzed popular books and lectures for UO women and noted that they focused on fostering understanding between husband and wife despite the immense differences between men and women, presenting women’s out-of-home work as a means of earning a living rather than as a mode of self-fulfillment and underscoring the relevance of menstrual purity laws. He noted that these messages reflect changing needs in UO society: “popular speakers provide us with certain indications about the problems, interests, and dilemmas of their listeners” (Caplan 2003: 98), an assumption that we adopted in analyzing the guidebooks. We believe that the rationales offered by the writers for the religious marital way of life hint at their readers’ need for an updated meaning system related to marriage, love, and inti-macy.

#### *METHOD*

To assess the extent of this genre, we conducted a comprehensive survey of Orthodox marriage guidebooks published in Hebrew in Israel since 1980, when the first of the contemporary guidebooks was published. We compiled a list of 246 books, 137 of which are explicitly presented in the format of premarital or marital guidance books while an additional 109 books address the issue of marriage through more traditional religious literary formats. The prominence of *halacha* versus that of relationship advice distinguishes the first category from the second. However, the difference is one of proportion, and it is rare for a book to address only one of the two topics.

There are significant interactions between the American and Israeli branches of the Orthodox guidebook industry. Some of the UO marriage guidebooks are translated from English, but they are adapted to the Israeli readership in various ways (Caplan 2007: 216). For example, issues of divorce and domestic violence are sparsely discussed in the Israeli literature while playing a larger role in the American literature.

From among the 246 books, we chose a sample of thirty books—twelve RZ and eighteen UO—to account for different subgroups within each sector. These

books are listed in the appendix to this article. It is relatively simple to classify the books by religious sector: Those written by leading rabbinic authorities clearly represent the sector to which that rabbi belongs. Books written by lesser known or nonrabbinic authors begin with an endorsement by one or more eminent rabbis, which serves as a sort of kosher stamp of approval. Because each endorsing rabbi is clearly identified with a particular sector, the affiliation of author and book follows suit. We focused on the two RZ subgroups described in the introduction—moderate and radical RZ—and on four UO subgroups: moderate Lithuanian, con-servative Lithuanian, Hasidim, and Sephardic. This enabled a comparison between moderate and extremist writers as well as a sectorial comparison within the genre. We analyzed four to six books from each of these six groups for a total of thirty books. In choosing these books, we used the sales data provided to us by four prominent booksellers and bookshop owners in the UO and RZ communities.<sup>8</sup> These data were used to create a list of the fifteen overall best-selling books in the market. We also consulted Orthodox marriage counselors, rabbinic advisors of brides and grooms, and scholars of Orthodox Judaism to identify the most influential books among subgroups that may be less represented by the best-seller lists, such as the Breslov and Chabad Hasidic groups. We rounded off the list by including three books that are considered early classics, since they are referred to by many later books and we believe that their influence transcends their current popularity. Thus the thirty books that were chosen fulfill two criteria: They are widely read and/or authoritative, and they represent the six subdivisions of Israeli Jewish Orthodoxy that we described in the introduction.

To create a basis for comparison, we analyzed these books using a grounded theory of category content analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1990). This process involved a close reading of each book, an identification of each of its messages and themes, a construction of a category tree for each book, and a comparative analysis between the books and the categories they yielded (Shkedi 2003).

Our analysis yielded eleven shared categories that were prevalent across the UO-RZ divide: appropriation of psychological insights, presenting marriage as hard work, a directive self-help style, explications of the ideal person and couple, selective rereading of Jewish sources, stance toward modernity as expressing an us/them boundary, rationalizing the traditional search for a partner, ambivalence toward the body, a religious essentialist gender discourse, rejection of the romantic love ideal, and the use of marriage theologies. Taken together, these eleven categories highlight the basic goals and methods of these guidebooks.

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<sup>8</sup> We would like to thank Sifrei Kodosh online bookstore, Hevruta bookstore and online store, Zol-Sefer bookstore and online store, and Virtual Geulah bookstore for kindly sharing their sales data of religious marriage guidebooks, their advice, and their expertise with us.

First, they are firmly rooted in the self-help and self-improvement traditions, as can be seen by the way in which they draw on psychological insights and evidence a directive style of instructions to couples, both of which are typical of many best-selling general relationship manuals (Zimmerman, Holm, and Starrels 2001). The moral aspect of self-improvement literature can be seen in the high-lighting of the ideal person and ideal relationship and the argument for marriage as hard work.

Second, the books deal with issues that arise from the desire to maintain an Orthodox lifestyle in the modern world in light of the gap between religious and Western secular norms.<sup>9</sup> Categories that demonstrate this are the selective re-reading of Jewish sources to highlight certain texts that the authors believe will be accepted by a critical, modern readership (for example, clearly chauvinistic tra-ditional sources pertaining to marriage are downplayed), highlighting differences between religious and nonreligious societies as a way of defining group boun-daries, and rationalizing the traditional search for a partner, which in past genera-tions needed no justification.

Third, there are uniquely religious themes in the books, often reflecting creative ways of formulating ideals of religious marriage. Three categories best exemplify the religious themes, which most clearly distinguish these guidebooks from others: a religious essentialist gender discourse, a rejection of the ideal of romantic love, and the use of marriage theologies. We focus on these three cate-gories for the remainder of this article because they best serve to answer our question about how religious leaders manage clashes between religious and non-religious meaning systems.

### *COMMON RELIGIOUS THEMES IN ORTHODOX MARRIAGE GUIDEBOOKS*

#### *Against Romantic Love*

A central theme that appears in all the books that we analyzed is a rejection of the view that couples should experience romantic love before deciding to marry each other. Despite considerable differences in courtship norms, we found that both RZ and UO authors criticize romantic love as a typical product of Western facileness, juxtaposing it against an ideal of Jewish love that is based on the family.

A ubiquitous argument in the guidebooks, which originated with the UO lumi-nary Rabbi Dessler in the mid-20th century, considers “giving” a positive

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<sup>9</sup> In a broader study of UO popular literature, Finkelman (2011) reached a similar conclusion.

trait that reflects mature (i.e., religiously informed) love and “taking” a negatively selfish one that reflects shallow (i.e., secular) romantic love. The Western notion of fall-ing in love as a prerequisite to marriage is rejected in favor of postnuptial giving, which is seen as fostering love between husband and wife. For example, radical RZ author Avizohar Harel (2005: 242) refers to Dessler’s view when he writes:

There are those who think that their love for their spouse is a result of gifts that they have received from them etc. . . . What may this be compared to? It may be compared to a man who eats a tomato, and when asked why he is eating the tomato he answers “because I love tomatoes”. This man does not love tomatoes, he loves only himself! If he truly loved the tomato he would not eat it. . . . The best example for [true love] is a mother’s love for her baby. The more she nurses and provides for it the more her love grows. Therefore it is important always to give. The more a person gives the more emotional attachment they will feel to their spouse.

Evidently, the books do not reject love per se. Rabbi Vardi (2002: 65–66), located on the liberal side of the RZ spectrum, writes: “Western culture that talks about love in music, in literature and most of all on television—describes love as exciting. Jewish culture prefers adult, responsible love that ties a person to his family and children.” Love as an overpowering emotion that sweeps the individual and for which one must wait patiently is the type of love to which the guidebooks are opposed. This is not to say that romantic love in its Western version is absent from the Orthodox dating process. Even in UO circles, match-makers might talk of the importance of there being “a sparkle in the eyes” of a young couple, and for many RZ singles, falling in love is a professed prerequisite to marriage (Engelberg 2011). Nevertheless, the authors of the guidebooks seek to downplay the importance of this element, perhaps because of its being voiced in the Orthodox communities. This attitude is apparent when authors cite Bible verses. For example, many authors describe at length the episode in Genesis 24 in which Abraham sends his slave to choose a wife for his son Isaac. Using rabbinical exegesis, they describe how the slave was able to discern that Rebecca was a righteous individual who would make a good wife. Young people are encouraged to use similar analytic tools to rapidly assess whether their date would make a good spouse. Biblical episodes that involve uncalculating romantic behavior, such as Jacob’s encounter with Rachel in Genesis 29, are largely ignored.

Illouz (1997) and Swidler (2001) write about two competing discourses that are used in Western culture to describe relationships: the prosaic love ideal that

views relationships as needing work and the romantic, Hollywood-style love ideal. Swidler argues that feelings of romantic love are necessary for couples to make the momentous decision to marry and that the idea of prosaic love that demands work is necessary in order to sustain marital relationships once they have been formed. The authors of the guidebooks reject romantic love and describe it as Western and shallow, but they co-opt the idea of working on relationships, which is viewed as the way of the Torah.

The UO efforts to demean romantic love are to be expected; a society in which arranged marriages prevail must reject the romantic love ideal for such a tradition to continue, but the pervasive adoption of their arguments by RZ authors came as somewhat of a surprise given that in Religious Zionist society, young men and women seek spouses independently and expect to fall in love before marriage. This adoption of UO polemics should be seen in light of RZ society's continued struggle against prolonged singlehood, a growing phenomenon that often leads to lax observance of gender segregation and to an embracing of various aspects of Western youth culture (Engelberg 2011). But even if RZ and UO leaders use the same argument to debunk romantic love and encourage early marriages, their courtship norms remain different. As a consequence, only the UO books demand that young people rely on parents, teachers, and matchmakers to decide whom they should meet (e.g., Simcha Cohen 2005; Leibowitz 1988).

### *Against Gender Egalitarianism*

Another common theme is the struggle against gender egalitarianism and feminism as they are understood by the authors of the guidebooks. Rather than encouraging more gender equality in marriage, as mainstream American marriage guidebooks often do (Zimmerman, Holm, and Starrels 2001), the authors of these guidebooks suggest that couples embrace partnership. This term allows for a gendered division of labor while connoting emotional closeness and hinting at the joint project of fostering a family.

Many RZ and moderate UO books explicitly disparage feminism. (The most conservative UO books ignore its existence entirely.) A typical narrative has it that while the original intentions of feminism to raise the status of women were commendable (although, the argument goes, not particularly applicable to the Jewish situation, in which women were always honored), it ended up obfuscating important gender differences and augmenting marital difficulties. Abramov and Abramov (1999: 29–30), for example, write:

The movement for women's liberation labored tirelessly to preserve the honor of women . . . but eventually the overzealous wish to bridge the gap between men

and women led to a desire to consider them identical. . . . One of the main causes of marital problems is the mistaken assumption that men and women are entirely identical.

Since the 1980s, family relations experts in the UO community have internalized a discourse of understanding the opposite sex (Caplan 2007), probably following the popularized notion that “men are from Mars, and women are from Venus” (Gray 1992). This discourse assumes that genders are inherently different and therefore need to be explained to each other if marriages are to succeed. As with the counter-romantic love arguments, we found this discourse not only in UO books but also in RZ books. Gender differences, claim the authors, are a result of the way in which men and women were created. As UO writer Yosef Gabai (2006: 16) puts it: “This is God’s operating manual.” More-over, God intended that no man or woman be complete without a member of the opposite sex by his or her side. To enjoy a peaceful home, men and women must acknowledge their differences and base their behavior toward each other on an understanding of the opposite sex’s characteristics. This essentialist view involves seeing one’s spouse as radically different from oneself and therefore acts as a form of re-enchantment of marriage. Abramov and Abramov (1999: 69) write: “Love is knowledge. When thus considered, we can never become bored. There are always endless details left to learn about the man to whom we are married.”

The lists of differences between men and women that the books enumerate are extensive. Gabai (2006) focuses on women’s “emotional” nature versus men’s “cerebral” nature. Pincus (2002) describes men as practical and unaesthetic, whereas women are talkative, sentimental, and clean. The authors encourage readers to attune their behavior to these differences. Knohl (2002) calls on the husband to offer his wife verbal affirmations of love even if this goes against his nature and to be patient with his wife’s lack of ability to forgive and forget, since that is her nature. Arush (2008) argues that while men can accept criticism, women interpret all criticism as a lack of love on the part of their husbands and pay no heed to the actual complaint. He therefore warns men never, under any circumstances, to criticize their wives.

A central difference between UO and RZ books pertains to the issue of patriarchal hierarchy. UO guidebooks tend to grant the husband authority over his wife, while RZ books are more closely aligned with Western egalitarianism. In Litvak UO books, the husband’s role resembles that of an enlightened despot. For example, Pincus (2002: 40) cautions that “although man becomes the homeowner upon marriage and his voice should indeed be heard in his home, he should nevertheless speak softly.” Sephardic UO writers seem to have fewer qualms

about the assertion of male authority in the home, which may align with a traditionally patriarchic bent within that society. Thus, for example, Gavriel (1996: 74) claims that the secret of a successful marriage is that the wife yields to her husband. While he cautions the husband not to contradict his wife in front of the children, Gavriel calls on the wife not to contradict her husband on any occasion. In a similar vein, Gabai (2006: 160–161) writes, “Any woman who tries to ignore her husband’s need to dominate in his home is actually trying to fight the laws of nature, and eventually both she and her husband will suffer. She will simply be causing the destruction of her home and ruining her family with her own two hands.”

*Orthodox Marriage Theologies*

One of the recurrent themes in all the books that we analyzed was a theological rendering of marriage and “peace in the home” ethics. We coined the term *marriage theologies* to express the idea that God is described as being involved in the couple’s relationship and that the envisioned wishes and needs of God become part of the idealization of a religious marriage.

A close analysis reveals five distinct arguments regarding the goal of marriage from a religious perspective. The first is a baseline argument shared by the writers of all the books that we analyzed, which expresses the elementary idea that God wishes for humans to marry. The next four arguments offer more nuanced rationalizations of marriage. These theologies are not mutually exclusive; most books reference more than one and often weave them together innovatively. Thus they are best considered building blocks of the religious arguments for marriage. However, when they are deconstructed, it becomes evident that each one reflects a somewhat different view of marriage. The manner in which these blocks fit together is an issue we will take up in the discussion.

Table 1 presents a summary of the five marriage theologies that we identified in the guidebooks. Each theology is presented in terms of how it references four central issues: the goal of marriage, the importance of peace in the home, God’s plan for an ideal marriage, and the readership that the theology targets.

**Table 1: Five Marriage Theologies**

<b>Theology</b>	<b>The Goal of Marriage</b>	<b>The Role of “Peace in the Home”</b>	<b>Recipe for Marital Bliss</b>	<b>Aimed at</b>
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Marriage as commandment	To fulfill God's commandment to marry and procreate	It is a condition for fulfilling the commandment.	Accepting essential gender differences as part of God's plan	All groups
Secret of the Jewish home	Personal fulfillment and emotional closeness	The recipe is inherent in the Orthodox way of life.	It is the goal and the prize for observant couples.	Women of all sectors, converts, outsiders
The home as a holy site	To create a site of holiness on earth in one's home	It is evidence of a holy home. God can dwell only in a home of peace.	Turning the home into a holy site leads to a shared sense of purpose and meaning.	Newlywed couples of all sectors
Self-repair	To enable work on personal virtues ( <i>middot</i> )	It is a by-product of an improved self.	Marital bliss is not the goal. Spiritual benefits of suffering from spouse are highlighted.	Disillusioned long-time married couples, conservative yeshiva scholars
Cosmic repair	To bring unity to the cosmos by reuniting genders	To mystically repair the upper worlds	Focusing on a cosmic-scale mission sets minor disagreements into proportion.	UO and spiritually inclined newlyweds

*The Baseline: Marriage as Commandment.* At some stage, each of the books notes that the basic reason to get married and to remain married is that it is a di-vine commandment. This argument is grounded in halachic discourse, as there are several commandments that can be fulfilled only through marriage. Men and women are commanded to procreate, and marriage is seen as the only legal vessel for procreation in Jewish law. Men are obligated to continue procreating until at least one boy and one girl are born, and this has been expanded to an injunction for women to bear children. The most common explanation for this is God's de-sire "to broaden the world of the creator with more people who will recognize the creator of the universe and fulfill His commandments" (Simcha Cohen 2005: 252).

This rationale is theocentric in that it views marriage as an act committed for

God's sake and heteronomic in that it considers the goal of religiosity as obeying God's will. Fulfilling commandments is seen as such an ultimate value that the ideal of achieving peace in the home is sometimes relegated to a means to fulfilling commandments. For example, since God commands husband and wife to procreate, they had better be able to get along well enough to have intimate relations with each other.

The injunction to marry because one is commanded to do so serves not only as a baseline, but also as a bottom line. When discussions get bogged down, authors are apt to remind their readers that the answer to marital dilemmas has already been given. For example, in a book based on a weekly advice column, radical RZ Rabbi Melamed is consulted by a 32-year old man who has not found his "chosen one." After offering various solutions, Melamed (2007: 62) concludes: "The best way to get out of this tight spot is by returning to the Torah, which commanded us to marry and have a son and a daughter. Reminding yourself of the holiness of the Mitzvah will give you the strength to make up your mind."

Despite the importance of grounding marriage in religious law, the effectiveness of religious law in imparting meaning is limited, as some of the writers readily admit: "If people had to get married only because of the commandment, perhaps only one in a thousand would marry; the rest would find excuses," writes Melamed (2007: 55). From this limit stems the need for more elaborate marriage theologies, of which each book promotes at least one.

*The Secret of the Jewish Home.* A marriage theology that is expressed in many of the books is the "secret of the Jewish home" argument, wherein a happy marriage is depicted as the privilege of Orthodox Jews. The claim begins with the premise that religious Jews have stable and happy marriages. Books will often cite statistics describing the high divorce rates among nonreligious couples. The argument then maintains that the secrets of the happy Jewish home are readily available in religious sources, some of which directly dictate appropriate behaviors (e.g., the laws of menstrual purity) and others that offer guidance (e.g., learning the lesson of respecting one's spouse from the biblical stories of Abraham and Sarah). The authors often provide a psychological, medical, or social rationale for their success. A case in point is the laws of menstrual purity (*niddah*). A frequent argument is that couples who observe *niddah* meticulously will never lack for marital passion (Avishai 2008; Davidman and Stocks 1995). Sephardic UO author Refael (2000) writes that if a husband were to say to his wife, "Let's separate for two weeks of each month in order to keep our marriage fresh," she would ridicule him, but the laws of menstrual purity enable this plan to successfully take place. Another popular "recipe" involves allowing the male to govern the household so that a peaceful division of labor will ensue. This

con-nects directly to the rejection of gender egalitarianism, described in the previous section: “The rule of following the husband’s wishes is very basic. A woman who makes sure to fulfill only this rule in all areas of her marriage, will find the answer to most of her problems” (Artziel 1998: 67).

Some writers buttress the claim by stating that a good marriage is a prize granted by God to deserving and obedient religious Jews. For example, if a man studies Torah diligently, he will be rewarded with a happy family life. A related claim is that God is intimately involved in matchmaking, ensuring that each individual meets his or her destined partner. This idea is often expressed through the concept of *bashert*—Yiddish for “destiny”—with its romantic undertones.

In sum, according to this theology, for a harmonious marriage to ensue, people need only allow God to realize his plan. This is an anthropocentric model in that a happy marriage is seen as a desirable goal in itself for the couple. In this sense, it exemplifies the way in which authors of Orthodox guidebooks adapt modern Western values regarding the importance of relationships by viewing them through the prism of religious beliefs.

*Marriage as a Site of Holiness.* Some authors seem intent on avoiding an “inner-worldly” rhetoric (Weber 1958) that considers the commandments to be a recipe for human bliss; instead, the rationale for creating a Jewish home is the opportunity and challenge of creating a holy site on earth. The anonymous Hasidic author of *Wedding Canopy* decries those who teach that “holiness means adhering to this-world and to its passions and that this is the ‘peace at home’ that is sought after. This was the view of the enlightenment scholars, may their name rot.” The purpose of marriage in his eyes is far more ambitious: “marriage means rebuilding the Temple!” (*Wedding Canopy* 2001: 61). Several books cite a “small-scale Temple” metaphor, arguing that in this day and age, when God is unable to dwell in the Temple in Jerusalem that was destroyed by the Romans some 2000 years ago, humans host God in their homes by creating peaceful, harmonious, and sanctified Jewish families. Rabbi Simcha Cohen (2005: 8), probably the most popular contemporary moderate UO author, passionately argues, “If the couple manages this feat [of marital harmony] their personality will be unified and their home will become a small-scale Temple. . . . This effort will lead the couple to a true unity, forming a home for God’s presence.”

Marriage is thus portrayed as a necessary condition for spiritual advancement, for God will dwell only with a couple and not with a bachelor: “All a man does and acts until his marriage is no more than the ‘aura’ around the ‘Real thing.’ A man does not touch the actual issue until he establishes his home,” writes conservative UO Rabbi Shimshon Pincus (2002: 40). In an interesting twist on the oft-quoted idea that one needs to love God in order to love one’s wife, Pincus

claims that in fact, one needs to love one's wife in order to learn to love God. True worship means feeling "embraced in His arms," and that sense can be achieved only after intimacy with a woman: "A man who hasn't yet married a woman, it is clear that God's presence does not dwell with him at all" (Pincus 2002: 89). Rather than an end goal, marriage is presented as a means to the lofty goal of worshipping God.

*Marriage as a Tool for Religious Self-Improvement.* The fourth argument views marriage as the ideal situation for improving one's character, because marriage demands so much patience, kindness, and self-sacrifice: "This is what the Lord of the universe wants: That man will repair himself! But God knows that man doesn't always feel like doing it, so he stuck him with a partner. Now man has no choice. If he wishes to remain with his partner, he must repair himself" (Aviner 2000: 184).

While the "holy site" theology focuses on drawing God's presence into the marriage, the self-improvement theology emphasizes the human who must raise himself to a higher plane of morality by rejecting "base" impulses. Taken to an extreme, marriage can be seen as an opportunity for self-purification through the suffering that it brings. UO Conservative Litvak writer Dan Ze'ev Segal presents the wife as entirely instrumental in furthering her husband's mission of self-repair. He writes that every man is granted a woman who will lead him to experience extraordinary difficulty with the traits he is most in need of improving. A miserly person will be granted a spendthrift, an introvert will be granted a chatterbox, and so forth. Thus marriage is a "golden furnace for welding the character" (Segal 2001: 4). True saints are granted a particularly difficult woman through whom to refine their pious character. This process of honing one's character can be done only with one's first wife, which means that divorce is never the right choice. Segal notes that all women are "difficult" in some ways—talkative, untidy, lazy, shallow, loud, and so on. Each of these vices serves to test the husband's patience and ability to sacrifice.

Rabbi Shalom Arush (2008) argues that only through marriage is a man's Torah learning put to test. Arush's highly popular book begins with the story of a man who chooses to remain single so that he can devote himself to a life of holi-ness by avoiding the burden of having a wife and children. After he dies, he is brought before the heavenly court, which informs him that his life has been wasted. "It is true that you studied Torah," he is told, "But you didn't live it." The heavenly tribunal explains this verdict to the surprised scholar:

If only you had married you would have realized how far you are from observance of the Torah. . . . If you would have married, your wife would have

tested you by preventing you from studying and making demands on you. You would have failed in all these trials, you would have become angry and would not have accepted affliction and then you would understand just how much you needed to work on your faith (Arush 2008: 21).<sup>10</sup>

*Cosmic Repair.* The fifth set of arguments, perhaps the most theologically complex, focuses on couples' involvement in God's cosmic mission and draws on such mystical concepts as *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) to idealize marriage and the work it demands. The *tikkun* theology, based on Jewish mysticism, sees marriage as a unique opportunity granted to humans to repair the lower and upper worlds by drawing together the complementary opposites of male and female and by enabling them to function as a harmonious whole. At the basis of this theology lies the belief that opposites resulted from a cosmic rupture early in the folds of mystical prehistory and that they need to be reunited. Man and woman embody this separation because once upon a time, their souls were two parts of a single unit. According to this version of the myth of creation, the first human was created with both sets of sexual organs and was subsequently divided into man and woman. Each person pines for his or her other half, and marriage is portrayed as a process of repair that restores humans to their natural state. In Simcha Cohen's book (2005: part 2, page 9), the purpose of marriage is portrayed as "turning two different people into one personality." The world seems to be full of conflict, but it is all so that people will search for order in the chaos and recognize God as one. However, faith and peace of mind are not the only benefits of the union of husband and wife. By achieving harmony, the couple is actually re-pairing fractures in the upper realms and speeding the day of ultimate salvation. Melamed (2007: 157) writes:

Let not people say: "How can I repair the world? It is filled with squabbles and wars." A person should know that it is in his own hands. If he himself succeeds in finding in his marriage love and solidarity, peace and camaraderie, he will tip the whole world to the side of favor, and others will follow suit, causing estrangement between people to gradually disappear, until divine unity will be revealed in the world and even the animals will not devour each other.

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<sup>10</sup> A famous sage in the Mishnah, Ben Azai (circa the first century C.E.), never married precisely for the reason offered by Arush's imaginary protagonist. While his choice was undoubtedly unusual in his circle, his fellow sages did not criticize him as severely as Arush criticizes his protagonist. This can help us to recognize both the novelty of this theology and its ancient roots.

Hasidic UO Rabbi Eliezer Schick claims that when husband and wife are at peace, a great repair takes place in the highest realms: “Try at all cost to obtain peace in the home, and in this way you will be privileged to become vessels of the uncovering of the Ein-Sof, Blessed be He” (Schick 1998: 266).<sup>11</sup> The lesson is clear: Every argument about who takes out the trash puts the very unity of the cosmos at stake.<sup>12</sup>

How this repair process actually takes place and what this means are couched in mystical terms and for the most part are only alluded to. To cite one example, Hasidic mystic Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh (2004: 73, 76) hints at the secrets of cosmic repair in writing about the wedding dance that takes place at the marriage ceremony:

The dancer should intend to participate simultaneously in three weddings: The first wedding is the physical union of the bride and groom. The second is the wedding of the root of their souls. The third is the “wedding” between the physical wedding and the wedding of the root of the souls. . . . While dancing after the meal, the dancers should aim for the third wedding (which actually contains all three), with the purpose of Unifying the name of Yod-Heh [the first part of God’s name] with Vav-Heh [the second part of God’s name] in a complete unification in the name of all Israel. When dancing, one must leap with great delight to the heights of the upper wedding and bring it all the way down to the lower wedding.

This quote hints at the sense of immense otherworldly importance imbued by this theology in acts as concrete as dancing at a wedding.

A corollary to this theology is that divorce, the act of severing cosmic unity, is seen as the ultimate evil, despite the fact that there is no prohibition on divorce in Jewish law. As Hasidic Rabbi Schick (1998: 327) writes, “Divorce is not the solution. . . . You are destroying each other, destroying the kids, and destroying the upper worlds.”

To recap, in the books that we analyzed, marriage is uniformly recognized as God’s wish and command, while a happy marriage is differentially construed as an end unto itself using the Orthodox lifestyle as the recipe, as an effect of

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<sup>11</sup> *Ein Sof* literally means “Infinity”; it is the most exalted name of God in the Kabbalah.

<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that this theology is not a modern invention. Consider, for example, this text of the Shlah (1558–1630): “With respect to copulation, when enacted with holiness and purity, it is most holy, bestirring [matters] above; a person sanctifies himself in the nether [world], and he is sanctified greatly from the upper, and he fulfills [the commandment:] ‘You shall be holy for I am holy, the Lord your God’” (quoted in Lichtenstein 2007). What is new is the way in which these theologies, often esoteric in the past, have been brought to the fore; also new is the purpose that they now serve.

creating a holy site on earth or of repairing the upper worlds, or as a by-product of religious self-improvement.

### *DISCUSSION*

The wealth of themes and messages imparted by the guidebooks lend themselves to numerous questions based on various groupings of the books. For example, how do books written by or for women differ from those written by or for men? How do the earlier books differ from the more recent ones? How do these Jewish religious books compare to marital guidebooks of other religions? Although each of these questions is worthy of attention and indeed we hope to delve into them in future publications, space and focus preclude us from discussing them here. We hope that the quotes cited in this article that represent books written by women and men from earlier and more recent manuals make it clear that the general trends that we highlighted can be found across the board.

The two topics that our discussion will highlight are the central commonalities of the overall sample in relating to romantic love, gender egalitarianism, and marriage theologies and some important differences between them in terms of subsectors and targeted readerships.

Our analysis of thirty representative Orthodox marriage guidebooks indicates both their close interaction with the nonreligious world and their uniquely religious perspective. In this, they reflect the general pattern identified by Finkelman (2011) as characterizing contemporary Jewish Orthodox popular literature. The books employ a two-part maneuver of overtly rejecting some parts of the secular meaning system and promoting a religious alternative while using many of the tools, explanations, and even values embedded in the rejected meaning system to allow for some sort of coexistence and sometimes integration of the two. However, there is a second commonality: We identified five marital theologies that are quite removed from modern secular sensibilities. The complex interplay between the unique aspects of Orthodox marriage manuals and the aspects that are shared with the nonreligious culture is the genre's most prevalent feature. Therefore we now turn to the task of interpreting this pattern in terms of meaning making.

As we noted, almost all books, RZ as well as UO, begin by rejecting, at least overtly, the Western notions that marriage should be predicated on romantic love and gender egalitarianism. They do so by employing rational thinking and enlisting a "love as work" therapeutic discourse. In this, the guidebooks that we analyzed echo a typical fundamentalist strategy of employing modern cognitive tools to combat the liberal modern ethos (Eisenstadt 1999). Thus the religious guidebooks accentuate the conflict between the two leading Western discourses

on love: romantic love and love as work (Illouz, 1997). The books reject the first and espouse the second, and most important, they transform the idea of mundane prosaic love into a form of sacred love. In effect, the guidebooks disenchant romantic love and then attempt to re-enchant marriage by setting alternative religious marital ideals. Romantic love can be threatening to conservative societies for various reasons: It undermines the authority of parents and leaders, it introduces an uncontrollable element into the orderly transmission of religion from one generation to the next, and it threatens to shake the set hierarchy and roles of the traditional family. Instead of romantic love, these guidebooks offer various marriage theologies that involve God's will, thus re-enchanting the marital arena by imbuing marriage with theological meaning. The first marriage theology that we identified as being common to all the books, "marriage as commandment," lacks re-enchantment power, since it merely states the traditional position of God's wish for people to marry and procreate. However, four additional theologies fill this void. Among them, the "secret of the Jewish home" theology comes closest to Western secular notions in that it preserves marital bliss as the ideal while presenting the Torah (in its widest sense) as the ultimate marriage guide, God as the best psychologist (often teaching lessons obtained directly from secular marriage guidebooks), and menstrual purity laws as the ideal way to retain sexual passion. Clearly, the less important it is for the authors to emphasize how different their value system is from modern society, the more likely it is that they adopt Western values.

The farther we move along the conservative scale, the less likely it is that secular notions of marital bliss are adapted from secular manuals. However, fundamentalists do not merely "conduct intellectual jujitsu with modernity" (Marty 1995: 37); they also offer alternative meaning systems based on religious values. The last three marriage theologies that we identified draw less heavily on non-religious meaning systems or techniques and may therefore be considered emblematic of religious leaders' efforts to offer an alternative to the feminist, therapeutic, and romantic love meaning systems. Two of the theologies ("a holy site" and "cosmic repair") concentrate directly on the sacred and can be seen as other-worldly in focus. The most radically conservative marriage theology ("self-repair") shifts the emphasis entirely away from personal fulfillment to God's will. In this sense, it can be juxtaposed with the therapeutic discourse, which is almost by definition self-focused. Romantic love is closest to being other-centered and can even be seen as creating a sense of sacredness in reality (Illouz 1997). However, it is still a system that has the gratification of the subjects at its center.

What might account for the large number of guidebooks that have been published relative to the size of the population that they serve? We suggest that it

is the different ways in which the need for making meaning must be met for these subsections of Orthodox Judaism in combination with a need to strengthen differential sectorial identities. As we noted earlier in this article, Orthodox society is highly sectorial, far beyond the basic division between UO and RZ, and each group has its own identity made up of norms, needs, and challenges. Although all subsectors—and all books analyzed—share the halachic baseline that marriage is religiously desirable and necessary, the need to find meaning in marriage and strength to deal with its challenges requires further elaboration. Spiritual leaders of each subgroup highlight the unique identity of their denomination by offering their adherents a unique combination of theological building blocks as well as by discussing the denomination's own cultural norms and issues. For example, UO women are likely to be preoccupied with the need to juggle work and family while enabling their husbands to devote all their time to Torah study. RZ women may be more concerned with sharing work and household responsibilities with their husbands. UO Hasidic men may need guidance in communicating with their wives after growing up in a highly segregated society. RZ men may be concerned about how to create a Torah-focused home when so many other options are available. The different theologies are therefore differentially tailored both to sectors and to subgroups in each population, such as newlyweds and long-married couples, women and men, and the newly religious and religiously born. At times, one writer may author several books (more than ten each in the cases of the highly popular Aviner and Ginsburgh), each with a slightly different emphasis to suit the needs of a particular readership for meaning as well as for identity.

To be more specific, the “secret of the Jewish home” theology draws heavily on a reward-and-punishment paradigm as it extols the advantages of the Orthodox way of life. It is therefore prominent in books of the RZ sector and in those intended for recently converted religious UO individuals who are still under the sway of Western ideals. The “marriage as a site of holiness” theology is aimed especially at idealistic brides and grooms who are seeking guidance and inspiration in establishing the principles of their new Jewish home. This theology sets its goals high in terms of calling for an idyllic and peaceful Temple-home. Therefore it features prominently in most guidebooks for newlyweds across sectors. The cosmic tikkun theology is directed at the more mystically inclined readers, which includes most Hasidic groups and some radical RZs. It requires a level of religious sophistication that is more typical of religiously born individuals, but some Hasidic groups (such as Breslov and Chabad) use the appeal of Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism) to attract mystically oriented converts to Orthodoxy. The “self-repair” theology offers meaning and solace to more conservative UO people for whom the modern ethos of love is less of an issue,

especially to Litvak yeshiva students who are engrossed in the project of religious self-improvement, or to disillusioned long-married couples for whom marriage has become a source of hardship and even misery. Meaning can be offered to them as well, and in extreme cases, authors attempt to comfort them by the assurance that the more difficult their marriage, the more they are purifying their souls. When considered together, these theological building blocks can be seen as tiers in a powerful and comprehensive theology of Orthodox Jewish couplehood.

The elements of life that religion is called on to imbue with meaning do not remain static. When marriage was an agreed-upon way of forming partnerships, the need for marriage theologies may have been less pressing. Other spheres of life, such as how to integrate religion and science, called for meaning making, and this need was answered by various religious philosophers. In fact, it is precisely because romantic relationships (but not necessarily marriage) have become a central locus of meaning in the lives of modern individuals (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Swidler 2001) that religious authorities feel the need to offer alternative meanings for the private lives of couples.

Finally, there is the important issue of the ideological interest of many of the writers in preserving a sense of religious superiority and supporting the patri-archal hierarchy system within Orthodox Judaism. Orthodox authorities have long identified romantic love and gender egalitarianism as threats to what they view as the traditional lifestyle. By depicting the religious marriage as being on a higher spiritual plane than the secular romantic relationship, they reinforce the perceived chasm between the two sectors and extol the Jewish Torah marriage.

If meaning is to be construed, as Mattis (2002) suggests, as the reorganization that emerges out of disruptions of taken-for-granted semantic and symbolic relationships, then perhaps the appeal of these religious marriage guidebooks stems from the need to deal with discrepancies between secular and religious values and fit them into a coherent meaning system. At the same time, religious communities seek to maintain boundaries and internal power structures, and the guidebooks do their best to fulfill both these individual and societal needs.

Considered in a broader perspective, the genre of religious marital guidebooks demonstrates the need of religious communities living within a wider nonreligious context to feel unique and at the same time to come to terms with some very alluring values and concepts from the surrounding culture. It also demonstrates the highly innovative and diverse ways in which leaders of these communities cater to these dual needs, by infusing the current trouble area of gender relations with sacred meaning. Finally, this article offered the term *marriage theologies*, which, to the best of our knowledge, has not been discussed before and which we believe to be an analytically useful concept. We hope that scholars of other

religions, especially those of other highly religious communities living within non-religious Western societies, will be encouraged to test and broaden the typology of marriage theologies that we described to enable comparisons between them and to consider their impact on the religious marital sphere.

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### **Appendix: The Thirty Analyzed Hebrew Jewish Orthodox Marriage Guidebooks by Religious Sector**

*Note:* All the books are in Hebrew, and all were published in Israel. The notation “PM” indicates that the name of the publisher was missing. For a list of the books by title in Hebrew, please contact us. [{{AUTHOR: Correct as added??}}](#)

#### ***Moderate Religious Zionist***

- Artziel, Devora. 1998. *Marriage: Self-Realization, Building a Family*. Jerusalem: Ateret.
- Batzri, Sima. 1980. *Marriage: An Assignment!* Jerusalem: Ktav Institute.
- Cherlow, Yuval. 2003. *The Private Domain*. Petach Tikvah: Yashivat Hahesder Petach Tikvah.
- Gurfein, Yehudit (editor). 2002. *Please God, by You*. Rosh Pinah: Marot Midrasha Publications.
- Knohl, Eliashiv. 2002. *The Marriage Covenant*. Ein Tzurim: Shiluvim Institute.
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#### ***Radical Religious Zionist***

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- Bleicher, Moshe. 2005. *Shekinah Amongst Them*, 2nd edition. Kiryat Arbah: Me'emek Hevron.
- Harel, Avizohar. 2005. *A Complete Construction*. Bar Yochai: PM.
- Luza, Yedidya. 2010. *The Jubilation of Grooms*. Jerusalem: PM.
- Melamed, Eliezer. 2007. *Dew-Drops*. Har Bracha: Har Bracha Institute.

#### ***Moderate Ultra-Orthodox—Lithuanian***

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- Cohen, Simcha. 2005. *The Jewish Home*. B'nei Brak: PM.
- Eliyahu, Yosef. 2006. *The Secret of Marriage*. Jerusalem: Beit El Library.
- Leibowitz, Yehuda. 1988. *Matchmaking and Pairing*. B'nei Brak: PM.
- Schach, Eliezer Menachem. 2005. *Ways of the Home*. B'nei Brak: PM.

#### ***Conservative Ultra-Orthodox—Lithuanian***

- Anonymous. 2001. *Wedding Canopy*. Jerusalem: PM.
- Pincus, Shimsohn. 2002. *Pride of Fathers*. Jerusalem: PM.
- Segal, Dan Ze'ev. 2001. *Peace in Your Tents*. B'nei Brak: PM.
- Volbeh, Shlomo 1996/1975. *Guidance Chapters for Grooms*. Jerusalem: Lehman

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***Conservative Ultra-Orthodox—Hasidic***

- Arush, Shalom. 2008. *In the Garden of Peace*. Jerusalem: Hut Shel Hesed.
- Ginsburgh, Yitzchak. 2004–2008. *A Pleasing Wine*, Parts 1–4. Kfar Habad: Gal Einai Institute Publications.
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- Schick, Eliezer. 1998. *A Compendium of Peace in the Home*. Jerusalem: Hassidei Breslev Publishing House.
- Shneiorsson, Menachem Mendel. 2001. *Light of the Home*. Kiryat Malachi: Torah Or.

***Sephardic Ultra-Orthodox—Shas***

- Gabai, Yosef. 2006. *Book of Love of Your Nuptials*. Jerusalem: Or Hachaim.
- Gavriel, David. 1996. *Around the Table*. Holon: Ateret Chachamic Yeashivah.
- Refael, Shaul. 2000. *Marriage: A Garden of Roses*. Jerusalem: PM.
- Tanami, Zecharya. 2003. *The Family in the Storm of the Times*. Rehovot: Moshe Institute.