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Beyond the Pale *New Religions in Israel*

In February 1982, an interdepartmental government commission was appointed by the Education Minister, to investigate and report on "Eastern cults." The appointment of this commission was in itself an indication of the growth of new religions in Israel. It was a result of pressure from parents' groups, religious orthodox groups, and the media. It was then estimated that about 3000 individuals were involved as active members in all of these groups. By 1990, there were six communal settlements in Israel created and maintained by followers of new religious movements. They included two settlements devoted to the teachings of G. I. Gurdjieff, two devoted to Transcendental Meditation, and one each for Emin and Anthroposophy.

The new religions that have appeared in Israel since the early 1970s are the same new religions that have appeared in the West since the 1950s. Their message when they come to Israel is the same as elsewhere. Only their audience is radically different and so is the reception they are likely to get. New religions are belief minorities in constant opposition to the world around them, which is challenging

the plausibility of their beliefs. The challenge and the opposition are going to be particularly fierce in the case of Israel. What is unique about the advent of these groups in Israel is not the specific content of their beliefs and activities but their history in Israel. Their beliefs and practices were well-known and predictable. What was totally unforeseeable was their development and growth within Israeli society. The appearance and growth of new religious movements in Israel since 1973 has included not only well-known new religions that appeared in the West since 1950, but also movements such as anthroposophy, theosophy, and Jehovah's Witnesses dating to the late nineteenth century.

New religions only partly fit the ideal type of religious sect, as formulated by Troeltsch (1961), which included voluntariness, selectness, egalitarianism, cooperativeness, intimacy, and opposition to the world. Sectarian religion means a total personal commitment, a frequent emotional expression of ecstasy, a total departure from the rest of society. Every religious sect, by definition, is in open rebellion against the ways of the world, and against the views of the majority (see Beit-Hallahmi, 1992). Religious sects overstep the boundaries of the area assigned to religion in secular society, and this is what is annoying and threatening. The sectarian rebellion against the majority is invisible in most cases, since sects tend to withdraw from the wider society or keep to their original environment. A few sects are visible and annoying, and attract much attention when their members perform deviant acts, but the more remarkable fact is that most of the time sect membership leads to very conventional behavior. Still, sect membership itself, which involves a total commitment, and a total personal involvement (e.g., living with other sect members, donating income) is deviant.

Glock and Stark (1965) define cults as "religious movements which draw their inspiration from other than the primary religion of the culture," whereas sects are "schismatic movements . . . whose concern is with preserving a purer form of the traditional faith" (p. 24). By this definition, all new religions in Israel are cults, since they draw their inspiration from non-Jewish traditions. Within their own frame of reference, some of the new religions can be regarded as sects, since they proclaim their own goal of preserving a purer form of Hinduism (ISKCON) or of Christianity (the Unification Church). One reason in favor of using the term *new religions* is its affective neutrality. Unlike sects or cults, which are often used to derogate, *new religions* is neutral.

The concept of new religions can be traced back to Needleman

(1970), who first made it popular. Following Needleman, we may define the new religions by three main characteristics:

1. They were founded after 1950.
2. They display "modern," often businesslike methods of organization and recruitment.
3. They all have a conscious psychotherapeutic component in their belief systems and practices.

We are looking at groups whose formal organization, if not their belief system, is of relatively recent origin. Some of the groups promote beliefs and practices that seem beyond the traditional scope of religion, especially in the two areas of occultism and self-improvement. This may be one of the characteristics of the new religions, as opposed to the old ones. Nevertheless, what the old and new religious movements always share is the *supernatural premise*, the belief in the invisible world or a spiritual world, which the believers have to relate to (Wallace, 1966). The existence and centrality of occult practices and beliefs and of various psychotherapy techniques indeed vary among the new religions, but what unites them is still traditional religious beliefs about the immortal soul and about gods, and other unseen cosmic forces.

There are organizational differences, related as well to the newness of the new religions. They are young in terms of organizational life cycle, and they are also very much belief minorities. Since the new religions do not enjoy the privileged status of the old ones and have to compete with them, their problem is the problem of every cultural innovation: how to create openness to ideas that are new and different. Plausibility for deviant beliefs is hard to gain. The problem new religions have to solve is that of gaining plausibility in the eyes of potential members and the public.

In many of the new religions, the member is offered a system of psychological (and sometimes physical) exercises such as meditation, individual psychotherapy, and group therapy aimed at self-improvement and psychological well-being. This may be one of the differences between the old religions and the new ones, and it reflects the historical process of the psychologization of religion (see Beit-Hallahmi, 1989). The technology offered by the group, whether meditation, chanting, or psychotherapy, creates support for weak egos. This psychotherapeutic aid naturally attracts and can potentially help individuals with a range of personal problems, from mild neurosis to

active psychosis. Some of the groups take a gnostic stance, claiming esoteric knowledge that is available only to group members. Sharing in this knowledge creates an understandable feeling of superiority. The insiders feel naturally superior to the unenlightened majority, and this feeling may exert a powerful attraction.

The resocializing effects of membership in new religions, which often lead members to stop self-destructive behaviors and to reenter the work world have been widely recognized (Kiev, 1969; Robbins, 1969; Robbins and Anthony, 1972). Only rarely has the claim been made that membership in new religions can have negative consequences in terms of psychological functioning (Kiev, 1964).

New religions, as opposed to old ones, are close to what Judah (1967) has called "modern metaphysical movements." Especially prominent in these groups are two characteristics listed by Judah: first, the identification of religion and science as mutually supportive and continuous, and the psychotherapeutic approach to individual well-being. Members of new religions who have experienced profound private salvation are likely to enjoy considerable therapeutic effects as a result of their entry into the group and their membership. The effects depend on their preconversion psychological state and on the nature of the social network in the group. The new religious group becomes a highly supportive structure, which provides exactly what is missing for the vulnerable individual. According to the classification offered by O'Dea (1968), the new religions in Israel can be classified as either "introversionist," i.e., seeking to withdraw from the world in order to cultivate its inner spirituality, or "gnostic," i.e., offering some special esoteric knowledge. The eschatology of the new religions covers two realms. There is the promise of radical change in the individual, in the direction of self-improvement, perfect health, longevity, and even immortality. There are also, in some groups, the expectation of a cosmic catastrophe, which only the faithful will survive.

The analysis of new religions in Israel has to be informed by the nature of Israeli society, by the Israeli-Jewish identity and its problems, and by the crisis of Zionism. What is remarkable about the new religions in Israel is their phenomenal growth during a very short period of time. In attempting to assess the existence and growth of new religions in Israel since 1973 we are fortunate to have a survey published in 1972 by two researchers at the Hebrew University (Cohen and Grunau, 1972). This detailed survey of ethnic and religious minorities in Israel at the time also included a section on cults. Using informants, official statistics, published research, and media reports, it gives us what we can call our baseline. What it shows is that the situation in Israel as of 1972 with regard to new religions was

strikingly different from that in Western Europe or the United States. The only groups listed were theosophy, anthroposophy, "yoga according to Vente Kesananda," transcendental meditation (TM), ISKCON, Subud, Zen, Krishnamurti, Rosicrucians, and "Spiritualists." The total number of members was at most 250. Most of the groups that became prominent later, such as Scientology and the Divine Light Mission, were simply unknown. The number of TM practitioners was estimated at less than ten.

In defining new religions in Israel we have another source of help. In Israel, where there is no constitution, no separation of religion and state, and a Ministry for Religious Affairs, there is a clear legal definition of new religions. They include all the religious communities not recognized by the state. According to Israel law, all residents must belong to some religious community, whose rules they then must follow with regard to marriage, divorce, and burial. The Israeli system of religious divisions uses the *millet*, the religious community, as a basic unit. This notion is taken from Turkish law (Cahnman, 1944). Under the *millet* system, the Israeli government recognizes certain established religious groups, whose leaders are accorded special status, even when they represent tiny minorities. These religious communities are also entitled to government financial support for keeping their churches or mosques, for maintaining their separate legal systems, and for paying the salaries of clergy. They have an official standing, their leaders are treated as dignitaries, and they are eligible for financial support and tax exemptions. All other groups, ranging from Reform Jews to ISKCON, are not recognized.

Conversions from one *millet* to another are possible under the system but have to be registered with the State to be legally valid. This according to a British order, based on the legal authority of the British Mandate of 1922. All these orders have been kept in force by the Israeli government since 1948. The British Mandate government recognized ten religious groups, namely Jews and nine Christian denominations. The Israeli government since 1948 has recognized the Druze (in 1957), the Evangelical Episcopal Church in Israel (in 1970), and Baha'ism (in 1971). Muslims have not been officially recognized, but their religious courts have been, and they have been empowered by two Israeli laws (1953 and 1961). Cases of conversion from one recognized group to another number under 300 a year, and most of them are conversions from one Christian church to another. About five cases of Jews converting to Christianity and about ten cases of Jews converting to Islam are officially registered every year.

As Pfeffer (1974) correctly points out, in Israel legitimation of a marginal religion is accorded by the government, and he chooses the

good example of non-Orthodox Jews, who in Israel are members of a marginal religion and are not accorded legitimacy by the State. The boundaries of religious legitimacy and religious experimentation in Israel of the 1950s are faithfully described by Weiner (1961). The boundaries of religious legitimacy in Israel in the 1970s are delineated in Israel Pocket Library's *Religious Life and Communities* (1974), which contains material taken from the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. The religious communities described are Jews, Muslims, Christians, Samaritans, Karaites, Druze, and Baha'is.

The common division of Jews in the United States into three denominations, Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform (Lazerwitz and Harrison, 1979) has little bearing on religious life in Israel. Reform Judaism and Conservative Judaism, imported from the United States, could be counted among the other new religions. They are subject to either opposition (from the Orthodox establishment) or indifference (from most Israelis) and have shown little success in attracting members. As Liebman and Don-Yehiya (1984) state: "The institutional monopoly of the Orthodox (Conservative and Reform rabbis are not recognized as rabbis in Israel . . .) is not a major political issue. There are no more than two or three thousand members of non-Orthodox synagogues" (p. 19). As of 1986, there were seventeen Reform and thirty Conservative synagogues in Israel (Bitzur, 1986). Their histories in Israel are similar to those of other new religious movements. They were imported by foreigners, who have been trying to convert the native-born to their viewpoint with limited success. Most members of these Jewish movements have been immigrants from English-speaking countries. As of 1990, there are probably fewer than 3000 Israeli adults in both.

In a sense, Reform Judaism has a harder task "selling" itself to Israelis than ISKCON. The former tries to present itself as an authentic form of Judaism, while the latter is clearly an alternative and an opposition to Judaism. Most Israelis have not responded to the Reform and Conservative messages apparently because they do not feel the need for another Judaism in addition to the Orthodox version readily available. The Reform and Conservative movements also express quite strongly values characteristic of U.S. culture, such as anti-authoritarianism and feminism, and which are quite foreign to Israeli experience and culture. The opposition to Reform Judaism in Israel comes from the Orthodox, as it threatens their dominance and monopoly. The opposition to new religions is almost universal because they threaten the unity provided by the Jewish identity common to secular and religious Israelis.

To appreciate the reality of new religious movements in Israel, we are now going to examine in detail the least known among them, the Emin Society, and in some detail the situation of Messianic Jews and Jehovah's Witnesses in Israel.

The Emin Society

The village of Maale Tzvia, in the hills of the Western Upper Galilee, appears to be just another struggling settlement surrounded by a barren, rocky scenery. Its nondescript houses, where only thirty families make their home, are not likely to attract much notice. The inhabitants seem to most observers to be busy, industrious young Israeli families, devoting their energies to work and family life, just like their neighbors in other villages. Little would lead the observer to guess that one of those light gray buildings houses a temple of worship, a hidden sanctum that is off-limits to the impure and uninitiated. Maale Tzvia is a settlement of the Emin Society, and its inhabitants' beliefs about the world, themselves, and others make them as unique as one could be in Western Galilee.

The Emin Society Israel, the Israeli branch of an occult group started by a London truck driver, is an impressive success story by any measure. In a few years it has grown from two emissaries to several hundred committed members, who are investing personal energies, money, and identities in this unlikely venture. And the members are by no means the downtrodden or visibly desperate. Many are young, handsome, neatly dressed, many of them officers in the Israeli armed forces.

History of the Emin Society

The only publication which is referred to explicitly as the Emin Bible, is *The Poem of The Church of Emin Coils* (Armin, 1978), which presents its history, rules, and sacraments. The *Poem* describes the growth of the organization from an inauspicious beginning of just five into a membership of 1000. This early membership, known as "the family," consisted of:

1. Mr. Raymond Armin, known as LEO (British)
2. Mrs. V. A. C. Armin, known as RUTH (British)
3. Mr. John Armin, known as PELLI (British)

4. Mr. Stephen Armin, known as PETER (British)
5. Ms. Deborah McKay, known as ETHRA (American)
adopted family member, by agreement. (Armin, 1978, p. 1)

According to the *Poem*, "The Emin story begins at 3:20 A.M. on the 27th of July 1924 with the emergence from the small world into the large world of earth by Raymond Armin, who by the age of 12 years had become deeply religiously inclined at the cost of his early general academic qualities" (Armin, 1978, p. 1). Raymond married Ruth in 1945 and begat John Armin (Pelli) in 1958 and Stephen Armin (Peter) in 1964. On 3 December 1971, nine other people joined the church. One of them was Ms. Deborah McKay, who was adopted in February 1972 by Leo and Ruth. The "healing capacity" of "the Essence" (Leo, Ruth, and Ethra) appeared as a "marked emanation" in 1973. In 1974, according to the *Poem*, the membership reached 250. During that year Leo stopped working at his previous job and has been kept since then by "small donations" from members.

"During these formative years, choirs, herbal groups, tarot groups, Bible study classes, poetry groups, mumming groups, theatrical groups, bands, vocal groups, music composition, dancing troupes, healers, astrology groups, palmistry, graphology, phrenology and other detection groups" (Armin, 1978, p. 3) were developed.

By 1977, according to the *Poem*, the Emin Society had 800 members, with 600 academic degrees, including eighty Americans residing in Britain. There was also "the retrieving and saving of some 450 persons from drugs (many hard-line), as well as the many successes in healing, of terminal conditions in both young and old, and of many other conditions, such as fibroids of the womb, arthritis and others." (p. 3). In 1978, there were groups in Israel, Canada, Australia, and the United States, in addition to the group in London. In November 1978, the Essence (Leo, Ruth, and Ethra) with Emin's executive officer (Pelli) traveled to the United States to start the Church of the Emin Coils. By that time, according to the *Poem*, membership reached 1000.

From various publications (e.g., *Private Eye*, May 23, 1983) it can be gathered that Emin was first known as the Eminent Way and that the current name Emin, is simply an abbreviation of the old one. The name Emin is pronounced *EE-men*, and various esoteric interpretations are offered to the members as to its derivation. The Church claims to have collected as of late 1978 (Armin, 1978) 14 million written words and 40 million spoken words on audio and video tapes, which are known as the Archives and serve as the source of all authority and knowledge. The prolific Mr. Armin thus resembles another founder of a well-known new religion, L. Ron Hubbard.

The roving ambassador for Leo is Mathew, who has resided in Israel as Leo's personal emissary, to oversee the activities of the Israeli branch. Mathew has also traveled to the United States to organize Emin activities there and to lecture. According to an Emin Foundation leaflet distributed in New York City, Mathew spoke on WMCA radio on October 15, 1982. The Church of Emin Coils is the Florida branch of the Emin Society, organized in 1978 by Leo and his emissaries.

Private Eye, London's muckraking satirical weekly, has devoted four articles to the Emin organization (Halloran, 1980a, 1980b, 1980c, 1980d), causing Mr. Armin to go to court and ask for injunctions against any more publications. These attempts have failed. *Private Eye* reported that Mr. Armin's real name was Schertenlieb and that he was the son of a British hotel waiter. As a child, he was often disturbed by "voices" and "past reincarnations." During World War II he was stationed in India and later employed as a house painter. In the early 1960s, he was an area manager for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* sales organization in Britain but in 1965 was declared bankrupt in Nottingham at his own request. He then moved to London and worked as a truck driver. Then started his career as Leo.

The Emin organization in Britain operates through six registered companies, all owned and directed by members of the Armin family. Only one of the companies has ever filed annual income returns, as required by British law. The income for that company, Esoteric and Occult Lectures, Ltd., was rather impressive (193,000 British pounds for 1977) but most of it was paid to the directors in fees and salaries. *Private Eye* estimated that the Emin group of companies was making about 10,000 British pounds a week, from 2000 dues-paying members worldwide. In addition to the request for a court injunction, the *Private Eye's* first article drew 135 letters from Emin members, some of which included rather explicit threats (Wallis and Curran, 1981).

The history of Emin in Israel starts in London in 1974, when Rafi and Erez, two young former commandoes, were serving as security men at the Israeli Embassy there. They chanced upon the developing Emin organization and became members. After what they call three years of study, they returned to Israel in 1977 and for the next two years held meetings with groups ranging from ten to thirty people. In 1979 Mathew, Leo's personal emissary was sent to Israel to oversee the development of the Israeli branch. In 1980, when membership reached 200, a former movie theater was rented in a lower-class neighborhood near Tel-Aviv and was then turned into the Emin center. According to Emin leaflets, from which the above information was taken, membership reached 350 in 1982, with an equal number of candidates for membership. In letters written to the Government

Commission of Inquiry on cults in Israel in 1983, membership was reported to be 550 or 600, and the number of candidates was not mentioned. Leo has visited Israel several times since 1983 to see for himself the development of the Israeli branch and direct its future course.

Emin Beliefs

Many of the beliefs and practices in the Emin lore are similar to those advocated by other modern occult groups, especially the Rosicrucian, Gurdjieff-Ouspensky, and Rudolf Steiner traditions. The basic beliefs and practices of the Emin Society are presented in *The Journey* (Armin, 1979) and in *Cobwebs and Tears* (Armin, 1982).

The following passages, written by Leo in 1972, give the flavor of much of the writings:

From the foundations of the world, the Queen of the Galaxy has been nurtured and maintained by the three forces that are the breath of life throughout the universe, herself being a tripod and crucible in which the magical and mysterious blending never ceases. (Armin, 1972, p. 30)

The Church of Emin Coils deems human life with its present possibility to have begun approximately nine thousand years ago, which is the measurement of the last evolutionary upgrading in the joint planetary and human story of trace. Therefore it is viewed that all ensuing evidence constitutes the current dignity and character of human existence, and stems from the King Scorpionian dynasty of Egypt . . . from which all attested religions of the twentieth century are subsequent and derivative. (Armin, 1978, p. 8)

[There are] two universal processes (blue and red) within the confines of the Blue Planet, Earth; the crossing of the three universes in the galaxy (blue, red and white) and the crossing of the five universes within the confines of middle space, which extends to the disc of the Milky Way (the colors of which are green, yellow, blue, red and white). (Armin 1978, p. 9)

The Emin view of other religions is accepting and eclectic: "Abraham is admitted to; Jesus Christ is admitted to (the Silver Chalice); Mohammed and the Blue Princes of Islam is [sic] admitted to

(the Silver Beacon); Guatama the Buddah is admitted to (the Gold Road); the Platinum Triangle of Lords Brahma, Wishnu, [sic] Shiva is admitted to" (1978, p. 11).

The Emin Society does have some peculiar beliefs about human anatomy, especially the nervous system. These include the belief in the existence of three brains. "Yes, three, originally. Now two. Simply, the human used to have an equivalent tail in which was seated the third brain. For many reasons the third brain broke up and became widely dispersed throughout the diaphragm and stomach" (Armin, 1979, p. 54).

The practices of the Emin Society include reading auras and diagnosing individuals on the basis of aura colors, according to charts developed by Leo, Ruth, and Ethra. There is a rite of exorcism, which "arrests any hostile, degenerative or unreasonable essence, practice, mind or mental projection; which stands against anything which tries to prevent the given right of human life to become enhanced over its planetary station. . . . It is processed and dealt with entirely in the occult, electrical and electro-magnetic fields of human precincts, dwelling precincts, location precincts and all concentrated ground or dimensions" (Armin, 1978, p. 118). Reincarnation is discussed extensively in Leo's various teachings (Armin 1979 and 1982).

Leo teaches that "True Tarot cards are representations in picture form, using symbol, colour, number, positions and so on, which constitute an encyclopaedia of knowledge concerning the purposes of God, the mechanics of creation and human life in relation to God and creation; and so, within any true tarot, there are clues to self-development" (Armin, 1982, p. 118).

According to interviews with ex-members and informants, Emin doctrine includes belief in a coming disaster, which will destroy the whole world, leaving behind only Emin members and their immediate environment. Such a disaster had been predicted for 1984 but was averted at the last moment because of the "positive energy" created by Emin members in their activities.

A major concern expressed in Emin writings is that about becoming electrically polluted, and the means to avoid or rectify this pollution. "Part of self development concerns taking care not to allow oneself to coarsen or become electrically poisoned or polluted below the level of one's aim or attainment" (Armin, 1982, p. 74).

Electrical stumps travelling through the astral light can attach themselves, in the way of a barnacle or limpet, to the human aura. Understand that all sorts of electrical filth can be released

by people which then moves through the astral light looking for a human host which is higher than itself upon whose aura it can attach itself, and from which it can electrically feed, and even grow. But there is worse to come, for at close quarters someone can stick upon you one of those electrical barnacles or limpets deliberately, through spite, malice, hatred, jealousy, sexual projection . . . Now, this can become even more serious, in that once an electrical barnacle or limpet has attached itself to a person's aura, it can then work like modern radar, acting as a beacon to that from which it came; and so it can receive further transmission from its source, and from any source of like kind and frequency . . . this indicates a very dangerous prospect should a 'branch office' be established on the very edge of your aura which is transmitted into on [sic] a long-term basis." (pp. 78-79)

The solution for this worrisome state, according to Emin writings, is cleansing your aura by wiping it with human hands.

Emin Activities

Before a group meeting, the floor of the room is mopped by the men, who then arrange the chairs in a U-shape. The women then move around with a bell and with incense, and decontaminate the room from undesirable electrical charges, which may interfere with the activities. The women also provide cut flowers for a vase, put on the table in front of the chairs. To mark the beginning of the meeting, the Usher plays the same musical record. The Usher is accompanied by Back Up Ladies, who provide tea (for the Usher) and positive electrical energy. Participation by group members is handled rather formally.

Group meetings are held twice a week, in addition to other special activities. Fees are charged for each meeting, in addition to monthly dues. The total expense per month for an active member may reach more than \$150, which is about one quarter of the average monthly income of an Israeli family in 1986. The Emin organization is highly centralized, with a small number of Ushers and Monitors, who have reached "more advanced levels of knowledge," being in charge. Personal emissaries of Leo, or Leo himself, make all policy decisions.

According to the *Poem* (p. 58), the church has its own calendar, with nine holidays as of 1978, including The Day of Seven Gifts (March 21 approximately), The Celebration of the Significance of Birth and Regeneration (Easter Sunday), and The Celebration of the Silver

Chalice (Christmas). For members of Emin, personal time is measured by Emin years, which are nine months long. "A normal seasonal life cycle is . . . 72 Emin years; which then translates into 54 calendar years, which is, interestingly enough, the age at which Mohammed is recorded to have become divine. Any more birthdays or cycles after this time are considered to be grace of extension" (Armin, 1978, p. 63).

Standards of behavior in the *Poem* include rules about symbols and sexual behavior. "It is forbidden . . . to erect a pentagram or an aeneagram; and it is against God and creation to worship any symbol in an upside-down condition, or to practice a ceremony backwards. Any offender will be exorcised and excommunicated" (Armin, 1978, p. 150). This is, in part, because "the two symbols become portals or terminal points of the arrival and dispatch of inter-galactic electrical form" causing death by "spontaneous combustion, petrification, lack of energy (wasting) and electrical gangrene" (p. 152).

Regarding sex, "At no time will homosexuality, lesbianism, transvestism, nymphonic or any other unnatural condition or freak practice . . . be permitted" (p. 156). Masturbation is allowable, only once a week, and with "no mental associations or mental pictures. . . . The action should be entirely mechanical . . . excess is sinful, and astral deterioration will ensue, by the power of the church Essences. Therefore, use it with care" (p. 161).

In sum, the Emin system of beliefs and practices seems to be an amalgam of Western occult traditions diligently and eclectically colated, if not integrated. These traditions include alchemy, numerology, tarot cards, astrology, palm reading, aura reading and cleaning, beliefs in reincarnation, animal magnetism, and electromagnetic healing. The sources of Emin beliefs and practices can undoubtedly be traced to the personal experiences of the founder Mr. Armin, who has been exposed to all these old and new systems through extensive reading, personal contacts with theosophical and occult groups of various kinds, and possibly with Scientology. The sheer volume of Mr. Armin's writings is impressive. What emerges from them is a system that can be described as modern occultism, and thus, Emin can be classified (alliteratively) as a modern eclectic (electrical) occult cult.

Emin in Israel, the Media, and the Government

The first newspaper article about the Emin in Israel was published in the daily *Davar* on June 30, 1980, and was clearly initiated by the group itself. It sounds like a press release and emphasizes the positive and social nature of its activities. The subtitle of the article proclaims: "A brain surgeon and a construction worker find a common

language in a club aimed at personal-creative development." The article does mention some of the esoteric knowledge but refers specifically only to astrology, which in Israel is not considered occult. At the end of the article, Rafi Eyal, one of the founders, expresses concern that the group not be perceived as something mystical, and that it has no "missionary intentions." The number of members is reported to be 100. The same article, in an abridged version, appeared seven months later in a local weekly. *Teva Ulbriut*, the organ of the naturopathy movement in Israel, carried in its October 1981 issue a brief article by Avi Levy, identified as an Emin member, dealing with the "Five electrical centers in the human body" (Levy, 1981).

Emin was one of the targets in the general attack on new religions, conducted by the Israeli press in 1982–83. *Laisha*, a women's weekly which has the highest circulation of all Israeli weeklies, published an article (Avidan-Barir, 1983) about an artistic couple who got divorced after the husband became a member of Emin. Zohar (1982) wrote about Emin as part of a series of articles pointing to the danger of cults. A local newspaper in Haifa (*Kolbo*, 1982) reported on an Emin meeting in a Haifa suburb, protested by Parents Worried About Cults. Kaffman (1983), a psychiatrist in charge of the section for research and prevention team on cults in the Kibbutz Child and Family Guidance Clinic in Tel-Aviv, denounced Emin in a letter to the editor of *Hashavua Bakibbutz Hartzit* (a weekly distributed in eighty kibbutzim). Kisslev (1983) devoted an article to Emin in a series of articles on New Religions, published in Israel's leading daily. The tone in all of these ranged from negative to vitriolic.

The Commission of Inquiry, appointed by the Minister of Education in 1982, was set up to investigate all cults operating in Israel. The Emin Society Israel responded by actively trying to persuade the commission that it was not a cult or a sect. The Society leaders appeared before the commission, bombarded it with letters and memoranda, and had members and their families send letters in support.

The Emin policy in regard to media criticism and to the government Commission of Inquiry has been one of responding to every mention of its name in the same way, trying to persuade the public that it was not a religious group and that it was not breaking the law. While the second point cannot be disputed, the Emin Society attempts to persuade the public and the government that their beliefs and practices focused on "study and self-improvement" seemed rather naive, as shown by their absolute lack of success. Of all new religions active in Israel in the early 1980s, including Scientology, ISKCON, Divine Light Mission, Ananda Marga, and Transcendental

Meditation, only TM has tried to respond directly to media attacks. Most groups did not respond to any media or government reports or inquiries. Emin chose almost a frontal assault strategy, possibly because of directions from Leo.

Publications by the Israeli branch of Emin are very much concerned with conveying a favorable image to the public. They include advertisements in newspapers, brochures, letters to the editors (usually in response to newspaper articles about Emin), and letters to various government authorities. There were newspaper advertisements offering information to the public about Emin on at least four occasions (September 22, 1982, March 9, 1983, February 6, 1983, and December 6, 1984). These carried the distinct griffin logo of Emin, and included a post office box address. Five letters to the editor (one of those signed by fourteen individuals) appeared in *Al Hamishmar* on April 6, 1982, in response to an article about Emin published on March 19, 1982. All five letters express the same message: Disappointment with the article of March 19, demands for apologies and retractions, and information about the society. The writers emphasize that they are gainfully employed, have served in the military, are loyal to the State, and are not members of a religious cult. Moreover, they claim that Emin represents the original Israeli pioneering spirit. A letter to the editor of *Hashavua Hakibbutz Haartzi* (a weekly publication of one of the two kibbutz federations) of May 27, 1983, signed only by the "spokesman for the Emin Society," declares, in response to an earlier article, that Emin is not a cult but a legally registered nonprofit club, whose members are adults, serve in the military, and do not use drugs. A letter in *Davar*, February 4, 1983, denies beliefs attributed to the group in an earlier article. It states that the Emin Society is a group involved in promoting personal development through "the application of studies in human culture, the human system and the natural laws of the universe." These studies were carried out "by hundreds of people during 40 years of work." The letter is signed by Udi Bendror, spokesman for the Emin Society.

A lecture dealing with the Emin during the annual meeting of the Israel Anthropological Society at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem on March 14, 1983, was interrupted by shouts and yelling from the audience, which included about thirty members of Emin. The lecture by a graduate student in sociology at the Hebrew University, developed into a shouting match after Emin representatives demanded time to present their views, and the speaker was not able to present the prepared text. Yigal Tumarkin, a well-known Israeli artist and journalist, writes in his weekly column in *Ha'ir* on September 16,

1983, that, following the mention of Emin among other cults in an earlier column, he received numerous angry and insulting letters from members claiming that the Emin Society was not a cult.

Udi Ben-Dror, spokesman for the Emin Society Israel claimed in a press interview (Be'er, 1983) that Emin members had been fired from their jobs, and that property belonging to them had been damaged as a result of adverse publicity. The author has been contacted by the Israel Association for Civil Rights after members of Emin complained to the Association of Harassment. The association appointed a team to investigate those allegations, but no substantial proof was ever found.

The Emin Society held an art exhibit at a city gallery in Jerusalem in December 1982. The paintings displayed were reminiscent of traditional occult works, such as tarot cards. According to a report (Beer, 1983), the exhibit was removed after three weeks by the deputy mayor of Jerusalem, who acted in response to what he regarded as "missionary activities." A leaflet distributed at the exhibit stated that it "is one of the many areas of work that are part of the whole fabric that we cover in our studies, researches, and practical activities. We are also open to give demonstrations in other areas, such as 'Sacred Dance,' Choir and the arts of human expressions" (The Emin Society Israel, December 1982, original in English).

In the summer of 1983, the Emin Society started offering the public a variety of open activities at various locations. These included cleanups of historical sites and evenings of Israeli folk dancing. Such an evening took place on Saturday, August 13, 1983, in the largest public park in Tel Aviv. In a letter to the Commission of Inquiry investigating cults, the Emin Society spokesman stated (August 15, 1983) that the society had been engaged in volunteer activities of this kind, in an attempt to promote the values of honesty, honor, altruism, and cleanliness. The letter also states that Emin members are a part of Israel and Judaism, and that they promote original Israeli dancing and songs.

A letter to local government authorities, reporting on the cleanup operation of a historical site in the Galilee (August 21, 1983), signed by the Emin spokesman, mentions that the site was the center of Judaism in the Galilee during ancient times and emphasizes the keeping of Jewish traditions. A letter dated August 25, 1983, and addressed to various public personalities lists community activities being carried out or being planned, including theater; lectures on "family life, child rearing, developing thinking and personality, human history, palm reading, astrology, natural healing, art and

creativity, the structure of the human brain"; art exhibits; and parties for elderly.

Between September 22 and 29, 1983, the days of the Jewish festival of Sukkot, the Emin Society Israel carried out a major campaign of open activities, announced through newspaper advertisements, leaflets, and letters to government authorities. The activities included cleanups of nature preserves and archeological sites, an exhibit of a "quality sukkah," concerts and choir performances, lectures on "Values to live by," and refreshment stands near highway intersections.

The Emin doctrine specifies and requires respect for other religions, especially the major established religions, and also respect and loyalty or civil law and civil obligations in all countries where members may reside (Armin, 1978). This doctrinal prescription may be the basis for the way in which Israeli Emin members treat the Israeli state. They emphasize their absolute loyalty and commitment. A major, and convincing, argument used by Emin members to justify their claim of complete loyalty to the state is their distinction in military service. The Emin membership contains an extraordinary number of men who have served in combat units as officers and noncommissioned officers. It should be remembered that in Israeli military service (compulsory between the ages of 18 to 21, then active reserve duty until age 55) is a major test of adjustment for all Israeli men. Military service is compulsory, but becoming a pilot, a paratrooper, or a combat officer is a matter of choice and distinction. Those who choose this career (and this is a secondary career if the man is a reserve officer) are not society's outcasts or deviants. They are in the mainstream and embody the culture's self-defined virtues. Whatever they do cannot be dismissed as lunacy or deliberate evil. It has to be reckoned with.

The Emin Membership

There are more data available about the Emin membership in Israel than on any other new religion, and this is due to the Emin Society itself. During 1982 and 1983, in a response to media reports about the Emin Society, the society started a public relations campaign, which included disclosing information about the members. To disprove what they say were misconceptions or deliberate lies, Emin members went public in media interviews, letters to newspapers, and paid advertisements. The most unusual step taken by the Emin Society was to publish two paid advertisements, in one Hebrew and one

English newspaper, which included a list of members' names, occupations, university degrees, and military rank. These advertisements included a total of 263 names. From other published sources I was able to obtain some additional names, and I now have a sample of 283 names of Emin members, with additional information on some of them.

Even a list of names, with no added information, tells us something about the social background of the members. In Israel, even a first name tells you much about an individual's background. Because of changes in naming traditions among secular Israelis and a rejection of traditional Jewish names (Beit-Hallahmi, unpublished) one's first name tells us something about family background and his age. A name such as Idan Saar, an Emin member (*Idan* means "era," *Saar* means "storm") tells us that its bearer was born in Israel after 1950. Names also indicate ethnic background.

The first thing I looked at were non-Ashkenazi names. The Jewish population of Israel in 1984 was made up of about 45 percent Ashkenazi and about 55 percent non-Ashkenazi Jews. Among 283 Emin names, only twenty-one were clearly non-Ashkenazi Jews, such as Kahalani, Mualem, or Matzliah. In terms of given names, 165 were clearly Israeli names—such as Ofra, Anat, Yael, Hadas, and Irit for women and Amos, Ehud, Boaz, Ronen, Erez, Oded, and Aviad for men. These first names were never known among Jews outside of Israel. They were invented or adopted by Zionist Israelis as one form of defiance with regard to traditional Jewish culture. Anat, a common name for women, is the name of a Canaanite goddess. Erez means cedar, and reflects a "return to nature." Such names faithfully reflect contemporary secular Israeli culture and tell us something about the parents of Emin members.

Tables 1.1 and 1.2 tell us much about Emin members' socioeconomic status. Most of them would be described as lower middle class, without much formal education. The number of professionals is relatively small. It should be noted that of the 283 names we have, eighty-four are of forty-two married couples in which both spouses are members. Forty-eight of the men (35 percent) and twenty-two of the women (15 percent) are reserve officers. From all this information, one may gather the clear impression that what characterizes the membership is not success or education. Some of them seem to have been fairly successful in the military but not in any civilian career. This impression was reinforced during meetings with members and attendance of one formal meeting. It seemed that the special knowledge offered by Emin and the special status conferred by it were a compensation for lives of quiet frustration.

Table 1.1. Reported Occupation of Emin Members (Men).

OCCUPATION	NO.	OCCUPATION	NO.
Unreported	24	Mechanic	3
Computer programmer	11	Pilot	2
Student	11	Reflexologist*	2
Salesman	13	Flight controller	1
Office worker	5	Waiter	1
Agriculture	5	"Physicist" (M. Sc.)	1
Bookkeeper	3	Optometrist	1
Teacher	2	Economist	1
Musicians	2	Private investigator	1
Designer	2	"Biochemist" (B. Sc.)	1
Computer technician	2	Air steward	1
Computer operator	2	Architect	2
Soundman	3	Weaver	1
Picture framer	2	Painter	1
Photographer	2	Graphic designer	1
Dentist	2	Model designer	1
Business executive	4	Reception clerk	1
Plumber	2	Electrician	1
Carpenter	5	Producer	1
Advertising man	3	Engineer	1
Technician	4	Lawyer	1
Foreman	2	Total	137

Of the above, twenty-three report having university degrees; only three have advanced degrees beyond the B.A.

*Reflexology claims to cure illnesses by applying pressure to various parts of the foot, which controls various parts of the body.

The explanation to Emin's extraordinary success in Israel has to be anchored in three levels of discussion: first, the content of Emin beliefs and practices; second, the structure through which the content is expressed; and third, the historical context of Emin's appearance in Israel.

The Emin's secret of success in Israel seems to stem from a combination of the three elements in its message. First, the occult knowledge, which promises clear and absolute answers to all of life's mysteries, together with much hope for coping with illness (through healing) and death (through reincarnation). Second, its petty-bourgeois ideology of hard work, clean living, and neat personal appearance. Third, the explicit loyalty to state and nation, which avoids any conflicts with the demands of Israeli culture for absolute

Table 1.2. Reported Occupations of Emin Members (Women).

OCCUPATION	NO.
Unreported	42
Teacher	22
Secretary	27
Computer programmer	6
Student	6
Physical therapist	5
Housewife	5
Designer	4
Artist	3
Speech therapist	3
Typist	2
Stewardess	3
Actress	2
Photographer	2
Air controller	1
Nurse	2
Dental assistant	1
Architect	1
Copy editor	1
Cabinet maker	1
Opera singer	1
Reflexologist	1
Policewoman	1
Musician	1
Tourist guide	1
Draftperson	1
Saleswoman	1
Total	146

Of the above, thirty-seven report holding a university degree; only three have an advanced degree beyond the B.A.

loyalty to a nation constantly at war. This combination may also explain another unique feature of Emin among new religions, which is the significant number of middle-aged individuals among its members and the support from some parents of members. These parents point to the change in their children's behavior in the direction of hard work and neatness as reason for their approval.

Several testimonials by Emin members, offered to the media and government authorities and supported by outside observers, attest to positive changes in the behavior of individuals as a result of joining Emin. These changes include the ability to be gainfully employed and