Rav Mayer Twersky shlit”a once described the meosrah as follows:

We have a *mesora* of both *Torah SheBichsav* and *Torah SheBe’al Peh* dating back to Har Sinai. This *mesora* consists of the aggregate of *halachos*, values, attitudes, and patterns of behavior and thought that comprise our tradition. However, a definition of *mesora* that stops there would be sorely lacking. A crucial element of the *mesora* is the role of the *chachmei hamesora*. The *chachmei hamesora* are not simply reliable recorders and transmitters of the *mesora*. Rather, they are an integral part of what the *mesora* is. They interpret and apply the *mesora* for us, and by doing so, they enrich and protect the *mesora*. It is impossible to discuss *mesora* without emphasizing the importance of and obligation to listen to the *chachmei hamesora*, who teach us how to properly learn the *Torah SheBe’al Peh*, as well as how to *pasken* based on it.

When that element of the *mesora* is neglected, the consequences are tragic. We must look to the *ba’alei hamesora* for guidance as to what the *halacha* is, what proper Torah attitudes are, and how we should approach the new issues that arise in every generation. This is part of our *na’aseh v’nishma*.

Rav Schachter often notes that today, when we no longer have *nevua*, it is especially important that we follow the guidance of the *talmidei chachamim* of our generation. He often mentions that two of the early changes made by the Reform movement were playing an organ during *davening* (originally, a non-Jew was appointed for this role) and *davening* in German instead of Hebrew. On technical halachic grounds, both of these changes could have been defended. Although we don’t hold this way *halacha lema’aseh*,some *Acharonim* say that having a non-Jew play music on Shabbos at a *simcha* is a שבות דשבות במקום מצוה, and the *halacha* is that one is allowed to *daven* in a language other than Hebrew if one understands that language. Nevertheless, all of the leading *talmidei* *chachamim* of the generation came out against these “reforms” for a variety of broader halachic and *mesora-*based reasons. (See *Mishna* *Berura* 101:13 and *Aruch* *HaShulchan* 101:9 and 185:2-3.) The Reform leaders of the time ignored the *talmidei chachamim*, and today we see the tragic results. This is an important lesson for us nowadays. Even if something is, or seems to be, technically *mutar*, if the leading *talmidei chachamim* don’t support it, we must stay away.

Similarly, the Jewish Theological Seminary was founded in the early 1900s by well-meaning Orthodox rabbis. They thought that their “new approach” to Halacha would be able to “conserve” halachic Judaism and prevent the domination of assimilation and Reform. Of course, when we see the results a century later, it’s clear that they were tragically mistaken. It goes without saying that these well-meaning Orthodox rabbis did not ask for the guidance of the great Torah leaders of their day. Their mistake began with their rejection of the absolute authority of *Chazal*’s *mesora* of *Torah SheBe’al Peh*, as taught and accepted by all of the *chachmei hamesora* over the generations. All of the great Torah leaders at the time rejected the new movement from the start, largely because of the new movement’s approach to the authority of *Chazal*. Ultimately, the Conservative movement rejected explicit *pesukim* in the *Torah SheBichsav*, such as the prohibition against a *Kohen* marrying a divorcee and many others.

In our own day, there are well-meaning Orthodox rabbis who try to develop new ideas and new approaches as well, and we must be extraordinarily careful in evaluating them. Rav Schachter *shlit”a* and Rav Willig *shlit”a* note the difference between *chiddush* (novelty) and *shinui* (change). There can never be *shinui* in our *mesora*, but some-times we have a *chiddush*. Only the great Torah leaders can decide whether a new idea is a positive *chiddush* or a tragic *shinui*.

Rav Schachter writes (torahweb.org/torah/1999/parsha/rsch\_vayech.html):

To use the terminology of the Rav, “*chiddush*” (new insight) is accept-able, but “*shinui*”(change) is not; and one must have a very strong *mesorah* to know how to distinguish between the two. *Matan Torah* did not occur yesterday. Our Torah of today is only valid to the extent that it has been transmitted accurately, by the *mesorah,* from earlier generations. That *mesorah* is one consisting of a way of thinking *halachically*, as well as attitudes, perspectives, and style, vis-à-vis the wording of *brachot*.

Rav Schachter points out that this crucial distinction between *shinui* and *chiddush* is found in the Rav’s writings (see *The Halachic Mind*, n. 98).

Any action or movement that goes against the views of our great leaders falls outside of our *mesora*. For this reason, whenever a new movement starts or whenever the question of adjusting accepted practice is raised, the **only** correct approach is to go to the *gedolim* for advice and approval. For example, one hundred years ago, it was very uncommon for young women to study Torah on an advanced level. The Bais Yaakov movement was a revolution. Sara Schenirer, the founder of Bais Yaakov, received the blessing of the Gerrer Rebbe and other *gedolim*. This is why her revolution has succeeded. Other revolutionary changes have not received the support of the *gedolim*, and these fall outside the parameters of our *mesora*.

One element of the fundamental *yesod* of listening to the *chachmei* *hamesora* is the humility one must have with regard to the *gedolim*. Due to their Torah knowledge and their closeness to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, they wear different glasses than we do. One has to make sure that his ideas pass the test of other leading *Rabbonim*. This has always been the way it has worked in *Am Yisroel*. If a person has a *chiddush* in Halacha, he sends it around to other *gedolim* and other *poskim* to see what they have to say. They might argue and disagree, and then he’ll have to defend himself.

Rav Schachter often tells the following story, and every time he tells it he cries. Rav Moshe Feinstein *ztz”l* had a particular *kula* regarding someone in Hatzalah returning home after taking a sick person to the hospital on Shabbos. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *ztz”l* did not accept one aspect of this *chiddush*, and he wrote a *teshuva* in which he argued with Rav Moshe. In the introduction to the *teshuva*, Rav Shlomo Zalman writes that he asked permission from Rav Moshe to publicly disagree with him (*Minchas Shlomo*, *siman* 8). Rav Shlomo Zalman was a tremendous *gadol* himself! We have no way of “grading” the *gedolim*; we can’t say who was greater, Rav Moshe or Rav Shlomo Zalman, but Rav Shlomo Zalman was certainly a *gadol.* Rav Shlomo Zalman didn’t “need” to ask permission from Rav Moshe, but he did anyway! This reflects the humility of the *gedolim.*

Rav Shlomo Zalman was extremely reluctant to go against accepted practice in the Torah world, even when he felt a *chiddush* was warranted. For example, there has been an ongoing discussion about adding a special *kina* on Tisha B’Av in memory of the *kedoshim Hy”d* murdered in the Holocaust. (In recent years, it has become more widely accepted to recite a special *kina*.) In Yeshiva Kol Torah, Rav Shlomo Zalman instituted the practice of reciting one specific traditional *kina* line by line together as a *tzibbur* while having the *kedoshim* in mind. However, since not all the *gedolei hador* accepted this innovation, it was stopped. (See *Halichos Shlomo*, *Mo’adim*, Tisha B’Av, p. 441, end of n. 36.) The entire “innovation” here did not even entail changing anything! All it entailed was saying a traditional *kina* in a more powerful way. Nevertheless, Rav Shlomo Zalman was not willing to institute it alone unless this innovation “caught on” with the other *gedolim*. When it did not, he stopped it. And let us not forget Rav Shlomo Zalman’s status as an undisputed *gadol hador*!

The *Shulchan Aruch* writes (*Orach Chaim* 124:4) that when the *chazan* recites *Chazaras* *HaShatz*, there need to be nine men listening with *kavanna* to the *brachos*. Otherwise, there is a very serious concern that his *brachos* are all *levatala*. The *Mishna Berura* writes that if the *chazan* is concerned that nine men are not listening, it is proper to follow the *eitza* of the *Shulchan Shlomo* and to mentally make a *tnai* to himself that if there are not nine men listening, his *tefilla* should be a *nedava*. That way, he avoids any possibility of *brachos levatala*. Rav Shlomo Zalman was asked about this, and he said that in his youth he followed this recommendation of the *Mishna Berura*. But when he got older, he stopped. He said, “Whatever will happen to *Klal* *Yisroel* who aren’t careful with this *tnai* will happen to me!” (See *Halichos Shlomo*, *Tefilla*, p. 121, n. 13.) This is incredible! The discussion is about a private *hiddur*, which no one else even knows about. Nevertheless, since it is clearly not the accepted practice to be *mehader* like this (even among *Bnei* *Torah*), Rav Shlomo Zalman decided to stop. He avoided making changes in the accepted practice whenever possible.

The contrast between the attitude of a *gadol beYisroel* to what is happening within Open Orthodoxy is self-evident (and tragic *r”l*). Some of the leaders of this new “Orthodox” movement assume the right to argue on the accepted practice and *mesora* of the leading *Rabbonim* of our generation and previous generations, breaking from accepted Orthodox norms and practice. We have to be very careful about staking positions that go against those of all of the leading *Rabbonim*.

Some Rabbis say that they “need” to make changes, *shinuyim*, in order to “save” Orthodox Judaism. The leading *Rabbonim* have rejected this approach. Rav Schachter writes

(torahweb.org/torah/2014/moadim/rsch\_chanuka.html):

We certainly should try to do whatever we can to help and encourage every Jew to remain or become Orthodox. In Halacha we have a principle that *sha’as hadechak kedieved domi*, that in difficult situations we are permitted to act *lechatchila* in a fashion that under normal circumstances would only be acceptable *bedieved*. Many of the leniencies of *hagaon vehatzaddik* Rav Moshe Feinstein were based on this principle that *beshas hadechak* we allow *lechatchila* what under normal circumstances would only be acceptable *bedieved*. Even so, even in a *sha'as hadechak* situation, we cannot do something which is not acceptable even *bedieved*!

Over the centuries, there have always been some Jewish leaders who had noble intentions to save and conserve the Jewish People but, under the stress of a *sha'as hadechak*, made the mistake of taking positions that were so out of line as to not even be acceptable *bedieved*. The Conservative movement started years ago with the noble intention of saving and conserving the Jewish People, but unfortunately we all read in the Pew report what has become of their movement. At one of the Yeshiva’s *chagei hasmicha*, Rav Soloveitchik gave the charge to the young *musmachim* that they should be careful not to develop a “messiah complex,” that they should not convince themselves that they are “saving the whole world” and therefore are allowed to cut corners. We have to be careful even *besha’as hadechak* not to cross the Torah’s red lines. There are rules and regulations for *sha'as hadechak* as well!

History repeats itself, and time and time again we see well-meaning Jewish leaders who are out to “save” the Jewish world, and because of their youth (they were just “born yesterday,” so to speak), they don't understand that their ideas and courses of action have already been discussed and rejected in the past by our greatest leaders.

Other relevant issues include the appointment of women rabbis, interfaith dialogue regarding matters of faith, women reading the *Megilla* publicly for men, somehow re-interpreting the Torah’s description and prohibition of homosexual behavior, partnership *minyanim*, Orthodox Rabbis publicly supporting the Conservative practice of women wearing *tefillin*, and the like. For a discussion of these and related topics from a Torah, *mesora-*based perspective, see the following:

torahweb.org/torah/special/2003/rtwe\_wtg.html,

torahweb.org/torah/special/2003/rtwe\_JA\_women.html, torahweb.org/torah/special/2010/homosexuality.html, torahweb.org/audioFrameset.html#audio=rtwe\_020903, torahweb.org/torah/2012/parsha/rsch\_reeh.html,

torahweb.org/torah/2012/parsha/rsch\_Bereishis.html, torahweb.org/torah/special/2010/homosexuality.html, torahweb.org/torah/2004/parsha/rsch\_dvorim2.html,

hakirah.org/Vol%2011%20Schachter.pdf,

yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/703939/Rabbi\_Aaron\_Cohen/11\_Women\_Reading\_
the\_Megillah\_for\_Men:\_A\_Rejoinder

matzav.com/pictures/ravSchachtertefillinteshuvah

rcarabbis.org/pdf/Rabbi\_Schachter\_new\_letter.pdf

torahweb.org/torah/special/2014/rtwe\_tefillin.html

Rav Schachter has also spoken out sharply about those who wish to “modernize” Judaism and claim that the Rav *ztz”l* is their role model. For example, see:

yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/773832/Rabbi\_Hershel\_Schachter/Should\_Rabbis\_wear\_
jeans\_to\_’connect’\_better\_with\_their\_congregations\_What\_would\_Rav\_Soloveitchik\_say

See also the important comments of the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh, Rav Aharon Bina *shlit”a*, in *Michtav Bracha*, *Sefer Kovetz HaEzer*, *os* 12. He writes there that when he is *mesader kiddushin*, he is *makpid* not to allow a woman to read the *kesuba* under the *chupa*, “in order not to change *mesoras avoseinu*, even though it is not technically prohibited.” He writes that while some have a custom to have a woman repeat each of the *sheva brachos* in English after the men recite them, he does not allow this either because it generates *brachos levatala* and is similarly a “change from *mesoras avoseinu*.” Rav Bina concludes that we say, “חדש ימינו כקדם” (*Eicha* 5:21) – “We want our *minhagim* to be like those of our forefathers, *kekedem*.”

In addition to the articles and lectures cited above, I recommend the many articles by Rav Avrohom Gordimer *shlit”a* on these topics (available on the Cross-Currents blog). He has become one of the leading effective spokesmen for Torah true Orthodoxy against the serious breaches in our *mesora* referred to in these links. The following article is particularly crucial:

scribd.com/doc/233645350/Open-Orthodoxy-Outright-Heresy-and-the-Orthodox-Rebirth-of-the-Conservative-Movement

I have referred to these articles by Rav Gordimer repeatedly in the *seforim* that I have been *zocheh* to publish. Unfortunately, the breaks from the *mesora* in Open Orthodoxy have continued to get worse and worse. In each *sefer*, my list of breaks from the *mesora* grows longer! Most recently, some of the leaders of Open Orthodoxy have publicly permitted the ordination of women rabbis, one of the strongest symbols of Conservative Judaism for the past 40 years. See Rav Gordimer’s articles on this topic:

[cross-currents.com/archives/2015/06/15/ordination-of-insubordination/](http://www.cross-currents.com/archives/2015/06/15/ordination-of-insubordination/)

cross-currents.com/archives/2015/07/20/wish-i-didnt-have-to-but/

Over the past ten years, we have witnessed the rise of a new Conservative movement. Orthodox Jews must understand that the trajectory of Open Orthodoxy is the same as that of the early Conservative movement. (Actually, it’s worse. A leading Rosh Yeshiva said correctly, “They are moving more quickly than the Conservatives. It took the Conservatives seventy years to ordain women rabbis; it has taken them only around ten.”) We have to remember that JTS was started by well-meaning Orthodox Rabbis. We have to realize that we are witnessing a true break from our *mesora*. It is therefore important to read all of Rav Gordimer’s articles, as well as the *teshuvos* of Rav Schachter and the articles of Rav Twersky available on torahweb. See also the important book by Rabbi David Rosenthal, *Why Open Orthodoxy is not Orthodox*.

I would like to emphasize one particular argument of Rav Twersky. Rav Twersky wrote the following in 2003

(torahweb.org/torah/special/2003/rtwe\_wtg.html):

Women's *tefilla* groups distort not only *tefilla* but also the standing and status of women within *Yahadut*. Consistent with the axiomatic metaphysical equality which it bestows upon the genders, the Torah manifests profound and equal concern for the spiritual welfare of women and men and directs both genders along the path of religious fulfillment and perfection. By contrast, women’s *tefilla* groups *nolens volens* lead to the inevitable conclusion that the Torah has, God forbid, shortchanged women.

This inexorable logical process unfolds as follows. Prayer, as the Rav explained, is a staple of our religious existence:

It is impossible to envision service of God without prayer. What is prayer? The expression via the oral medium of the soul which yearns for God… If the Torah had not charged [us] with prayer as the sole medium of expressing inner service, we would not have known what a person whose soul thirsts for the living God should do when he seeks God.
Is it conceivable that Judaism wanted man to suppress his experience? On the contrary! The Halakha has always been concerned with the expression of the inner life.

Accordingly, if, God forbid, Halakha were to discriminate against women in the realm of *tefilla*, it would *eo ipso* suppress their religious experience and stifle their spiritual aspirations. Such a religious handicap would relegate them to spiritual mediocrity.

This false, egregious conclusion, replete with potentially tragic ramifications, is dictated by women’s *tefilla* groups. These groups are predicated upon the mistaken notion that the experience of *tefilla* is enhanced by assuming active roles and conversely is stunted when such roles are off-limits. And yet women's *tefilla* groups, conducted with even minimal technical allegiance to the particulars of Halakha, cannot provide their participants with the same or even equivalent active roles to those that are available to men praying with a quorum. Within such groups, it is impossible to recite *devarim shebikedusha* as such, fulfill the *mitzva* of *kriyas haTorah*, etc. And thus, according to the mistaken premise of the *tefilla* groups, women's religious life remains muted even within such groups.

The participants in women's *tefilla* groups will, within the present generation, become intellectually and existentially aware of the failure of such groups and the concomitant false yet inevitable conclusion regarding women's standing within *Yahadut*. We must recognize that the possible ramifications of this falsehood are especially frightening and particularly tragic. Propelled by negative momentum and misguided by erroneous teachings, some women, God forbid, could reject all remaining halakhic constraints in an unrestrained attempt to enhance their (inauthentic) *tefilla* experience in particular and religious experience in general. Needless to say, this development would be especially tragic.

Looking back, Rav Twersky’s words seem almost prophetic. Men and women are different and have different halachic roles, and that cannot change. Thus, all of the gradual changes demanded in some quarters and accommodated by some *Rabbonim* will never be enough.

Rav Twersky returned to this point in an article written a decade later (torahweb.org/torah/special/2014/rtwe\_tefillin.html):

As already explained, the real, underlying issue is the Torah's religious gender differentiation. Accordingly, any accommodation *nolens volens* accepts and reinforces the inimical premise that avenues and ex-pressions of *avodas Hashem* for men and women must be identical.

Such acceptance is wholly unacceptable. First of all, it distorts Torah. Moreover, such acceptance and accommodation actually alienate women from Torah.

The process of alienation is tragically straightforward and frighten-ingly quick. As just noted, accommodation validates and reinforces the inimical egalitarian impulse but cannot satisfy it. Brushing aside the Rama's ruling does not make Halacha conform to the egalitarian creed. Seen from the twisted perspective of egalitarianism, women still suffer from discrimination. They are excluded from serving
as *shaliach tzibbur*, the *halachos* of marriage and divorce are most decidedly unegalitarian, etc. By reinforcing the egalitarian impulse without satisfying it, every accommodation intensifies the demand for further accommodations. But that demand can never be met because Torah and egalitarianism are fundamentally incompatible. And thus accommodationism, *rachmana litzlan*, inevitably results in alienation and assimilation.

Tragically, this process of assimilation has already partially materialized. Yesterday’s women's *tefilla* groups, which stemmed from the same egalitarian impulse, no longer suffice. Today *tefillin*, “partnership *minyanim*,” and women rabbis are sought. And the handwriting on the wall is unmistakable. Tomorrow, these stopgap, anti-halachic concessions will no longer suffice. The current path leads inexorably to a black hole of complete assimilation, *rachmana litzlan*.

The alternative to aiding and abetting assimilation is to assume our spiritual, educational mandate. Our mandate is to teach Torah (including, but obviously not limited to, elucidating the halachic process), and to engender a profound appreciation for authentic Torah values, thereby guiding men and women alike to genuine *avodas Hashem* and religious experience.

This is a precise description of what has been happening. The process predicted by Rav Twersky is unfolding before our very eyes. What began with women leading *Kabbalas* *Shabbos* has now extended to *Pesukei* *DeZimra*. The partnership *minyanim* are moving further and further away from any connection to a binding Halacha at all. Take, for example, the following quote from an article on partnership *minyanim* on college campuses

([newvoices.org/2013/02/04/a-mechitza-runs-through-it-egalitarian-orthodox-prayer/](http://newvoices.org/2013/02/04/a-mechitza-runs-through-it-egalitarian-orthodox-prayer/)):

Another concern for students lies in the partnership *minyanim*’s balance of tradition with egalitarianism. “It’s hard for me to imagine that partnership *minyans* are going to exist for a long time,”
[a participant] said. For her, it’s somewhat awkward that Shira Chadasha *minyanim* don’t count women for a *minyan* and only let them lead some parts of the service. “In some ways it exacerbates the situation. We’ll let you do this, but only because we don’t even really need to do it,” she said. Another participant feels similarly. “I grapple with the idea that women can’t do everything. I grapple with Halacha,” she said. In her opinion, the ideal *minyan* would
be completely egalitarian, but with a *mechitza* separating men and women.

As I mentioned, Rav Twersky’s words have proven to be almost prophetic, and *chacham adif minavi* (*Bava Basra* 12a). We should all recommit ourselves to following the guidance of our great Torah leaders.

More recently, Rav Twersky delivered a powerful *mussar shmuz* on this subject. The following is a nearly verbatim presentation of that *shmuz*:

At the beginning of the *Mishneh Torah*, the Rambam lists the work's 14 sections and gives a description of what each section will contain. Regarding *Sefer HaMadda*, the Rambam writes: “ספר ראשון אכלול בו כל המצות שהם עיקר דת משה רבינו,” “I will include here all of the *mitzvos* that are fundamental to *das* Moshe Rabbeinu.” What a funny way to refer to the Torah! The Rambam doesn't refer to it as “*das HaKadosh Boruch Hu*”; he refers to it as “*das Moshe Rabbeinu*”! This *sefer* is not concerned with *mitzvos* *derabbanan*. It includes “אנכי ה' אלקיך,”
“שמע ישראל,” “לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני”... These are not *mitzvos derabbanan*. Why, then, is it referred to as “עיקר דת משה רבינו”?

The *mishna* in *Kesuvos* (71) also refers to “*das Moshe*:” “אלו יוצאות שלא בכתובה: העוברת על דת משה ויהודית.” What are examples of “*das Moshe*”? “מאכילתו שאינו מעושר, משמשו נידה....” This is a strange *lashon* of *Chazal*. Why are *issurei d’oraysa* referred to as “*das Moshe*”? The truth is, it's not the Rambam's funny *lashon*, and it's not *Chazal*’s funny *lashon* – it's the *Ribbono Shel Olam*'s funny *lashon*! At the end of *Sefer Malachi*, the *navi* tells us, “זכרו תורת משה עבדי.” *HaKadosh* *Baruch Hu* refers to His Torah as “*Toras Moshe avdi*”! There is no Torah, there is no link to *HaKadosh* *Baruch* *Hu*, which does not go initially through Moshe Rabbeinu. That is why the *Ribbono* *Shel Olam* says, My Torah is Toras Moshe Rabbeinu.

Why do you eat *matza* at the *seder*? Because Moshe Rabbeinu told you to eat *matza* at the *seder*. And why do you take a lulav? Moshe Rabbeinu told you, “ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון.” *Zichru Toras Moshe avdi*.

A *ger* comes to Hillel and says, “I'll convert, but I only buy into *Torah SheBichsav*. I don’t buy into *Torah SheBe’al Peh*.” Hillel agrees and begins to teach him: “a*lef*, *beis*, *gimmel*, *daled*... Okay, that’s enough for today.” The *ger* comes back the next day and Hillel tells him, “*Taf*, *shin*, *resh*, *kuf*. ” The *ger* says, “But yesterday you told me *fakhert*! [the opposite].” Hillel says, “So you’re relying on me from what I told you yesterday? עלי דידי קא סמכת? דעל פה נמי סמוך עלי.” Just like you rely on me for the order of the *alef beis*, you should also rely on me when I tell you that there is also a *Torah* *SheBe’al* *Peh*.

A person can’t pledge his allegiance to *HaKadosh* *Baruch* *Hu* and disavow his allegiance to *Chazal*. There is no such thing. Because *HaKadosh* *Baruch* *Hu* gave the Torah to Moshe, and then who did Moshe give it to? He didn't send it by Fed-Ex to us. He gave it
to Yehoshua, and Yehoshua *lezekeinim*, and *zekeinim* *lenevi’im*… “ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו.” There is no meaningful *emuna* *baHashem*, there is no meaningful *avodas Hashem*, there is no Torah without *Chazal*. You can't even have *Torah SheBichsav*.

In his *peirush* on the *mishnayos* (*Avos* 1:3),the Rambam explains that it wasn't that Tzaduk and Baysus believed that *Torah SheBichsav* was *min haShamayim* and *Torah SheBe’al Peh* wasn't. No, that was simply a fraud that they perpetrated on the masses because they couldn’t come out and say what they really believed – that they didn't believe in anything. They didn’t believe that, because it's not a tenable position. You can't have allegiance to *HaKadosh* *Baruch* *Hu* without having *emuna* in *Torah SheBe’al Peh*. They pulled the wool over people's eyes, and the people didn’t get that.

That is why in a few places in the *gemara* (*Shabbos* 101b; *Sukka* 39b), the *Chachamim* are referred to as “Moshe: ” “משה שפיר כאמרת.” What does that mean? That each of the *chachmei* *hamesorah* is a *bechina* of Moshe Rabbeinu in the sense that there is no Torah without Moshe Rabbeinu. *HaKadosh* *Baruch* *Hu* said it: “זכרו תורת משה עבדי.” What you have in your hands is *Toras Moshe Avdi* because it comes through him. And without it, you don’t have My Torah. My Torah is *Toras Moshe Avdi*. Of course, every word is *mipi hagevura*, every word is *ratzon Hashem*, and nothing there is from Moshe Rabbeinu, but it comes to you as *Toras Moshe Avdi*.

Why should we have such confidence in *Chazal* and the *chachamim*? We can understand this by way of a *mashal*. Let's say you're applying for a position, so you need letters of recommendation. Who do you try to get letters of recommendation from? Your six year old brother will give you a letter of recommendation: “He’s a really good guy. He takes me to the park whenever I want to go to the park, and he can throw a football at least 30 yards, and…” Okay, so maybe if you're applying for sports counselor that letter will do it. What do you look for in a letter of recommendation? Depending upon the position, you look for the person with the most impressive credentials. If you're applying to graduate school in chemistry, and as an undergraduate you had a Nobel Laureate as one of your professors who will write you a letter of recommendation, that will carry weight. That's a good letter of recommendation. When your application is considered, those letters are weighed heavily, especially if the person writing the letter is someone who's known not to exaggerate and not to speak in hyperbole. A letter of recommendation carries a lot of weight.

Why should we trust *Chazal*? *Chazal* have a letter of recommendation from the *Ribbono Shel Olam*: “כי יפלא ממך דבר למשפט בין דם לדם בין דין לדין ובין נגע לנגע דברי ריבות בשעריך, וקמת ועלית... ודרשת והגידו לך את דבר המשפט” (*Devarim*17:8-9) Are the rabbis God? No. But they have His endorsement. His Torah is channeled through them, and He endorsed their interpretation of His Torah.

I have a close friend who made the following *he’arah*. It is common nowadays that people talk about personal religious expression and personal religious fulfillment. That's what our generation talks about. Our grandparents' generation spoke about *avodas Hashem*. They didn’t talk about personal religious expression and personal religious fulfillment. Personal religious expression means, "I want to do this. This makes me feel good. This form or forum makes me feel good, and this form or forum doesn’t make me feel good. And the test of your sensitivity is whether or not you understand what my personal religious expression is.” Our Bubbies and Zaydies spoke about *avodas Hashem*. Whether they learned it or not, they knew the *mishna* in *Pirkei Avos* (2:4): “יעשה רצונך כרצונו.” They understood that this is what *avodas Hashem* means – that a person conforms to *ratzon Hashem*. Not that one descends upon the *chachmei hador* with demands that they make the Torah and *halacha* conform to what people want. That’s the difference between aspiring to *avodas Hashem* and aspiring to religious expression and religious fulfillment. *Avodas Hashem* means a person serves *HaKadosh* *Baruch Hu*, and religious fulfillment means a person serves himself through Jewish rituals.

How can it be that Torah is going to stifle people's religious expression and tell people that they can't do something? How can that be? The Torah says you can't do something?! No, the Torah wouldn’t say that! The Torah is “דרכיה דרכי נועם!” It can't be that the Torah wouldn’t let you do something you want to do! This is a powerful argument, for whatever you want it to be an argument for. It's a powerful argument for gay marriage. How can it be? They want to get married! “דרכיה דרכי נועם!” It can't be that the Torah opposes it. Where's the *ne’imus*?! A married woman wants to have an affair. Her husband doesn't mind. Where's the *ne’imus*? Such rigidity! Such lack of empathy! How can it be? “דרכיה דרכי נועם!”

“דרכיה דרכי נועם” means what the Torah defines to be *ne’imus*, not what I define to be *ne’imus*. It is not that what I subjectively want becomes the definition of *ne’imus*, to which the Torah now has to conform. The Torah provides the definition of *ne’imus*, and within the Torah's definition, “דרכיה דרכי נועם וכל נתיבותיה שלום” (*Mishlei* 3:17).

“ואהבת לרעך כמוך” (*Vayikra* 19:18) – to be sensitive to people is also a Torah value. How can you say no to people? How is that consistent with “ואהבת לרעך כמוך”? This argument should apparently lead us to the conclusion that if someone says, "Please pass the *chazir*," we should hand it over. They said please, they want it, and “ואהבת לרעך כמוך”!

The Torah defines how to love someone. It’s not that I define it: “Love me on my terms!” No. Love me on the Torah's terms.

At the end of *Hilchos Tumas Tzara’as*,the Rambam describes a very, very frightening progression, a very frightening escalation. First people talk *lashon hara* about colleagues, then they talk *lashon hara* about *chachamim*, then about *nevi’im*, and then about *HaKadosh* *Baruch* *Hu*. How does that happen? We will talk about the first step in the progression another time. Regarding our present discussion, we'll begin with the second step. A person speaks against *chachamim* – maybe only against a contemporary *chacham* – but at a certain point, the realization sets in that everything he said is what the *mesorah* says. He didn't say anything idiosyncratic. He didn't make up his own Shulchan Aruch; he didn't make up his own *Shas*. Last time we all checked, *daf beis* was there in the *gemara* with the *mishna* of “*mei’eimasai korin*.” So at a certain point, the realization sets in that he is not really arguing against that *chacham* – he is arguing against the *mesora*.

That’s what the Rambam says. First you speak against the *chachamim*, and then you realize: What do the *chachamim* know? They're quoting *pesukim* in *Nevi’im*! But that doesn't conform to what you want either, so you speak against the *nevi’im*. But then at a certain point, the Rambam says, the realization sets in that the *nevi’im* were just repeating what *HaKadosh* *Baruch* *Hu* said. How long does that escalation take? It's frightening to see how fast it goes. *Mamish*, *mamish* a *pachad* to see how fast that escalation goes.

We must all rededicate ourselves to having full trust in *Chazal* and full trust in the guidance of the *chachmei* *hamesora*, and thereby remain within the *mesora* ourselves.