

Orthodox Judaism

Orthodox Judaism is a collective term for the traditionalist branches of Judaism, which seek to maximally maintain the received Jewish beliefs and observances and which coalesced in opposition to the various challenges of modernity and secularization. Theologically, it is chiefly defined by regarding the Torah, both Written and Oral, as literally revealed by God on Mount Sinai and faithfully transmitted ever since. Other key doctrines include belief in a future resurrection of the dead, divine reward and punishment, the Election of Israel and an eventual restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem under the Messiah. Orthodox Judaism advocates a strict observance of Jewish Law, or *Halakha*, which is to be interpreted only according to received methods and canonical sources due to its divine origin. It regards the entire *halakhic* system as the unfolding and application of an immutable revelation, essentially beyond external and historical influence.

Orthodox Judaism is not a centralized denomination. Relations between its different subgroups are sometimes

strained and the exact limits of Orthodoxy are subject to intense debate. Very roughly, it may be divided between Ultra-Orthodox or "Haredi", which is more conservative and reclusive, and Modern Orthodox Judaism which is relatively open to outer society. Each of those is itself formed of independent streams. They are almost uniformly exclusionist, regarding Orthodoxy as the only authentic form of Judaism and rejecting all competing non-Orthodox philosophies as illegitimate. While adhering to traditional beliefs, the movement is a modern phenomenon. It arose as a result of the breakdown of the autonomous Jewish community since the 18th century and was much shaped by a conscious struggle against rival alternatives. The strictly observant and theologically aware Orthodox are a definite minority among all Jews, but there are also numerous semi- and non-practicing persons who are officially affiliated or personally identifying with the movement. In total, Orthodox Judaism is the largest Jewish religious group, estimated to have over 2 million practicing adherents and at least an equal number of nominal members or self-identifying supporters.^[1]



Visitors in frock coats and hats in the Orthodox Jewish cemetery in Budapest, Hungary (1920s). Traditionalist Jews in Hungary were the first anywhere to form independent Orthodox Jewish organizations in the 19th century

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Theology

Orthodox attitudes

A definite and conclusive credo was never formulated in Judaism; the very question whether it contains any equivalent of dogma is a matter of intense scholarly controversy. Some researchers attempted to argue that the importance of daily practice and punctilious adherence to halakha (Jewish religious law) relegated theoretical issues to an ancillary status. Others dismissed this view entirely, citing the debates in ancient rabbinic sources which castigated various heresies without any reference to observance. However, while lacking a uniform doctrine, Orthodox Judaism is basically united in affirming several core beliefs, disavowal of which is considered major blasphemy. As in other aspects, Orthodox positions reflect the mainstream of traditional Rabbinic Judaism through the ages.

Attempts to codify these beliefs were undertaken by several medieval authorities, including Saadia Gaon and Joseph Albo. Each composed his own creed. Yet the 13 principles expounded by Maimonides in his *Commentary on the Mishna*, authored in the 1160s, eventually proved the most widely accepted. Various points – for example, Albo listed merely three fundamentals, and did not regard the Messiah as a key tenet – the exact formulation, and the status of disbelievers (whether mere errants or heretics who can no longer be considered part of the People Israel) were contested by many of Maimonides' contemporaries and later sages. But in recent centuries, the 13 principles became standard, and are considered binding and cardinal by Orthodox authorities in a virtually universal manner.^[2]

During the Middle Ages, two systems of thought competed for theological primacy, their advocates promoting them as explanatory foundations for observance of the Law. One was the rationalist-philosophic school, which endeavored to present all commandments as serving higher moral and ethical purposes, while the other was the mystical tradition, exemplified in Kabbalah, which assigned each rite with a role in the hidden dimensions of reality. Sheer obedience, without much thought and derived from faithfulness to one's community and ancestry, was believed fit only for the common people, while the educated classes chose either of the two schools. In the modern era, the prestige of both suffered severe blows, and "naive faith" became popular. At a time when excessive contemplation in matters of belief was associated with secularization, luminaries such as Israel Meir Kagan stressed the importance of simple, unsophisticated commitment to the precepts passed down from the Beatified Sages. This is still the standard in the ultra-Orthodox world.^[3]

In more open Orthodox circles, attempts were made to formulate philosophies that would confront modern sensibilities. Notable examples are the Hegelian-Kabbalistic theology of Abraham Isaac Kook, who viewed history as progressing toward a Messianic redemption in a dialectic fashion which required the strengthening of heretical forces, or the existentialist thought of Joseph B. Soloveitchik, who was deeply influenced by Neo-Kantian ideals. On the fringes of Orthodoxy, thinkers who were at least (and according to their critics, only) sociologically part of it, ventured toward radical models. These, like the apopathic views of Yeshayahu Leibowitz or the Feminist interpretation of Tamar Ross, had little to no influence on the mainstream.

God

Orthodox Judaism affirms monotheism, the belief in one God. The basic tenets, drawn from ancient sources like the Talmud as well as later sages, include the attributes of God in Judaism: one and indivisible, preceding all creation which he alone brought into being, eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, absolutely incorporeal, and beyond human reason. Maimonides delineated this understanding of a

monotheistic, personal God in six articles concerning his status as the sole creator, his oneness, his impalpability, that he is first and last, that God alone may be worshipped, and no other being, and that he is omniscient.

Eschatology

Orthodox Judaism now includes opinions on eschatology which, in past centuries, were not mainstream views in Judaism. The prophecy of the coming of a Messiah is now central to Orthodox Judaism. According to this doctrine, a Messiah will arise from King David's lineage, and will bring with him signs such as the restoration of the Temple, peace, and universal acceptance of God.^[4] The Messiah will embark on a quest to gather all Jews to the Holy Land, will proclaim prophethood, and will restore the Davidic Monarchy.

Classical Judaism did incorporate a tradition of belief in the resurrection of the dead.^[5] There is scriptural basis for this doctrine, quoted by the Mishnah:^[6] "All Israelites have a share in the World-to-Come, as it is written: *And your people, all of them righteous, Shall possess the land for all time; They are the shoot that I planted, My handiwork in which I glory* (Isa 60:21)." The Mishnah also brands as heretics any Jew who rejects the doctrine of resurrection or its origin from the Torah.^[7] Those who deny the doctrine are deemed to receive no share in the World-to-Come.^[8] The Pharisees believed in both a bodily resurrection and the immortality of the soul. They also believed that acts in this world would effect the state of life in the next world.^[9] The Mishnah *Sahendrin* 10 clarifies that only those who follow the correct theology will have a place in the World to Come.^[10]

There are other passing references to the afterlife in mishnaic tractates. A particularly important one in the *Berakhot* informs that the Jewish belief in the afterlife was established long before the compilation of the Mishnah.^[11] Biblical tradition categorically mentions Sheol sixty-five times. It is described as an underworld containing the gathering of the dead with their families.^[12] Numbers 16:30 states that Korah went into Sheol alive, to describe his death in divine retribution.^[13] The deceased who reside in Sheol have a "nebulous" existence and there is no reward or punishment in Sheol, which is represented as a dark and gloomy place. But a distinction is made for kings who are said to be greeted by other kings when entering Sheol.^[14] Biblical poetry suggests that resurrection from Sheol is possible.^[15] Prophetic narratives of resurrection in the Bible have been labelled as external cultural influence by some scholars.^[16]

The Talmudic discourse expanded on the details of the World to Come. This was to motivate Jewish compliance with their religious codes.^[17] In brief, the righteous will be rewarded with a place in Gan Eden, the wicked will be punished in Gehinnom, and the resurrection will take place in the Messianic age. The sequence of these events is unclear.^[18] Rabbis have supported the concept of resurrection with plentiful Biblical citations and shown it as a sign of God's omnipotence.^[19]

Revelation

The defining doctrine of Orthodox Judaism is the belief that the Law, both Written and Oral, was revealed by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, and that the Law was transmitted faithfully from Sinai in an unbroken chain ever since. One of the foundational texts of Rabbinic tradition is the list opening the Ethics of the Fathers, enumerating the sages who received and passed on the Torah, from Moses through Joshua, the Elders and Prophets and then onward until Hillel the Elder in and Shammai.

The basic philosophy of Orthodoxy is that the body of revelation is total and complete; its interpretation under new circumstances, required of scholars in every generation, is conceived as an act of inferring and elaborating based on already prescribed methods, not of innovation or addition. One clause in the Jerusalem Talmud asserts that anything which a veteran disciple shall teach was already given at Sinai; and a story in the Babylonian Talmud claims that upon seeing the immensely intricate deduction of future Rabbi Akiva in a vision, Moses himself was at loss until Akiva proclaimed that everything he teaches was handed over to Moses. Lacunae in received tradition or disagreements between early sages are attributed to disruptions, especially persecutions which caused to that "the Torah was forgotten in Israel" — according to Rabbinic lore, these eventually compelled the legists to write down the Oral Law in the Mishna and Talmud — but the wholeness of the original divine message and the reliability of those who transmitted it through the ages are axiomatic.^[20]

History

Roots of Orthodox Judaism

The roots of Orthodox Judaism can be traced to the late 18th or early 19th century, when elements within German Jewry sought to reform Jewish belief and practice in the early 19th century in response to the Age of Enlightenment, Jewish Emancipation, and Haskalah. The Haskalah movement sought to modernize education in light of contemporary scholarship. They rejected claims of the absolute divine authorship of the Torah, declaring only biblical laws concerning ethics to be binding, and stated that the rest of *halakha* (Jewish law) need not be viewed as normative for Jews in wider society (see Reform Judaism).

In reaction to the emergence of Reform Judaism, a group of traditionalist German Jews emerged in support of some of the values of the Haskalah,^[21] but also wanted to defend the classic, traditional interpretation of Jewish law and tradition. This group was led by those who opposed the establishment of a new temple in Hamburg [1819], as reflected in the booklet "Ele Divrei HaBerit". As a group of Reform Rabbis convened in Braunschweig, Rabbi Jacob Ettlinger of Altona published a manifesto entitled "Shlomei Emunei Yisrael" in German and Hebrew, having 177 Rabbis sign on. At this time, the first Orthodox Jewish periodical, "Der Treue Zions Waechter", was launched with the Hebrew supplement "Shomer Zion HaNe'eman" [1845 - 1855]. In later years, it was Rav Ettlinger's students Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer of Berlin who deepened the awareness and strength of Orthodox Jewry. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch commented in 1854:

It was not the "Orthodox" Jews who introduced the word "Orthodoxy" into Jewish discussion. It was the modern "progressive" Jews who first applied this name to "old", "backward" Jews as a derogatory term. This name was at first resented by "old" Jews. And rightly so. "Orthodox" Judaism does not know any varieties of Judaism. It conceives Judaism as one and indivisible. It does not know a Mosaic, prophetic, and rabbinic Judaism, nor Orthodox and Liberal Judaism. It only knows Judaism and non-Judaism. It does not know Orthodox and Liberal Jews. It does indeed know conscientious and indifereent Jews, good Jews, bad Jews, or baptized Jews; all, nevertheless, Jews with a mission which they cannot cast off. They are only distinguished accordingly as they fulfill or reject their mission. (Samson Raphael Hirsch, Religion Allied to Progress, in JMWp. 198)^[22]

Hirsch held the opinion that Judaism demands an application of Torah thought to the entire realm of human experience, including the secular disciplines. His approach was termed the Torah im Derech Eretz approach, or "neo-Orthodoxy". While insisting on strict adherence to Jewish beliefs and practices, he held that Jews should attempt to engage and influence the modern world, and encouraged those secular studies compatible with Torah thought. This pattern of religious and secular involvement has been evident at many times in Jewish history. Scholars believe it was characteristic of the Jews in Babylon during the Amoraic and Geonic periods, and likewise in early medieval Spain, shown by their engagement with both Muslim and Christian society. It appeared as the traditional response to cultural and scientific innovation.

Traditionalist and reformist Jews in the middle of the nineteenth century had a consensus that the "Orthodox" label was inappropriate. Reformists even referred to the Orthodox as "*der so genannte Orthodoxen*" ("the so-called Orthodox"). The traditionalists blamed the reformists for causing this label to come about by drawing a distinction between themselves and those Jews who adhered to the old ways.^[23]

Some scholars believe that Modern Orthodoxy arose from the religious and social realities of Western European Jewry. While non-Orthodox Jews consider Modern Orthodoxy traditional today, some (the Haredi/Hasidic groups) within the Orthodox community consider some elements to be of questionable validity. The neo-Orthodox movement holds that Hirsch's views are not accurately followed by Modern Orthodoxy. [See Torah im Derech Eretz and Torah Umadda "Relationship with Torah im Derech Eretz" for a more extensive listing.]

Development of Orthodox religious practice

Contemporary Orthodox Jews believe that they adhere to the same basic philosophy and legal framework that has existed throughout Jewish history, whereas the other denominations depart from it. Orthodox Judaism, as it exists today, is an outgrowth that claims to extend from the time of Moses, to the time of the *Mishnah* and Talmud, through the development of oral law and rabbinic literature, until the present time. For some, Orthodox Judaism has been seen as a continuation of what was the mainstream expression of Judaism prior to the 19th century^[24]

However, the Orthodox claim to absolute fidelity to past tradition has been challenged by modern scholars who contend that the Judaism of the Middle Ages bore little resemblance to that practiced by today's Orthodox. Rather, the Orthodox community, as a counterreaction to the liberalism of the Haskalah movement, began to embrace far more stringent halachic practices than their predecessors, most notably in matters of Kashrut and Passover dietary laws, where the strictest possible interpretation becomes a religious requirement, even where the Talmud explicitly prefers a more lenient position, and even where a more lenient position was practiced by prior generations.^{[25][26]}

Jewish historians also note that certain customs of today's Orthodox are not continuations of past practice, but instead represent innovations that would have been unknown to prior generations. For example, the now-widespread *Haredi* tradition of cutting a boy's hair for the first time on his third birthday (*upshirin* or *upsheerin*, Yiddish for "haircut") "originated as an Arab custom that parents cut a newborn boy's hair and burned it in a fire as a sacrifice", and "Jews in Palestine learned this custom from Arabs and adapted it to a special Jewish context".^[27] The Ashkenazi prohibition against eating *kitniyot* (grains and legumes such as rice, corn, beans, and peanuts) during Passover was explicitly rejected in the Talmud, has no known precedent before the 12th century, and represented a minority position for hundreds of years thereafter, but nonetheless has remained a mandatory prohibition among Ashkenazi Orthodox Jews due to their historic adherence to ReMA's rulings in the Shulchan Aruch^[28]



The *Shulchan Aruch*, published in 1565, is the authoritative legal code for Orthodox Jews

Growth of Orthodox affiliation

In practice, the emphasis on strictness has resulted in the rise of "homogeneous enclaves" with other Haredi Jews that are less likely to be threatened by assimilation and intermarriage, or even to interact with other Jews who do not share their doctrines.^[29] Nevertheless, this strategy has proved successful, and the number of adherents to Orthodox Judaism, including Haredi and Hasidic communities, has grown rapidly^[29]

In 1915, Yeshiva College (later Yeshiva University) and its Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary was established in New York City for training in an Orthodox milieu. A school branch was established in Los Angeles, California.

A number of other influential Orthodox seminaries, many of them Haredi, were established throughout the country, most notably in New York; Baltimore, Maryland; and Chicago, Illinois. Beth Medrash Govoha, the Haredi yeshiva in Lakewood, New Jersey, is the largest Talmudic academy in the United States, with a student body of over 5,000 students.

Streams of Orthodoxy

Orthodox Judaism is heterogeneous, whereby subgroups maintain significant social differences, and less significant differences in understanding Halakha. What unifies various groups under the "Orthodox" umbrella is the central belief that Torah, including the Oral Law, was given directly from God to Moses at Mount Sinai and applies in all times and places. As a result, all Orthodox Jews are required to live in accordance with the Commandments and Jewish law.

Since there is no one Orthodox body, there is no one canonical statement of principles. Rather, each Orthodox group claims to be a non-exclusive heir to the received tradition of Jewish theology. Many groups have affirmed a literal acceptance of Maimonides' thirteen principles

Given this (relative) philosophic flexibility, variant viewpoints are possible, particularly in areas not explicitly demarcated by the Halakha. The result is a relatively broad range of *hashqafoth* (Sing. *hashkafa* Hebrew: השקפה – world view, Weltanschauung) within Orthodoxy. The greatest differences within strains of Orthodoxy involve the following issues:



Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, a leading 20th-century American Orthodox authority.

- the degree to which an Orthodox Jew should integrate or disengage from secular society
- based, in part, on varying interpretations of the Three Oaths, whether Zionism is part of Judaism or opposed to it, and defining the role of the modern State of Israel in Judaism
- their spiritual approach to T̄rah, such as the relative roles of mainstream Talmudic study and mysticism or ethics
- the validity of secular knowledge, including critical Jewish scholarship of Rabbinic literature and modern philosophical ideas
- whether the Talmudic obligation to learn while/so practicing a trade/profession applies in our times
- the centrality of yeshivas as the place for personal T̄rah study
- the validity of authoritative spiritual guidance in areas outside of Halakhic decision (D'a'as Torah)
- the importance of maintaining non-Halakhic customs, such as dress, language, and music
- the role of women in (religious) society
- the nature of the relationship with non-Jews

Based on their philosophy and doctrine vis-a-vis these core issues, adherents to Orthodoxy can roughly be divided into the subgroups of Modern Orthodox Judaism and Haredi Judaism, with Hasidic Jewish groups falling into the latter category

Modern Orthodoxy

In general, Modern Orthodoxy's "overall approach ... is the belief that one can and should be a full member of modern society, accepting the risks to remaining observant, because the benefits outweigh those risks^[30] Jews should engage constructively with the world that they are in to foster goodness and justice within both themselves and the larger community, such as by avoiding sin in their personal lives while also caaring for the unfortunate

Thus, Modern Orthodoxy holds that Jewish law is normative and binding, while simultaneously attaching a positive value to interaction with the modern world. In this view, as expressed by Rabbi Saul Berman^[31] Orthodox Judaism can "be enriched" by its intersection with modernity; further, "modern society creates opportunities to be productive citizens engaged in the Divine work of transforming the world to benefit humanity". At the same time, in order to preserve the integrity of halakha, any area of "powerful inconsistency and conflict" between T̄rah and modern culture must be filtered out.^[32]

Modern Orthodoxy also assigns a central role to the "People of Israel".^[33] Here two characteristics are manifest: in general, Modern Orthodoxy places a high national, as well as religious, significance on the State of Israel, and institutions and individuals are, typically, Zionist in orientation; relatedly, involvement with non-orthodox Jews will extend beyond "outreach" to include institutional relations and cooperation.

Other "core beliefs" ^[30] are a recognition of the value and importance of secular studies (see Torah Umadda: Torah and secular knowledge), a commitment to equality of education for both men and women, and a full acceptance of the importance of being able to financially support oneself and one's family

Haredi Judaism

Haredi Judaism is a broad spectrum of groups within Orthodox Judaism, all characterized by a rejection of modern secular culture. Its members are often referred to as "strictly Orthodox" or "ultra-Orthodox" in English, although the term "ultra-Orthodox" is considered pejorative by many of its adherents.^[34] Haredim regard themselves as the most religiously authentic group of Jews,^[35] although this claim is contested by other streams.^{[36][37]}

Haredi Judaism is a reaction to societal changes, including emancipation, enlightenment, the *Haskalah* movement derived from enlightenment, acculturation, secularization, religious reform in all its forms from mild to extreme, the rise of the Jewish national movements, etc.^[38] In contrast to Modern Orthodox Judaism, which hastened to embrace modernity, the approach of the Haredim was to maintain a steadfast adherence both to Jewish Law and custom by segregating themselves from modern society.^[39] However, there are many Haredi communities in which getting a professional degree or establishing a business is encouraged, and contact exists between Haredi and non-Haredi Jews, as well as between Haredim and non-Jews.^[40]

Haredi communities are primarily found in Israel, North America, and Western Europe. Their estimated global population currently numbers 1.5–1.8 million, and, due to a virtual absence of interfaith marriage and a high birth rate, their numbers are growing rapidly.^{[41][42][43][44]} Their numbers have also been boosted by a substantial number of secular Jews adopting a Haredi lifestyle as part of the Baal teshuva movement^{[45][46][47][48]}

Hasidic Judaism

Hasidic Judaism, or *Chasidism* arose as a spiritual revival movement in contemporary Western Ukraine during the 18th century, and spread rapidly throughout Eastern Europe. Today, most affiliates reside in the United States, Israel, and the United Kingdom. Israel Ben Eliezer, the Baal Shem Tov, is regarded as its founding father, and his disciples developed and disseminated it. Present-day Hasidism is a sub-group within Haredi Judaism, and is noted for its religious conservatism and social seclusion. Its members adhere closely both to Orthodox Jewish practice – with the movement's own unique emphases – and the traditions of Eastern European Jews, so much so that many of the latter, including various special styles of dress and the use of the Yiddish language are nowadays associated almost exclusively with Hasidism.

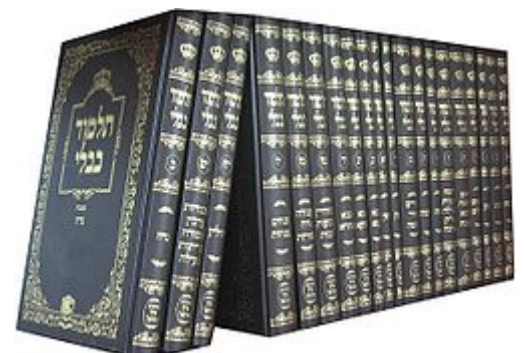
Hasidic thought draws heavily on Lurianic Kabbalah, and, to an extent, is a popularization of it. Teachings emphasize God's immanence in the universe, the need to cleave and be one with Him at all times, the devotional aspect of religious practice, and the spiritual dimension of corporeality and mundane acts. *Hasidim*, the adherents of Hasidism, are organized in independent sects known as "courts" or dynasties, each headed by its own hereditary leader, a Rebbe. Reverence and submission to the *Rebbe* are key tenets, as he is considered a spiritual authority with whom the follower must bond to gain closeness to God. The various "courts" share basic convictions, but operate apart, and possess unique traits and customs. Affiliation is often retained in families for generations, and being Hasidic is as much a sociological factor – entailing, as it does, birth into a specific community and allegiance to a dynasty of *Rebbes* – as it is a purely religious one. There are several "courts" with many thousands of member households each, and hundreds of smaller ones. The total number of Hasidim, both adults and children, is estimated to be above 400,000.

In practice

For guidance in practical application of Jewish law, the majority of Orthodox Jews appeal to the Shulchan Aruch ("Code of Jewish Law" composed in the 16th century by Rabbi Joseph Karo), together with its surrounding commentaries. Thus, at a general level, there is a large degree of uniformity amongst all Orthodox Jews. Concerning the details, however, there is often variance: decisions may be based on various of the standardized codes of Jewish Law that have been developed over the centuries, as well as on the various responsa. These codes and responsa may differ from each other as regards detail (and reflecting the above philosophical differences, as regards



A Lag BaOmer parade in front of Chabad headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, New York, in 1987



The Babylonian Talmud

the weight assigned to these). By and large, however, the differences result from the historic dispersal of the Jews and the consequent development of differences among regions in their practices (see minhag).

- Mizrahi and Sephardic Orthodox Jews base their practice on the Shulchan Aruch. The recent works of Halakha, Kaf HaChaim, Ben Ish Chai and Yalkut Yosef are considered authoritative in many Sephardic communities. Thus, Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews may choose to follow the opinion of the Ben Ish Chai when it conflicts with the Shulchan Aruch. Some of these practices are derived from the Kabbalistic school of Isaac Luria.
- Ashkenazic Orthodox Jews have traditionally based most of their practices on the Shema, the gloss on the Shulchan Aruch by Rabbi Moses Isserles, reflecting differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardi custom. In the post-World War II period, the Mishnah Berurah has become authoritative. Ashkenazi Jews may choose to follow the Mishna Brurah instead of a particular detail of Jewish law as presented in the Shulchan Aruch.
- Chabad Lubavitch Hasidim follows the rulings of Shneur Zalman of Liadi in the Shulchan Aruch HaRav.
- Traditional Baladi and Dor Daim (Yemenite Jews) base most of their practices on the Mishneh Torah, the compendium by Maimonides of halakha, written several centuries before the Shulchan Aruch. The Talmidei haRambam also keep Jewish law as codified in the Mishneh Torah.
- A smaller number, such as the Romaniote Jews, traditionally rule according to the Jerusalem Talmud over the Babylonian Talmud.
- Spanish and Portuguese Jews consider the Shulchan Aruch authoritatively but differ from other Sephardim by making less allowance for more recent authorities, in particular customs based on the Kabbalah. Some customs are based on Maimonides or the Arba'ah Turim.

Orthodox Judaism emphasizes practicing rules of kashrut, Shabbat, family purity, and tefilah (daily prayer). Many Orthodox Jews can be identified by their manner of dress and family lifestyle. Orthodox men and women dress modestly by keeping most of their skin covered. Married women cover their hair, most commonly in the form of a scarf, also in the form of hats, snoods, berets, or, sometimes, wigs. Orthodox men wear a skullcap known as a kipa, and often fringes called tzitzit. Many men grow beards, and Haredi men wear black hats (with a kipa underneath) and suits. Modern Orthodox Jews are sometimes indistinguishable in their dress from those around them, although they too wear kipas and tzitzit; additionally, on Shabbat, Modern Orthodox men wear suits (or at least a dress shirt) and dress pants, while women wear fancier dresses or blouses.

Along with these practices, Orthodox Jews practice the laws of negiah,^[49] which means touch. Orthodox men and women do not engage in physical contact with those of the opposite sex outside of their spouse, or immediate family members (such as parents, siblings, and children).

Demographics

As of 2001, Orthodox Jews and Jews affiliated with an Orthodox synagogue accounted for approximately 50% of British Jews (150,000), 27% of Israeli Jews (1,500,000),^[50] and 13% of American Jews (529,000). Among those affiliated to a synagogue body, Orthodox Jews represent 70% of British Jewry^[51] and 27% of American Jewry^[52]

In the United States

In 1880, the number of members of the American Jewry was 250,000. Their numbers swelled with European Jewish migration in the closing decades of the 19th century and opening decades of the 20th century to 3.5 million by 1924.^[53] This migration was discouraged by several Rabbis, stating that the American environment was not conducive to Jewish observance, an observation many Jews agreed with, but only after settling in the United States.^[54]

Although sizable Orthodox Jewish communities are located throughout the United States, the highest number of American Orthodox Jews live in New York State, particularly in the New York City Metropolitan Area. Two of the main Orthodox communities in the United States are located in New York City and Rockland County. In New York City, the neighborhoods of Borough Park, Midwood, Williamsburg, and Crown Heights, located in the borough of Brooklyn, have particularly large Orthodox communities. The most rapidly growing community of American Orthodox Jews is located in Rockland County and the Hudson Valley of New York, including the communities of Monsey, Monroe, New Square, Kiryas Joel,^[55] and Ramapo.^[56] There are also sizable and rapidly growing Orthodox communities throughout New Jersey, particularly in Lakewood, Jackson Township, Freehold, Manalapan,^[57] Teaneck, Englewood, Passaic, and Fair Lawn. Growth in the Orthodox Jewish population in Lakewood has driven overall population



The New York City Metropolitan Area is home to the largest American Orthodox Jewish population. Seen here is Crown Heights in Brooklyn.

growth, making it the fastest growing town by absolute numerical increase in New Jersey between roughly 2008 and 2012; Lakewood's population grew from 70,046 to 96,575, an increase of 26,529 over that period.^[58]

In addition, Maryland has a large number of Orthodox Jews, many of whom live in Baltimore, particularly in the Park Heights, Mount Washington, and Pikesville areas. Two other large Orthodox Jewish centers are southern Florida, particularly Miami Beach, and the Los Angeles area of California.

In contrast to the liberal American Jewish community, which is dwindling due to low fertility and high intermarriage and assimilation rates, the Orthodox Jewish community of the United States is growing rapidly. Among Orthodox Jews, the fertility rate stands at about 4.1 children per family, as compared to 1.9 children per family among non-Orthodox Jews, and intermarriage among Orthodox Jews is practically non-existent, standing at about 2%, in contrast to a 71% intermarriage rate among non-Orthodox Jews. In addition, Orthodox

Judaism has a growing retention rate; while about half of those raised in Orthodox homes previously abandoned Orthodox Judaism, that number is declining.^{[59][60]} According to *The New York Times*, the high growth rate of Orthodox Jews will eventually render them the dominant demographic force in New York - and American - Jewry.^[61]

On the other hand, Orthodox Jews subscribing to Modern Orthodoxy in its American and UK incarnations, tend to follow far more right-wing politics than both non-Orthodox and other Orthodox Jews. While the majority of non-Orthodox American Jews are on average strongly liberal and supporters of the Democratic Party, the Modern Orthodox subgroup of Orthodox Judaism tends to be far more conservative, with roughly half describing themselves as political conservatives, and are mostly Republican Party supporters.^[62] Modern Orthodox Jews, compared to both the non-Orthodox American Jewry and the Haredi and Hasidic Jewry, also tend to have a stronger connection to Israel due to their attachment to Zionism.^[63]

Movements, organizations, and groups

- Agudath Israel of America is the largest and most influential Haredi organization in America. Its roots go back to the establishment of the original founding of the Agudath Israel movement in 1912 in Katowitz, Prussia (now Katowice, Poland). The American Agudath Israel was founded in 1939. There is an Agudat Israel (Hasidic) in Israel, and also Degel HaTorah (non-Hasidic "Lithuanian"), as well as an Agudath Israel of Europe. These groups are loosely affiliated through the World Agudath Israel which from time to time holds a major gathering in Israel called *aknessia*. Agudah unites many rabbinic leaders from the Hasidic Judaism wing with those of the non-Hasidic "yeshiva" world. It is generally non-nationalistic, and more or less ambivalent towards the modern State of Israel.^[64]
- The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, known as the Orthodox Union or "OU", and the Rabbinical Council of America, "RCA", are organizations that represent Modern Orthodox Judaism, a large segment of Orthodoxy in the United States and Canada. These groups should not be confused with the similarly named Union of Orthodox Rabbis (described below).
- The National Council of Young Israel (NCYI) and the Council of Young Israel Rabbis (CYIR) are smaller groups that were founded as Modern Orthodox organizations, are Zionistic, and are in the right wing of Modern Orthodox Judaism. Young Israel strongly supports, and allies itself with, the settlement movement in Israel. While the lay membership of synagogues affiliated with the NCYI are almost exclusively Modern Orthodox in orientation, the rabbinical leadership of the synagogues ranges from Modern Orthodox to Haredi.
- The Chief Rabbinate of Israel^[65] was founded with the intention of representing all of Judaism within the State of Israel, and has two chief rabbis: One is Ashkenazic (of the East European and Russian Jewish tradition), and one is Sephardic (of the Mediterranean, North African, Central Asian, Middle-Eastern, and of Caucasus Jewish tradition.) The rabbinate has never been accepted by most Israeli Haredi groups. Since the 1960s, the Chief rabbinate of Israel has moved somewhat closer to the positions of Haredi Judaism.



Heichal Shlomo, former seat of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel in Jerusalem.

- Mizrahi, and political parties such as Mafdal and National Union (Israel) all represent certain sectors within the Religious Zionist movement, both in Israel and the diaspora. The defunct Gush Emunim, Meimad, Tzohar, Hazit, and other movements represent over competing divisions within the sector. They firmly believe in the "Land Of Israel for the People of Israel according to the Torah of Israel" principle, although the left-wing Religious Zionism Meimad party is more pragmatic about such program. Gush Emunim are the settlement wing of National Union (Israel) and support widespread kiruv as well, through such institutions as Machon Meir and Merkaz HaRav, and individuals like Rabbi Shlomo Aviner. Another sector includes the Hardal faction, which tends to be unallied to the Government and quite centristic.
- Chabad Lubavitch is a branch of Hasidic Judaism widely known for its emphasis on outreach and education. The organization has been in existence for 200 years, and especially after the Second World War, it began sending out emissaries (*shluchim*) who have as a mission the bringing back of disaffected Jews to a level of observance consistent with Chabad norms (i. e., Orthodox Judaism, Chassidus, Chabad messianism^[67] Tanya). They are major participants in what is known as the Baal Teshuva movement. Their mandate is to introduce Chabad philosophy to non-observant Jews, and to make them more observant as Beinonis.^{[68][69][70][71][72][73]} According to sociologists studying contemporary Jewry the Chabad movement neither fits into the category of Haredi or modern Orthodox, the standard categories for Orthodox Jews. This is due in part to the existence of the "non-Orthodox Hasidim" (of which include former Israeli President Zalman Shazar), the lack of official recognition of political and religious distinctions within Judaism and the open relationship with non-Orthodox Jews represented by the activism of Chabad emissaries.^{[74][75]}
- The Rohr Jewish Learning Institute is a provider of adult Jewish courses on Jewish history, law, ethics, philosophy and rabbinical literature. It also develops Jewish studies curricula specifically for women, college students, teenagers, and seniors. In 2014, there were 117,500 people enrolled in JLI, making it the largest Jewish education network in the world.
- In Israel, although it shares a similar agenda with the Sephardi Shas political party, Shas is more bipartisan when it comes to its own issues, and non-nationalistic-based, with a huge emphasis on Sephardi and Mizrahi Judaism.
- The Agudath HaRabbonim, also known as the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada, is a small Haredi-leaning organization founded in 1902. It should not be confused with "The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America" (see above), which is a separate organization. While at one time influential within Orthodox Judaism, the Agudath HaRabbonim in the last several decades has progressively moved further to the right; its membership has been dropping, and it has been relatively inactive. Some of its members are rabbis from Chabad Lubavitch; some are also members of the RCA (see above). It is currently most famous for its 1997 declaration (citing Israeli Chief Rabbi Yitzhak HaLevi Herzog and Orthodox Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik) that the Conservative and Reform movements are "not Judaism at all".
- The Central Rabbinical Congress of the United States and Canada (CRC) was established in 1952. It is an anti-Zionist, Haredi organization, closely aligned with the Satmar Hasidic group, which has about 100,000 adherents (an unknown number of which are rabbis), and like-minded Haredi groups.
- The left-wing Modern Orthodox advocacy group Edah, formed from United States Modern Orthodox rabbis. Most of its membership came from synagogues affiliated with the Union of Orthodox Congregations and RCA (above). Their motto was, "The courage to be Modern and Orthodox". Edah ceased operations in 2007, and merged some of its programs into the left-wing Yeshivat Chovevei Torah.
- The Beis Yaakov educational movement, begun in 1917, introduced the concept of formal Judaic schooling for Orthodox women.

See also

- [Haredi Judaism](#)
- [Chardal](#)
- [Hasidic Judaism](#)
- [Divine providence \(Judaism\)](#)
- [Jewish denominations](#)
- [Jewish philosophy](#)
- [List of Baalei teshuva](#)
- [List of Orthodox rabbis](#)
- [Lithuanian Judaism](#)
- [Religious Zionism](#)
- [Sephardi Judaism](#)
- [Torah Judaism](#)

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- [Orthodox-Jews.com: Everything You Need to Know About Orthodox Jews](#)
 - [Your Complete Guide to Brochos](#)
 - [Orthodox Union](#)
 - [The State of Orthodox Judaism Today](#)
 - [Orthodox Judaism in Israel](#)
 - [Orthodox Jewish population growth and political changes](#)
 - [Orthodox Retention and Kiruv: The Bad News and the Good News](#)
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