

Union for Traditional Judaism

The **Union for Traditional Judaism**, founded in 1984, is a traditional, Halakhic Jewish outreach and communal service organization.^[1] It initially called itself "The Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism" but dropped the "C" from its title when it broke with the Conservative Movement. In 1985 Rabbi Ronald D. Price was tapped to lead the organization as Executive Director and later as Executive Vice President.^[2] He served in that capacity for 26 years until his retirement in 2011. He was succeeded by Rabbi David Bauman and then Rabbi Gerald Sussman who is currently (2018) the Executive Director. In 1988 after attempting to affect change within Conservative Judaism, the UTJ membership voted to drop the word 'Conservative' from its title. Following a two year period of negotiations, the Rabbinic Fellowship of the UTJ absorbed a modern Orthodox rabbinic organization, the Fellowship of Traditional Orthodox Rabbis. The merged rabbinic body is known today as MORASHAH (acronym for **מועצת רבנים שומרי ההלכה**, *Council of Rabbis, Protectors of Halakhah*). Some of the UTJ leaders at various times called themselves Conservative, Modern Orthodox or trans-denominational. The UTJ's Institute of Traditional Judaism (ITJ), **המתיבתא ללימודי היהדות**, granted semikhah to a number of Rabbis, though as of 2018 there are no current semikhah students. The UTJ's Panel of Halakhic Inquiry has published three volumes of responsa titled "Tomeikh kaHalakhah." The UTJ produced the educational curriculum "Taking the MTV Challenge--Media and Television Values" designed to provide high-school students with tools to respond to the electronic media. The UTJ is often viewed as representing a denomination or inhabiting an ideological space nestled between Conservative Judaism and Orthodox Judaism.^[1]

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Origins

The Union for Traditional Judaism, originally known as the Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism, was founded in the Fall of 1984 by a group of laypeople and rabbis who were disaffected with the perceived shift within Conservative leadership, particularly at the Jewish Theological Seminary, away from commitment to Halakhic Process. Its antecedent was a group of traditionalist Conservative rabbis, led by former Jewish Theological Seminary of America Talmud professor David Weiss Halivni, who broke with the movement because of ideological differences, including the approach to changes in Halakha and the manner in which the issue of admitting women to the rabbinate was addressed.

Rabbi Halivni and other traditionalists claimed that in this and other areas of Jewish Law, the Conservative movement had made decisions to change from traditional practices in a legislative rather than a judicial fashion, by poll or majority vote. Traditionalists believed that halakhic decision-making should be made by Ḥlמוד and Halakha scholars following a process of legal reasoning.

One of the most prestigious Talmudic scholars of the 20th and 21st century, Rabbi Halivni had written a responsum that could permit a more limited role of women as rabbis, although by a more gradual process than the one approved by the Conservative movement.^{[3][4]} Halivni withdrew this responsum prior to leaving the Conservative movement and founding the UTJ. The UTJ issued a responsum opposing the ordination of women as part of its first volume of responsa.^[5]

The Union originally intended to form the elements of a separate denomination, including an association of rabbis, a rabbinical school, and an association of synagogues. The organization subsequently described itself as being trans-denominational in character

Beliefs and practices

The Union for Traditional Judaism attempts to combine modern approaches to studying Judaism's sacred texts, including the use of critical methods and the study of approaches such as the Documentary hypothesis, with what it regards as classical approaches to interpreting and making decisions regarding Jewish law. As such, it stands in between Modern Orthodox Judaism, which retains a belief that the current written Torah and Oral Torah were transmitted in an unbroken tradition from what was received by Moses on Mount Sinai through Divine revelation, and Conservative Judaism, which in the UTJ's view has sometimes permitted personal views to override classical halakhic scholarship. The Union endorsed women's prayer groups [1]. The Metivta, its rabbinical school, does not ordain women as rabbis.

David Weiss Halivni, one of the Union founders and the head of its rabbinical school, has written extensively on an approach to harmonizing the perspectives of contemporary biblical criticism (as well as critical study of the Talmud) with traditional religious belief. In his books *Peshat and Derash* and *Revelation Restored*, he developed the concept he called *Chate'u Israel* ("Israel sinned"), in which he argued that the biblical texts were originally given to Moses on Mount Sinai, but they subsequently became irretrievably corrupted and the texts we currently have were redacted by editors in an effort to restore them.

Relationship to Conservative Judaism

Major differences between UTJ and USCJ exist due to UTJ rabbis generally choosing halakhic options with regards to issues related to women, or in the use of siddurim. For instance, UTJ synagogues follow the practice of having separate seating for men and women, and women not acting as ashliach tzibbur, both positions considered halakhically valid by Conservative rabbis.

In *Jewish Choices* (Bernard Melvin Lazewitz et al.) The Union for Traditional Judaism is viewed as a denomination within Conservative Judaism, p. 8.^[6]

When describing the creation of the UTJ Stefan Reif refers to the founding members of the UTJ as "traditionalists" within the Conservative movement.^[7]

Many other sources, however, describe the Union for Traditional Judaism as a new religious movement positioned between Orthodoxy and the Conservative movement.^{[8][9][10]}

The Institute of Traditional Judaism/The Metivta

The Institute of Traditional Judaism, also known as the Metivta, is the rabbinical school sponsored by the UTJ. The Metivta trains men for the rabbinate, and also offers study programs for men and women which do not lead to ordination.

Graduates of the rabbinical program have been hired by both Conservative and Orthodox synagogues.

Financial difficulties

The Union for Traditional Judaism filed for bankruptcy during the Great Recession. It emerged from bankruptcy in January 2011,^[11] but sold its headquarters building in Teaneck, NJ in order to pay its debts at one hundred cents on the dollar. The building was purchased by Congregation Netivot Shalom, which had been UTJ's Teaneck congregation.

Important figures

- [David Weiss Halivni](#) - Rabbi, talmud scholar and *Reish Metivta* of the UTJ's rabbinical school.
- [David Novak](#) - Rabbi and theologian. He currently teaches at the University of Toronto and the Institute of Traditional Judaism.
- [Isaac S.D. Sassoon](#) - Sephardic Rabbi and scholar He currently teaches at the Institute of Traditional Judaism.
- [Bruce Ginsburg](#) - Rabbi, spiritual leader of Congregation Sons of Israel, Wodmere, NY, past president of UTJ
- [Ronald D. Price](#) - Rabbi, founding UTJ Executive Vice President, Emeritus and founding ITJ Dean, Emeritus^[12]

See also

- [Conservadox](#)
- [Conservative Halakha](#)
- [Role of women in Judaism](#)

Footnotes

1. *American Jewish Yearbook vol. 96* (https://books.google.com/books?id=daFeyrLbqy0C&pg=PA500&lpg=PA500&dq=Rabbi+Ronald+D.+Price&source=bl&ots=pOU9Xiu-C5&sig=XCpyF5Q9f9RJMwjdI0syK7popY&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewiigODeme_YAhVCL6wKHfKtDDIQ6AEIVzAJ#v=onepage&q=Rabbi%20Ronald%20D.%20Price&f=false) The American Jewish Committee. 1996. p. 500 ISBN 0874951100. Retrieved 23 January 2018.
2. Price, Ronald (1987). "I Love Conservative Judaism but..." (<https://www.bjpa.org/search-results/publication/10066>) *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Ideas* 17 (335): 115–117. Retrieved 23 January 2018.
3. David Fine, "Women and the Minyan" (http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/19912000/oh_55_1_2002.pdf) Rabbinical Assembly 2002, p.9
4. David Weiss Halivni, *The Book and The Sword* Westview Press, 1996, page 105.
5. Liberman, *Tomekh kaHalakhah* v.1, 1986.
6. *Jewish Choices: American Jewish Denominationalism* Bernard Melvin Lazewitz, J. Alan Winter, Arnold Dashefsky, Ephram Tabory, SUNY Press, 1997
7. *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer* Stefan C. Reif, Cambridge Univ Press, 1995.
8. *Essential Judaism*, George Robinson, p.60
9. *Jews in America: A Contemporary Reader* Roberta Rosenberg Farber, Chaim Isaac Waxman, University Press of New England [for] Brandeis University Press, 1999, p.104
10. *Jewish Identity in the Postmodern Age: Scholarly and Personal Reflections* Charles Selengut, Paragon House, 1999, p.33
11. [UTJ Emerges from Bankruptcy](http://utj.org/node/56) (<http://utj.org/node/56>) UTJ Press Release
12. *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (2nd ed.). Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA. 2007. pp. 806–807.

External links

- - [The UTJ Homepage](#)
- - [The UTJ Statement of Principles.](#)
- - [The UTJ FAQ](#)
- - [The UTJ Facebook Page](#)
- - [The UTJ Facebook Discussion Group](#)
- - [The UTJ Youtube Channel](#)
- - [The Institute of Traditional Judaism / The Metivta](#)
- - [Gradofsky, Being a Halachic Jew](#)

Synagogues

- [Traditional Congregation of Creve Coeur](#) MO
- [Temple Israel of Long Beach](#), NY
- [Northbrook Congregation Ezra Habonim](#), Northbrook, Illinois
- [The Traditional Congregation of Mount Dora](#), FL
- [Chavurah Zohar Ysrael](#) Rockwall, Tx

Further reading

- Ament, Jonathon. *The Union for Traditional Judaism: A Case Study of Contemporary Challenges to a New Religious Movement*. Doctoral Dissertation, Department of Near Eastern and Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 2004. Reviewed in "Dissertations in Jewish Studies", *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Volume 95, Number 3, Summer 2005, pp. 601–608
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