

Study Guide for:  
*Modern Orthodox Judaism: A Documentary History*  
Zev Eleff

**Session 1: Engaging Reform**

**Learning Goals:** By its very nature, an “orthodox” faith represents a response to some form of heterodox. Before the emergence of a “reform” element, Jews in this modern period by and large did not divide into neat “denominations” or “movements.” In the early 1820s, then, Orthodox Jews defended their traditional against Reform and did their best to articulate a vision for their community. Students and learners should explore the various and fluid meanings of “Orthodox Judaism” and how it rose up in reaction to Reform Judaism.

**Reading:** Chapter 1

**Questions for Discussion**

1. What were some of the different ways in which traditional Jews responded to the early incarnations of Jewish Reform in America?
2. Why might a “traditional” Jew accept the label “Orthodox” and why might they avoid that designation in their religious lives?
3. On what grounds did “Orthodox” Jews defend their inability to properly observe Jewish law? Are there echoes of those explanations today? If so, how might they differ?

**Suggestions for Further Reading**

Dianne Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997.

Emily Bingham, *Mordecai: An Early American Family*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2003.

Hasia R. Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.

Karla Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery: Finding a Place for Women in American Judaism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Jonathan D. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981.

Lance J. Sussman, *Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Jewry*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995.

Gary Phillip Zola, *Isaac Harby of Charleston, 1788-1828: Jewish Reformer and Intellectual*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994.

## **Session 2: An Orthodox Approach to Texts**

**Learning Goals:** Teachers and students should use this session to gain a better understanding of the role that texts play in the formation of Orthodox Judaism's religious culture. In addition to the Bible, traditional Jews consider the prayer book and the Talmud very sacred. Therefore, attempts to change those texts or devalue them in some manner were viewed as hostile in the minds of Orthodox Jews.

**Reading:** Chapter 2

### **Suggestions for Further Reading**

Eric L. Friedland, *"Were Our Mouths Filled with Song": Studies in Liberal Jewish Liturgy*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1997.

Bruce L. Ruben, *Max Lilienthal: The Making of the American Rabbinate*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011.

Harold Sharfman, *The First Rabbi: Origins of Conflict Between Orthodox and Reform*. Malibu: Pangloss Press, 1988.

Alan Silverstein, *Alternatives to Assimilation: The Response of Reform Judaism to American Culture, 1840-1930*. Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1994.

Isaac Mayer Wise, *Reminiscences*, trans. David Philipson. Cincinnati: L. Wise and Co., 1901.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Why do you believe it was so important for Orthodox defenders to raise the stature of the Talmud in response to the inroads paved by Reform leaders?
2. How did Orthodox defenses of the Talmud and the prayer book differ? In which ways were they similar?
3. Did you find any of the language used in this chapter's texts overly "harsh?" If so, why do you think Orthodox leaders felt compelled at times to write in such extreme fashion?

### **Session 3: An Orthodox Rabbinate**

**Learning Goals:** The role of authority is crucial to understanding the developments of religious community in the United States. In its first decades in America, Orthodox Judaism was led by the laity. In fact, the first ordained rabbis did not reach the United States until the 1840s. In the later decades of the century, rabbinic champions of Orthodox Judaism compete for control of the traditionalist community. This tension should be explored in this session.

**Reading:** Chapter 3

#### **Suggestions for Further Reading**

Naomi W. Cohen, *Encounter With Emancipation: The German Jews in the United States 1830-1914*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1984.

Judah David Eisenstein, *Ozer Zikhronotai: Korot Toladati u-Mikrei Yom bi-Yameinu*. New York, 1929.

Robert E. Fierstein, *A Different Spirit: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1886-1902*. New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1990.

#### **Questions for Discussion**

1. How do these documents demonstrate the changing image of the traditional American rabbinate?
2. Did Alexander Kohut express “Orthodox” ideals in his debates with Kaufmann Kohler?
3. Was the Jewish Theological Seminary Association conceived as an “Orthodox institution?”

## **Session 4: The Eastern Europeanization of American Orthodoxy**

**Learning Goals:** The character of the Orthodox community was irrevocably altered by the Jewish mass migration to the United States around the turn of the twentieth century. Too often it is perceived that immigrants were of one mind in relating to their new American environs. This session and its assigned sources are intended to challenge that narrow viewpoint.

**Reading:** Chapter 4

### **Suggestions for Further Reading**

Gur Alroey, *Bread to Eat and Clothes to Wear: Letters from Jewish Migrants in the Early Twentieth Century*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011.

Kimmy Caplan, *Orthodox Judaism in the New World: Immigrant Rabbis and Preaching in America, 1881-1924*. Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2002. (Hebrew)

Marni Davis, *Jews and Booze: Becoming American in the Age of Prohibition*. New York: New York University Press, 2012.

Jeffrey S. Gurock, *American Jewish Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective*. Hoboken: Ktav, 1996.

Abraham J. Karp, "New York Chooses a Chief Rabbi," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 44 (September 1954-June 1955): 129-98.

Daniel Soyer, *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York, 1880-1939*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. What challenges to Rabbi Jacob Joseph face upon arrival in America?
2. What do these sources teach about the assumptions and decisions of Orthodox leaders who "resisted" the pull toward American acculturation?
3. What are different "accommodationist" perspectives explored in this chapter's documents? How are these views similar and how are they different from one another?

## **Session 5: Trailblazers?**

**Learning Goals:** History is the result of contingencies, or choices made by historical actors. This session challenges readers and learners to consider why Orthodox Jews chose to follow Bernard Revel rather than the vision of Solomon Schechter and the Jewish Theological Seminary.

**Reading:** Chapter 5

### **Suggestions for Further Reading**

Michael R. Cohen, *The Birth of Conservative Judaism: Solomon Schechter's Disciples and the Creation of an American Religious Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

Zev Eleff, "Jewish Immigrants, Liberal Higher Education and the Quest for a Torah u-Madda Curriculum at Yeshiva College," *Tradition* 44 (Summer 2011): 19-34

Jeffrey S. Gurock, *The Men and Women of Yeshiva: Higher Education, Orthodoxy, and American Judaism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Abraham J. Karp, "Solomon Schechter Comes to America," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 53 (September 1963): 44-62.

Aaron Rothkoff, *Bernard Revel: Builder of American Jewish Orthodoxy*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. What was the "Revel Revolution" and how did it compare with earlier visions of Orthodox Judaism in the United States?
2. Was Solomon Schechter "Orthodox?"
3. Why do you think Revel remained within the Orthodox fold whereas Solomon Schechter's legacy moved him to Conservative Judaism?

## **Session 6: The Parting of the Ways of Orthodox and Conservative Judaism**

**Learning Goals:** The purpose of this session is to explore the long separation between Conservative and Orthodox Judaism. For the first half of the century, it was not at all clear how to identify a rabbi, layperson or synagogue as part of one religious movement or the other. There were various causes for the eventual split, and learners should be encouraged to explore these texts and identify them.

**Reading:** Chapter 6

### **Suggestions for Further Reading**

Louis Bernstein, *Challenge and Mission: The Emergence of the English Speaking Orthodox Rabbinate*. New York: Shengold Publishers, 1982.

Michael R. Cohen, *The Birth of Conservative Judaism: Solomon Schechter's Disciples and the Creation of an American Religious Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

Jeffrey S. Gurock, "From Fluidity to Rigidity: The Religious Worlds of Conservative and Orthodox Jews in Twentieth-Century America," in *American Jewish Identity Politics*, ed. Deborah Dash Moore. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008, 159-206.

Jenna Weissman Joselit, *New York's Jewish Jews: The Orthodox Community in the Interwar Years*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Zachary Silver, "The Excommunication of Mordecai Kaplan," *American Jewish Archives Journal* 62 (2010): 21-48.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Why did rabbis like Leo Jung and Joseph Lookstein hesitate to embrace "Orthodox Judaism?" What do you think was gained and lost with their decisions?
2. Why was mixed seating a major point of contention in conversations about Orthodox and Conservative Judaism?
3. Why did rightwing Orthodox leaders oppose the Synagogue Council of America? How did the interdenominational organization threaten their culture and community?

## **Session 7: Becoming Modern Orthodox Jews**

**Learning Goals:** This session asks students to analyze how a Modern Orthodox Movement emerged in American Jewish life. Learners should be asked to consider how youth played a role in this process, as well as the balance between lay and rabbinic influences. In addition, the session should call attention to the fact that this movement emerged after a decades-long struggle for Orthodox Jewish leaders to define the contours of their religious community, particularly in an American milieu.

**Reading:** Chapter 7

### **Suggestions for Further Reading**

Lawrence Grossman, “American Orthodoxy in the 1950s: The Lean Years,” in *Rav Chesed: Essays in Honor of Rabbi Dr. Haskel Lookstein*, vol I, ed. Rafael Medoff. Jersey City: Ktav, 2009, 251-69.

Zev Eleff, “‘Viva Yeshiva!’: The Tale of the Mighty Mites and the College Bowl,” *American Jewish History* 96 (December 2010): 287-305.

William B. Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva: An Intimate Portrait of Orthodox Jewry*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

David Singer, “Debating Modern Orthodoxy at Yeshiva College: The Greenberg-Lichtenstein Exchange of 1966,” *Modern Judaism* 26 (May 2006): 113-126.

David Singer, “Emanuel Rackman: Gadfly of Modern Orthodoxy,” *Modern Judaism* 28 (May 2008): 134-48.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Why did the members of the so-called “New Orthodox Left” reject the designation “Modern Orthodoxy?”
2. What might Modern Orthodox Judaism have looked like if more liberal Orthodox rabbis claimed leadership of the movement?
3. What in Rabbi Norman Lamm’s 1969 article is reflective of a “Modern Orthodox” point of view?

## **Session 8: Orthodox Inc.**

**Learning Goals:** Once better consolidated, the Modern Orthodox community managed to identify several important and “standard” features of its allied institutions and ideals. This session should ask students to consider why these areas were set into focus, perhaps over others.

**Reading:** Chapter 8

### **Suggestions for Further Reading**

Jeffrey S. Gurock, *The Men and Women of Yeshiva: Higher Education, Orthodoxy, and American Judaism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Seth Farber, *An American Orthodox Dreamer: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Boston’s Maimonides School*. Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2004.

Reuven Kimelman, “Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Abraham Joshua Heschel on Jewish-Christian Relations,” *Modern Judaism* 24 (October 2004): 251-71.

Timothy D. Lytton, *Kosher: Private Regulation in the Age of Industrial Food*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Jonathan D. Sarna, “A Crucial Decade for Jewish Camping,” in *A Place of Our Own: The Rise of Reform Jewish Camping*, eds. Michael M. Lorge and Gary P. Zola. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006, 28-51.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Why did the Jewish day school emerged as one of the more celebrated institutions within America’s Orthodox community?
2. In the interview with Rabbi Alexander Rosenberg on kashrut, why do you think the interview felt compelled to raise issues of Orthodox observance?
3. Why did Rabbi Soloveitchik’s position on interfaith dialogue achieve a consensus among Orthodox leaders?



## **Session 9: The New Orthodox Synagogue**

**Learning Goals:** Like Session 3, this area of study returns the focus to the role of rabbis and the synagogue in dictating the developments of Orthodox Judaism in the United States. For many Orthodox Jews, the synagogue was the major site (along with the day schools, particularly later in the century) where congregants looked to obtain their religious culture and points of social contact. Students should be urged to address how the synagogue conveyed Orthodox culture and whether its various messages were truly on the same Modern Orthodox page.

**Reading:** Chapter 9

### **Suggestions for Further Reading**

Edward Abrahamson, *A Circle in the Square: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin Reinvents the Synagogue*. Jerusalem: Urim, 2008.

Jerome E. Carlin and Saul H. Mendlovitz, “The American Rabbi: A Religious Specialist Responds to Loss of Authority.” In *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group*, edited by Marshall Sklare, 377-414. The Free Press, Glencoe, IL, 1972.

Etan Diamond, *And I Will Dwell in their Midst: Orthodox Jews in Suburbia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Zev Eleff, “From Teacher to Scholar to Pastor: The Evolving Postwar Modern Orthodox Rabbinate,” *American Jewish History* 98 (October 2014): 289-313.

Samuel C. Heilman, *Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. How did economic mobility influence the Orthodox synagogue in the post-World War II period?
2. How did proximity to Conservative communities impact Orthodox Jewish life in American suburbs?
3. How do the documents in this chapter describe the “evolution” of the Orthodox rabbinate in the post-World War II period?

## **Session 10: What do Orthodox Jews Believe?**

**Learning Goals:** Interestingly, most Modern Orthodox Jews were united by social and cultural factors, rather than a shared theological outlook. This session urges students to engage the variety of Orthodox theological positions in the postwar period.

**Reading:** Chapter 10

### **Suggestions for Further Reading**

Arnold M. Eisen, *The Chosen People in America: A Study of Jewish Religious Ideology*.  
Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983.

Lawrence Kaplan, "From Cooperation to Conflict: Rabbi Professor Emanuel Rackman, Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and the Evolution of American Modern Orthodoxy," *Modern Judaism* 30 (February 2010): 46-68.

Jonathan Sacks, "Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik: Halakhic Man," *L'Eylah* 19 (Spring 1985): 36-42.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. The Orthodox presentations of "theology" in this chapter differ markedly from one another. What are the advantages and disadvantages of their literary forms and viewpoints?
2. Consider the two excerpts from the *Commentary* symposium. How did the answers provided by Marvin Fox and Immanuel Jakobovits differ?
3. What was "radical" about Rabbi Emanuel Rackman's view of Jewish law? Why did it elicit criticism?

## **Session 11: Responding to Tragedies and Triumphs**

**Learning Goals:** America's Orthodox Jews were deeply impacted by changes in the global Jewish community. Recurrently, their leaders were challenged to offer responses to major and cataclysmic events such as the Holocaust and the rise of the State of Israel. Students should be encouraged to ask how Orthodox Jews reacted to the global situation of Jews and the broader situation of the American social and political landscape.

**Reading:** Chapter 11

### **Suggestions for Further Reading**

Adam S. Ferziger, "'Outside the Shul': The American Soviet Jewry Movement and the Rise of Solidarity Orthodoxy, 1964-1986," *Religion and American Culture* 22 (Winter 2012): 83-130.

Libby Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane: His Life and Thought, 1932-1975*. Jerusalem: Urim, 2008.

Steven T. Katz, *Historicism, the Holocaust, and Zionism: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought and History*. New York: New York University Press, 1992.

Benny Kraut, *The Greening of American Orthodox Judaism: Yavneh in the Nineteen Sixties*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2011.

Jacob J. Schacter, "Holocaust Commemoration and *Tish'a Be-Av*: The Debate Over 'Yom Ha-Sho'a,'" *Tradition* 41 (Summer 2008): 164-97.

Baila Round Shargel, *Female Leadership in the American Jewish Community: Bessie Gotsfeld and the Mizrahi Women's Organization of America*. Lanham: University Press of America, 2007.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. How did Orthodox leaders connect the Holocaust to the State of Israel?
2. What are the differences that Bessie Gotsfeld distinguish between religious life in "Eretz Israel" and the "Galut?"
3. Why did some leaders within the Movement to Free Soviet Jewry speak of their cause in religious terms and why did other choose not to do so?

## **Session 12: The Orthodox Family**

**Learning Goals:** This session places an emphasis on the domestic condition of the Modern Orthodox community. How did the personal decisions of Orthodox women and men cohere with the more public pronouncements and ideologies of Orthodox Judaism? What role did public policy—particularly in the area of family purity—play in how Orthodox families augured their lives? These are the sorts of broad questions that this session should provoke.

**Reading:** Chapter 12

### **Suggestions for Further Reading**

Kenneth Auman and Basil Herring, *The Prenuptial Agreement: Halakhic and Pastoral Considerations*. Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996.

Fred Rosner, “Tay-Sachs Disease: To Screen or Not to Screen?,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 15 (October 1976): 271-81.

Beth Wenger, “Mitzvah and Medicine: Gender, Assimilation, and the Scientific Defense of ‘Family Purity.’” In *Women and American Judaism: Historical Perspectives*, edited by Pamela S. Nadell and Jonathan Sarna, 201-22. Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2001.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. In what ways did Rabbi Norman Lamm’s fresh treatment of “family purity” differ from the earlier statement issued by the Orthodox Union?
2. What were Rabbi Herbert Goldstein’s reasons for his anti-birth control stance? How did Judaism and Jewish law figure into his argument?
3. Evaluate the Rabbinical Council of America’s 1993 resolution on Agunah. In which ways was this text representative of a sea change in Modern Orthodox Judaism? In which ways was it not?

## **Session 13: From Rebbetzin to Rabbah**

**Learning Goals:** Other sessions offer insight into the role of gender in the development of American Orthodox Jewish life. However, this session takes a more focused look at the role of female Orthodox leadership. Without question, women have obtained an ever-increasing role in this sector of American Judaism. This session should explore how that role has been defined at different stages and the rhetoric used by Orthodox women to describe their positions within Orthodox leadership.

**Reading:** Chapter 13

### **Suggestions for Further Reading**

Darren Kleinberg, "Orthodox Women (Non-)Rabbis," *CCAR Journal* 59 (Spring 2012): 80-99  
Schwartz.

Pamela S. Nadell, *Women Who Would Be Rabbis: A History of Women's Ordination, 1889-1985*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1998.

Shuly Rubin Schwartz, *The Rabbi's Wife: The Rebbetzin in American Jewish Life*. New York: New York University Press, 2006.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. How has the role of the Orthodox rebbetzin changed over the course of twentieth century?
2. How did the two tracks of female congregational leadership compare and contrast in the 1980s and 1990s?
3. What can be gleaned from the sources in this chapter about the relationship between Orthodox Judaism and feminism?

## **Session 14: Sliding to the Right and to the Left**

**Learning Goals:** Harmony within Modern Orthodox Judaism was a rare commodity. This session asks learners and students to explore the various avenues of the fissures. Modern Orthodox Judaism had considered itself the occupier of the “center.” Yet, an assortment of elements tried to move it to both the right and left. On some occasions, observers accused “centrists” of sliding out of that difficult position. This session is ripe for consideration of how a religious balance was so difficult to maintain.

**Reading:** Chapter 14

### **Suggestions for Further Reading**

Shalom Berger et al., *Flipping Out? Myth or Fact?: The Impact of the “Year in Israel.”* New York: Yashar Books, 2007.

Adam S. Ferziger, “Feminism and Heresy: The Construction of a Jewish Metanarrative,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77 (September 2009): 494-546.

Samuel C. Heilman, *Sliding to the Right: The Contest for the Future of American Jewish Orthodoxy.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Yehuda Turetsky and Chaim I. Waxman, “Sliding to the Left?: Contemporary American Modern Orthodoxy,” *Modern Judaism* 31 (May 2011): 119-41.

Jack Wertheimer, *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America.* New York: Basic Books, 1993.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. How did feminism and “women’s issues” shape the discussions of Modern Orthodox Jews in the final decades of the twentieth century?
2. Consider the variety of ways that Modern Orthodox Jews used Rabbi Soloveitchik to argue for their perspectives? Why do you think each side was able to use Soloveitchik to justify their respective viewpoints?
3. Consider the lexical transformation of the Modern Orthodox community in this period? What is the different between a “Modern Orthodox” Jew and a “Centrist” Jew?

## **Session 15: Reconsidering Modern Orthodox in a New Century**

**Learning Goals:** The fallout of the fissures within Modern Orthodox Judaism caused great confusion and religious depression. In the wake of this turmoil, a group of Orthodox Jews whose views did not altogether mirror the positions of Modern Orthodox leaders of previous generations attempted to claim the mantle of Modern Orthodox Judaism. Students should read the sources included in this session with sensitivity and consider how this epoch resembled and differed from previous incarnations of Modern Orthodoxy.

**Reading:** Chapter 15

### **Suggestions for Further Reading**

Sylvia Fishman, *The Way into the Varieties of Jewishness*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2007.

Chaim Rapoport, *Judaism and Homosexuality: An Authentic Orthodox View*. London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2004.

Jack Wertheimer, “Can Modern Orthodoxy Survive?,” *Mosaic* (August 3, 2014).

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. How does the criticism levied against Modern Orthodox Judaism in this chapter differ from the kind expressed in the previous chapter?
2. How do you view Rabbi Saul Berman’s optimism in his announcement on the close of Edah in light of the pessimism and disinterest shared by the earlier texts in this chapter?
3. How did Rabbi Asher Lopatin attempt to “reclaim” and “rejuvenate” Modern Orthodox Judaism? Was this an isolated moment or should it be viewed in a wider historical context?