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**The Haredization of American Orthodoxy in the Early Twentieth Century**

Until the 1940s many members of the populous Orthodox Jewish communities in America worked on Shabbat because of the scarcity of alternative employment; they consumed non-kosher rather than higher-priced kosher meat; they let slide the laws of family purity because the mikves were sparse and often charged high admission fees; and they did not provide their children with a Jewish education because it was private and costly.

Most rabbis earned low wages and, reluctant to risk their precarious livelihood, did not dare to challenge the laxity of their congregants’ religious lifestyle. Thus, while in Eastern Europe most Jews who considered themselves Orthodox and regularly attended the synagogue were observant, in America the vast majority of Jews who belonged to the Orthodox congregation did not observe even the most fundamental mitzvot.

A radically different picture emerges at the end of the twentieth century: At this point most members in the American Orthodox congregations led a religious lifestyle even more rigorous than that which prevailed in many Orthodox communities in Eastern Europe which included a significant number of observant yet religiously lax members. Several scholars described the Haredization process of American Orthodoxy during the later twentieth century as “the shift” or “the slide” to the right.¹ In this article, however, I return to the first half of the twentieth century to

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examine the beginning of the process, relying on primary sources, particularly Orthodox newspapers and journals published in America during that period. (See the appendix on Orthodox press in the first half of the twentieth century at the end of this article).

Using such sources lets us know not only the thoughts of the reporters and editors, but also the picture to which the readers were exposed and probably adopted without further questioning. For example, New York’s Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) was established as an Orthodox institution in 1886 and its leaders continued to regard it as Orthodox until the 1920s. Yet, following the nomination of Rabbi Solomon Schechter as its president in 1902, it appears that the Orthodox newspapers accepted the more conservative rabbis’ view who no longer considered JTS Orthodox, and hardly reported on its ongoing events.

**American Orthodoxy in the Nineteenth Century**

The wave of immigration to the United States in the early years of the nineteenth century emanated predominantly from Germany and Ireland. By 1825 some 10,000 Jews, mainly of German origin, had settled there as well, and by 1880 this number had swelled to more than 250,000, including several tens of thousands of Jews from Eastern Europe. The onset of the pogroms in southern Russia in 1881 triggered an unprecedented wave of immigration, and by the end of the nineteenth century a further 600,000 Jews immigrated to the United States, most of them settling in the East Coast cities with New York’s Jewish population crossing the half-million mark. Since the majority came from traditional homes, many, including the modernized, the acculturated, and even the non-observant among them, tended to join the Orthodox communities that as well as constituting a place of worship, fulfilled a broader social function in the life of their members. Two of New York’s daily Yiddish newspapers, Morgen Journal and Yidishes Togblat, were considered Orthodox.

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Because the religious community in Eastern Europe was an integral part of the administrative system, including the all-important right of residence, it was incumbent upon every Jew to register with their local Jewish community and pay its dues. In the modern era, the growth in the number of less observant Jews was reflected in their increased representation among community officials. Nevertheless, because of the scarcity of Reform communities in Eastern Europe, the millions of Jews living there, including the non-observant, were unfamiliar with streams of Judaism other than the Orthodox of which they were non-observant, or non-fully observant members.

In America, where church and state were totally separate, there were no European-style religious communities. Jewish organizations were established solely on a voluntarily basis and many Jews were not affiliated with any Jewish organization. These organizations can be divided into two main groups: first, the Landsmanshafts, namely the social organizations of immigrants from the same area or city, which aimed to support and provide a social network for their members and for their families who remained behind in Europe; and second, more pertinent to this article, the religious-oriented “synagogue community,” namely the congregation. The religious congregation, which was funded by its own members, established its own synagogue. In many cases it also employed a rabbi who sometimes taught Jewish education to the community’s children while wealthier congregations employed professional teachers.

A significant disparity thus developed between the Eastern European community and the American congregation. The congregations were run autonomously and without any supreme religious and administrative authority regulating their conduct other than the American law which was indifferent to religious considerations. Since all the congregations depended on membership fees, their interest in recruiting new members set them in constant competition with one another. Whereas the small towns had few congregations, competition was fierce in the larger cities, especially New York, where congregations were plentiful.

Many of the early Jewish immigrants to America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries continued to keep the commandments, at least in public. The subsequent generations of Jewish immigrants hailed primarily from Eastern Europe. There, they received a Jewish education,

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7 Kimmy Caplan, *Orthodoxy in the New World: Immigrant Rabbis and Preaching in America (1881-1924)* [Hebrew], (Zalman Shazar, 2002).
refrained from working on Shabbat, attended the synagogue at least several times a year, and consumed kosher food. However, conditions in America, especially during the period of the Great Migration in the late nineteenth century, made it all but impossible to maintain the traditional Jewish way of life. Despite never considering doing so in their original communities, the reality in America obliged them to work on Shabbat, which was yet another workday. This eased their way to forgo other traditions such as family purity laws, consuming kosher food, and granting their children a Jewish education. Looking to preserve their Jewish identity, yet sensing that the Orthodox lifestyle was obsolete, many Jews joined the modernized Reform synagogues.

A report on New York’s Orthodox Jewry in 1887 reveals that there were at the time some 200 Orthodox congregations of one sort or another. Although they hosted many visiting preachers and Torah scholars, there were only three or four Eastern European style rabbis in the whole city. It further claims that the synagogue served primarily as a social meeting place dominated by the wealthier members rather than by those who served as spiritual and religious role models.8 Hoping to stem the growing numbers of Jews who belonged to Orthodox congregations yet were not observant, in 1887 several Orthodox rabbis established the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in the hope that it would produce rabbis and teachers more equipped to address these challenges. In 1896 they established the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, known as RIETS and American Modern Orthodoxy’s most dominant religious education institute, and in 1898 they established the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, later known as the Orthodox Union (OU).

In 1888, Rabbi Jacob Joseph, a renowned Lithuanian rabbi, was invited by several community leaders to serve as New York City’s chief rabbi in the hope that establishing a single and supreme Torah authority, in the European model, would raise the level of observance. Reality proved them wrong. It became clear within a few years that the disparate interests and religious nature of the different congregations made it impossible for them to reach any consensus. Rabbi Joseph himself was slandered and humiliated, and in 1902 he died heartbroken at a young age.9 By the end of the nineteenth century, American Orthodoxy was by and large an empty title.

The First Decade of the Twentieth Century

Some of the Eastern European rabbis could not remain indifferent to their congregants’ violation of even the most fundamental commandments. One such rabbi was Dov Ber Abramovich who founded the scholarly journal *Beit Va’ad la-Hakhamim* in the early twentieth century as a vehicle for the promotion of a more religious lifestyle in America. Laying out his ethos, he declared: “We must continue to follow the path paved by our ancestral forefathers and not deviate from it or engage with the new ideas that spring up all the time. Only in strengthening the Torah and the traditional Mitzvoth that are held sacred to all Jews lies our hope and purpose.”\(^\text{10}\)

American Orthodoxy’s main problem, he argued, was that each congregation functioned autonomously in the absence of a supreme religious authority that would set religious standards and protect those rabbis who feared for their livelihood:

> Our People who live in this land and the great sages of Israel in our country are divided into several tribes, and there is no unity and no agreement among them on how and with what to raise the standing of religion… some forbid and some allow, some embrace and some reject… and the common people of the House of Israel are sinking into the depth of the abyss, drowning in a sea of obscenity…. Their souls are drowning in the desecration of the Shabbat, eating forbidden foods, and leaving the ways of Israel… and there is no one to stop the breach, because the rabbis worry about their future and are fearful of one another… and in the meanwhile Judaism in this country is becoming extinct.\(^\text{11}\)

In 1902, several like-minded rabbis decided to establish Agudat HaRabbanim HaOrtodoksim (The Union of Orthodox Rabbis). The organization which started out with only a few dozen rabbis, grew to become the most powerful Orthodox organization over the next four decades, and one of its first steps was to publish a book of religious regulations.\(^\text{12}\) Nevertheless, the state of religious observance remained woeful:

> In the circles of Judaism in this new land there is a great sigh which reaches the skies and its voice is heard from the ends of the Atlantic to the ends of the Pacific Ocean, and from north to south. Our holy Judaism, the legacy of our ancestors… is rapidly deteriorating…. Day after day and year after year our holy religion is devastated…. The holy Jewish

\(^{10}\) *Beit Va’ad la-Hakhamim* (=BVL), Shevat 5663 (1903), 2.

\(^{11}\) BVL, Shevat, 5663 (1903), 1–2.

\(^{12}\) BVL, Adar, 5663 (1903), 4; *Sefer ha-Takanot shel Agudat ha-Rabbanim ba-Ortodoksim be-Amerika* (New York, 5662 [1902]).
communities’ members at first observed all the laws of the Holy Torah, are crushed and our children are leaving them every day and there is no consolation. . . . [Even] intermarriage has become frequent, occurring on a daily basis.13

In light of the establishment of the Zionist movement in the late nineteenth century, and because most leaders of the Reform movement in America objected to the concept of Jewish nationality, Zionist ideology prevailed mainly among members of the Orthodox communities.14 The religious-Zionist movement Mizrachi was established in Europe in 1902, and since the vast majority of American rabbis subscribed to its tenets, it opened its first official branch in the United States in 1914.15 However, for a handful of traditionalist rabbis, Zionism and Jewish nationalism were antithetical to Jewish religion and threatened its existence.16

Despite Agudat HaRabbanim being declared a national organization, in its first decade its membership included fewer than a hundred rabbis.17 Another organization active at the time was the Association of Orthodox Communities of Greater New York, which included both rabbis and lay activists. It dealt primarily with issues requiring cooperation at the local level such as establishing a kosher slaughtering system and the kosher supervision of food products and restaurants. Like other public bodies, the Orthodox organizations held an annual general conference where they discussed the challenges to Orthodox Judaism such as the growing missionary activity among Jews or the celebration of Christmas in public schools.18

Most of the communities belonging to the Association still harbored aspirations to replicate the religious lifestyle they had left behind in Eastern Europe.19 Well-established Americanized Jewish communities chose not to join the Association, seeking rather to combine observance with a modern lifestyle. They appointed rabbis who combined proficiency in Talmudic studies with the minimum of

13 BVL, Nisan, 5663 (1903), 17–18.
16 BVL, Iyar, 5663 (1903), 8–9; Baruch Meir Klein, Sha’alu Shelom Yerushalayim (Philip Publishing Co., 1918).
17 Yidishes Togblat (=YT), July 12, 1907, 8.
18 YT, June 10, 1907, 1.
19 YT, February 5, 1909, 4.
a master’s degree from a well-known university, preferring American rabbis ordained at RIETS over the Eastern-European trained rabbis sought by the Association of Communities.

At the end of 1909, Philadelphia hosted the national conference of Agudat HaRabbanim, which was attended by a record number of 80 rabbis who discussed various ideas on how to preserve the unity of Orthodox Judaism in America. The speakers addressed questions relating to religious education, the halakhic problems arising from the handling of marriage and divorce by inexperienced rabbis, and the poor scholarly background of some community rabbis. The rabbis who were elected at this convention to lead Agudat HaRabbanim significantly influenced the future path of Orthodox Judaism.

The two leaders, Rabbi Israel Rosenberg and Rabbi Dov Ber (Bernard) Revel, represented the two streams that characterized American Orthodoxy in the past and still exist today. R. Rosenberg subscribed to a conservative Eastern European outlook and in 1915 founded and headed the Ezras Torah (Torah Assistance) organization which aimed to support the yeshivot, particularly in Europe but in Palestine and America as well. On the other hand, R. Revel was a professor of Jewish studies who laid the foundations for the development of Modern Orthodoxy in America.

The 1910s: Under the Shadow of World War I

Three extraordinary events impacted Europe’s Orthodox Jewry in the second decade of the twentieth century. First was the establishment of Agudath Israel in 1912, the first ever international organization of non-Zionist Orthodox Jews. The second event was World War I (1914–1918), during which most of Europe’s Torah institutions and particularly the yeshivot were destroyed or forced into exile. Because of America’s late entry into the war, its Orthodox communities remained largely unaffected, but in the face of the destruction of the Orthodox communities in other parts of the world, American congregations felt a moral obligation to extend a helping hand.

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20 YT, June 18, 1909, 1.
21 YT, November 5, 1906, 3.
22 Morgen Journal (=MJ), November 14, 1909, 8; ibid., November 18, 1909, 2; ibid., November 25, 1909, 4; ibid., November 30, 1909, 1; ibid., December 2, 1909, 1; ibid., December 3, 1909, 1; ibid., December 4, 1909, 4; ibid., December 5, 1909, 1; ibid., December 7, 1909, 2; YT, November 28, 1909, 4; ibid., November 30, 1909, 1; ibid., December 1, 1909, 1, 8; ibid., December 3, 1909, 1, 8; ibid., December 5, 1909, 1, 8.
This marked the beginning of the tradition of charitable and relief activities that became a hallmark of American Orthodoxy.

The third major event was the changing situation in the Land of Israel. Although the country’s Jews had suffered terrible devastation during the war, the Balfour Declaration’s promise in 1917 to establish a “national home” for the Jewish people in Palestine and the advent of British rule there contributed to a feeling of great optimism. This boosted hope of Jews everywhere that the Mandate administration would open the gates to a greater number of Jewish immigrants, paving the way to fortifying Jewish settlement in the country.

The American religious press covered extensively the establishment of Agudath Israel and reported on the two delegates sent to America to discuss the establishment of local branches. The delegates visited several Orthodox congregations, including some in New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Cincinnati. Besides establishing branches of Agudath Israel, to which each member was required to pay an annual fee of at least one dollar, they proposed to establish branches of the movement’s youth organizations for boys (Tzeirei Agudath Israel) and girls (Bnos Agudath Israel). Local Orthodox leaders decided instead to establish Young Israel, which promoted a traditional lifestyle among English-speaking youth and young adults. Its first branch was situated on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, but, in time, more branches opened elsewhere in New York and in other cities.

Since the delegates returned empty-handed, Agudath Israel dispatched another emissary on its behalf. Although not explicitly stated, it was clear that Agudath Israel’s expectations regarding the religious conduct of its members were inconsistent with the nature of American Orthodoxy. And while the gathering of several dozen rabbis into an organization such as Agudat HaRabbanim was a relatively simple task, the establishment of a truly Orthodox mass movement was simply inconceivable considering the insufficient number of fully observant American Jews. In any case, following the

24 YT, July 9, 1912, 1; ibid., November 19, 1912, 4; ibid., November 10, 1913, 6; ibid., December 9, 1913, 6; ibid., December 19, 1913, 6; ibid., January 1, 1914, 4; ibid., January 8, 1914, 7; ibid., January 12, 1914, 7; ibid., January 20, 1914, 7; ibid., January 22, 1914, 7.
25 YT, January 16, 1914, 4; ibid., January 18, 1914, 8; ibid., January 22, 1914, 6; ibid., February 9, 1914, 3; ibid., February 15, 1914, 8; ibid., February 16, 1914, 3.
26 YT, December 8, 1913, 5; ibid., February 17, 1914, 6.
27 *The Reform Advocate*, January 18, 1913, 740; *B’nai B’rith Messenger*, March 28, 1913, 11.
28 YT, March 20, 1914, 10; ibid., April 10, 1914, 7; ibid., April 26, 1914, 5; ibid., May 21, 1914, 8.
advent of World War I the first Knnesia Gedola (Agudath Israel’s international general conference) which was due to open in late 1914 to mark the launching of its activities, was postponed.29

Following the devastation of Europe’s communities and Torah institutions, Mizrachi, Agudat HaRabbanim, and the Union of Orthodox Communities (OU) joined forces to found the Orthodox Central Relief Committee.30 This cooperative effort continued throughout the war years and strengthened the connection between these organizations on other issues as well, such as the demand to draft a municipal law preventing kosher fraud, the establishment of the American Jewish Congress to act as a unified body on behalf of war victims, and setting fasting and prayer days.31

One outcome of the collective activity was the failed initiative to merge Mizrachi and Agudat HaRabbanim into one organization.32 A more successful venture was the establishment of a separate rabbinical association for Greater New York in order to address local problems. Some 200 representatives from various religious circles participated in a rabbinical assembly which discussed the supervision of kashrut in the city.33

In 1917, several American Jewish leaders, including some Orthodox representatives, decided to establish the Jewish Congress, which would represent and take care of the needs of the Jewish people after the war.34 The strengthening of Reform Judaism reflected in the elections for the leadership of this organization and the rising number of Shabbat desecrators prompted Agudat HaRabbanim to issue a public appeal:

In contemplating the state of the Holy Shabbat in our country it is heartbreaking to realize that the number of Shabbat-keepers is dwindling

29 YT, August 20, 1914, 4; ibid., August 24, 1914, 4.
30 YT, September 6, 1914, 7; ibid., October 14, 1914, 7; ibid., November 8, 1914, 7; MJ, October 26, 1915, 8.
31 YT, January 4, 1915, 6; ibid., April 7, 1915, 1; ibid., April 29, 1915, 2; ibid., May 7, 1915, 2; ibid., May 31, 1915, 2; ibid., August 25, 1915, 5; ibid., September 1, 1915, 1; ibid., October 6, 1915, 7; ibid., October 17, 1915, 9; ibid., December 23, 1915, 4; MJ, November 6, 1914, 7; ibid., January 22, 1915, 4; ibid., February 11, 1915, 4; ibid., April 28, 1915, 1; ibid., April 30, 1915, 1; ibid., June 25, 1915, 4.
34 YT, January 14, 1917, 6; ibid., January 24, 1917, 1; ibid., February 28, 6; MJ, January 24, 1917, 1; ibid., January 25, 1917, 4; ibid., February 28, 1917, 2.
from day to day. And many of our brethren no longer feel the need to observe the holy Shabbat, and they watch indifferently as their sons desecrate the Shabbat and sell newspapers publicly. And they don’t care to educate them in the way of Torah and according to our ancestors’ tradition saying they have no time to supervise them.\(^{35}\)

This dire situation was reflected in the Orthodox education system. Although by then more than a million Jews lived in Greater New York, only about 1,200 school-aged children attended the four yeshivot affiliated with the New York Yeshiva Association. Furthermore, because of their low salaries, the melamdim (teachers of Torah) crammed 50–60 children into each classroom.\(^{36}\) The failure of Agudat HaRabbanim to effect significant change after fifteen years of activity prompted several rabbis headed by Rabbi Avraham Yudelovitch, to establish Agudat HaRabbanim VehaMetifim (Association of Rabbis and Preachers) that included not only rabbis ordained in Eastern Europe but also those ordained in America, as well as community spiritual leaders not officially ordained as rabbis.\(^{37}\)

This organization subscribed to a religious Zionist outlook similar to that of Mizrachi and in its public statement following the Balfour Declaration it declared: “For the first time in our lives here [in the United States] the Jewish religion will justly demand to return our country to its people, because in the Diaspora we cannot properly keep the Shabbat and impart a true Jewish education to our sons and our descendants.”\(^{38}\)

Since this organization did not consist exclusively of Eastern European rabbis, it embraced an even larger number of members from more diverse backgrounds. It likewise promoted a more modern approach which advocated the inclusion of general education into the Orthodox school curriculum, openly supported the Zionist movement, and was extensively involved in various charitable initiatives. This was designed to enhance the attractiveness of Orthodox communities and their institu-

\(^{35}\) MJ, January 16, 1917, 1. “Newsboy” was a common occupation among children, and Jewish children sold Jewish newspapers, particularly those published in Yiddish. Weekends were the busiest days, and many if not all non-Orthodox daily newspapers were printed and distributed on Shabbat. Allowing them to sell newspapers, many Jewish boys got accustomed to publicly desecrate the Shabbat.


\(^{37}\) YT, June 22, 1917, 10; ibid., July 6, 1917, 3; ibid., August 10, 1917, 3; ibid., October 25, 1917, 5; MJ, June 19, 1917, 2; ibid., July 8, 1917, 10; ibid., July 15, 1917, 9; ibid., September 5, 1917, 8; ibid., September 14, 1917, 6; ibid., December 5, 1917, 9; ibid., December 7, 1917, 6.

\(^{38}\) YT, November 19, 1917, 5.
tions and stanch the continued dropout of young families deterred by an overly stringent lifestyle.39

Despite their similar goals, the two rabbinical organizations were pitted against one another, each one seeking to gain the upper hand by forming coalitions with other organizations, particularly with Mizrahi, which at the time was the largest and most influential Orthodox organization.40

The rivalry between the organizations was financial as well as ideological, as evidenced by their vying for contracts from the larger food manufacturers for the issuing of kosher certificates, a field which generated a large number of jobs and brought in hefty sums in exchange for their stamp of approval.41 In 1919, Agudat HaRabbanim VehaMetifim expanded its activities and established Agudat HaKehilot BeAmerica (America’s Association of Communities), and Keren Geula (the Salvation Fund) for the purpose of encouraging the settlement of Orthodox Jews in Eretz Yisrael.42

Opposition to this more lenient rabbinical organization and the desire to distinguish between “true” and “false” rabbis, led Agudat HaRabbanim to announce their intention to establish a special ordination committee in which three experienced and trusted rabbis would ordain only graduates of the RIETS Yeshiva.43 A few years later Agudat HaRabbanim VehaMetifim merged with Agudat HaRabbanim, which remained American Orthodoxy’s main rabbinical union. The joint organization increased its cooperation with Mizrahi and lobbied for support of its Eretz Yisrael settlement initiatives.44

The 1920s: Early Signs of Change

In the aftermath of World War I America enjoyed a period of economic prosperity which attracted a new wave of Jewish immigration. This trend

39 \textit{YT}, December 2, 1917, 1, 8; ibid., December 5, 1917, 1, 5; \textit{MJ}, March 7, 1918, 6; ibid., March 10, 1918, 1; ibid., March 11, 1918, 1; ibid., March 26, 1918, 7; ibid., May 21, 1918, 1; ibid., June 3, 1918, 2; ibid., June 10, 1918, 9; ibid., September 10, 1918, 2; ibid., December 25, 1; ibid., December 27, 1918, 6.

40 \textit{YT}, April 29, 1918, 6; ibid., May 6, 1918, 1; \textit{MJ}, March 26, 1918, 7.

41 \textit{YT}, July 12, 1918, 1; ibid., July 21, 1918, 3; ibid., July 26, 1918, 4, 6; \textit{MJ}, July 18, 1918, 2; ibid., July 19, 1918, 7; ibid., July 26, 1918, 8; ibid., August 1, 1918, 4.

42 \textit{YT}, January 10, 1919, 2; ibid., January 17, 1919, 1; ibid., January 31, 1919, 1; ibid., February 7, 1919, 9; ibid., February 28, 1919, 2; ibid., March 14, 1919, 4; ibid., April 6, 1919, 3; ibid., May 2, 1919, 9.

43 \textit{YT}, March 19, 1919, 2; ibid., March 20, 1919, 2, 6; ibid., March 21, 1919, 7; ibid., May 7, 1919, 1–2; ibid., May 8, 1919, 4; ibid., May 15, 1919, 5.

44 \textit{MJ}, February 29, 1919, 5; ibid., May 2, 1919, 9; ibid., May 5, 1919, 7; ibid., May 7, 1919, 1, 11; ibid., December 23, 1919, 8; ibid., February 25, 1920, 6; ibid., February 29, 1920, 8; \textit{YT}, April 19, 1920, 4; ibid., April 20, 1920, 1, 4; ibid., April 21, 1920, 1–3; ibid., September 3, 1920, 7.
halted after the Immigration Act of 1924 reduced the number of newcomers from Eastern Europe by 90 percent. However, a special section of the law granting exceptional status to the migration of rabbis and yeshiva students, mitigated for them the impact of these restrictions. Among these immigrants were also the first Hasidic rabbis who established their own communities, but even in their synagogues only a few were strictly observant. They also established their own rabbinical association named Agudat HaAdmorim.

By the mid-1920s, as life returned to normal in Europe and the need to assist Jewish refugees and war-stricken communities diminished, the American Orthodox charity organizations established during the war, primarily Ezras Torah, channeled more funds toward increasing their support of local religious institutions and especially the Orthodox education system. At the same time, all the Orthodox organizations, including Agudat HaRabbanim, joined the Zionist movement’s fundraising projects. Another organization that expanded its activity was Young Israel, which catered to the younger generation and while claiming to be an Orthodox organization, also introduced some innovations and cooperated with non-Orthodox movements. Despite criticism from the more conservative rabbis, this enabled it to attract many youngsters and by 1921 it already had some 20,000 members.

In 1922, Agudat HaRabbanim celebrated its twentieth anniversary. Yet despite its two decades of activity the state of observance remained dire, which was especially evident in the religious education system. In Harlem, for example, which was home to some 175,000 Eastern European Jews, less than one-fifth of the students received some form of

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46 MJ, March 24, 1922, 12; Apirion, Nisan 5684 (1924), 131; ibid., Adar 5686, (1926), 171; ibid., Heshvan 5687 (1927), 50, 58; ibid., Kislev 5688 (1928), 81.
47 MJ, April 22, 1921, 2; ibid., June 6, 1921, 11; ibid., June 10, 1921, 10; ibid., July 4, 1921, 2; ibid., February 17, 1922, 7; ibid., February 19, 1922, 1, 8; ibid., February 28, 1922, 2; ibid., September 20, 1922, 15; YT, March 17, 1921, 4; ibid., April 15, 1921, 3; ibid., April 21, 1921, 3; May 31, 1921, 1–2; ibid., June 14, 1921, 3; ibid., June 24, 1921, 2.
48 MJ, February 21, 1919, 6; ibid., September 30, 1921, 1; ibid., October 2, 1921, 5; YT, December 20, 1920, 4; ibid., June 1, 1921, 1–2; ibid., June 2, 1921, 1; ibid., July 6, 1921, 5; ibid., November 21, 1921, 1–2; ibid., February 6, 1922, 4; ibid., November 17, 1922, 4; ibid., November 22, 1922, 4; ibid., November 24, 1922, 7.
49 YT, December 20, 1920, 4; The Sentinel, December 24, 1920, 15; ibid., January 7, 1921, 80; The Reform Advocate, February 12, 1921, 34.
50 MJ, May 5, 1922, 6–7; YT, May 9, 1922, 1, 4.
Jewish education, including those who only attended a Sunday school for only a few years.\textsuperscript{51} In an attempt to remedy this situation, the Orthodox leaders decided to invest in RIETS, the flagship Orthodox institution, to enable it to train more American-style rabbis in addition to the dozens it had already produced, and to open a seminary for religious teachers (Teacher’s Institute).\textsuperscript{52} Another institution which expanded its activities was Mesivta Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, an Orthodox school, catering to hundreds of students on the Lower East Side.\textsuperscript{53} A new yeshiva, Torah Vodaath, established in Williamsburg and headed by Rabbi Shraga Feivel Mendelowitz, attracted many Orthodox families to the neighborhood, which remained America’s most highly-concentrated Haredi area.\textsuperscript{54}

Following the war, Agudath Israel resumed its activities in Europe and dispatched another delegation to the United States in the hope of establishing a branch there, but this attempt failed, as it had in the past.\textsuperscript{55} The mission’s only accomplishment was the establishment of a few branches of Agudath Israel’s youth movement, Tzeirei Agudath Israel, which remained the movement’s sole operation in America for the next two decades.\textsuperscript{56} The main obstacle to Agudath Israel’s acceptance in America was its open anti-Zionist position, particularly the stand voiced by its branch in \textit{Eretz Yisrael}. There, Agudath Israel pursued an independent policy with respect to how the Jewish leadership should respond to the Arab objection to Jewish immigration and settlement in Palestine.


\textsuperscript{52} \textit{MJ}, May 14, 1922, 2; ibid., May 25, 1922, 2; ibid., June 1, 1922, 10; ibid., June 7, 1922, 4; \textit{YT}, September 18, 1922, 2. The Mizrachi Teachers’ Institute was established by Rabbi Meir Bar Ilan in 1917. Following his temporary appointment as RIETS’s president, he merged the two institutions.

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{YT}, January 1, 1922, 9.

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{MJ}, January 15, 1920, 7; ibid., January 9, 1920, 9; ibid, February 9, 1920, 13; \textit{YT}, February 20, 1920, 12; ibid., February 27, 1920, 8.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{YT}, March 17, 1920, 8; ibid., September 12, 1920, 9; ibid., January 11, 1921, 4; ibid., May 2, 1921, 6; ibid., May 22, 1921, 6; ibid., May 25, 1921, 1; ibid., May 29, 1921, 8; ibid., June 19, 1921, 13; ibid., June 20, 1921, 3, 7; ibid., June 21, 1921, 1–2; ibid., June 23, 1921, 8, 10; ibid., June 24, 1921, 3; ibid., July 3, 1921, 14; ibid., July 10, 1921, 9; ibid., July 12, 1921, 2; ibid., July 14, 1921, 2, 10; ibid., July 17, 1921, 4; ibid., July 25, 1921, 6; ibid., September 1, 1921, 6; ibid., December 2, 1921, 9; ibid., December 11, 1921, 3; ibid., December 16, 1921, 12; ibid., February 24, 1922, 11; ibid., March 1, 1922, 6; ibid., April 27, 1922, 4; ibid., April 28, 1922, 9.

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{YT}, March 26, 1922, 10; ibid., December 31, 1922, 9; ibid., February 2, 1923, 13; ibid., February 18, 1923, 5; ibid., March 9, 1923, 4.
Unlike the Zionist leadership, Agudath Israel openly cooperated with Arab leaders while at the same time maligning the Zionist movement.\(^{57}\)

In 1923 a few American delegates participated in Agudath Israel’s first Knessia Gedola, which was held in Vienna. Soon thereafter, Agudath Israel tried to resume its activities in the United States, but some rabbis were averse to the introduction of an organization that was unfamiliar with the local Orthodox lifestyle:

The New York Center of Agudath Israel calls on the devotees in America to join it for the sake of strengthening the Torah and the Jewish religion, in order to supply the new generation with true religious education and for the sake of seriously working in favor of Eretz Yisrael. . . . [Nevertheless] observant Jews [in America] have always been involved in building Torah institutions, establishing Talmud Torah schools, founding social charities, and assisting the Jewish settlement in Eretz Yisrael long before Agudath Israel began to sound its shofar. Leave our Orthodox leaders in peace and do not mess in our world! We have enough associations already.\(^{58}\)

Despite Agudat HaRabbanim’s vigorous activity only a small percentage of Jewish children received any sort of religious education and the supervision of kosher slaughter was highly questionable.\(^{59}\) The training of the next generation of rabbis for the entire country’s 4 million Jews was in the hands of only three yeshivot. These included RIETS in New York, which had about 500 students; the Chicago yeshiva (Beit Midrash Gavoha LaTorah), which had some 300 students; and the New Haven Yeshiva with about 50 students. The largest Orthodox movement was Mizrachi whose membership numbered about 15,000 dues-paying families.\(^{60}\) Since the majority of observant Jews supported Zionism, Orthodox leaders feared that Agudath Israel would mobilize an anti-Zionist opposition that would disrupt the cooperation between all the Jewish movements when issues of national import were on the table.\(^{61}\) In order to facilitate Agudath Israel’s acceptance in America, some of the local

\(^{57}\) YT, March 16, 1922, 1; ibid, April 21, 1922, 6; ibid., September 25, 1922, 4; Menachem Keren-Kratz, “Israel and Ishmael: The Arabs in the Land of Israel in the Eyes of the Haredi Old Yishuv” [Hebrew] in Dat u-Le’umiut, ed. Ephraim Lavie (Carmel 2017), 145–162.

\(^{58}\) Apiryon, Tishrei 5684 (1924), 15.

\(^{59}\) Apiryon, Heshvan 5684 (1924), 32–34; ibid., Elul 5684 (1924), 297–298; ibid., Tishrei 5685 (1925), 1–2.

\(^{60}\) Apiryon, Adar Bet 5684 (1924), 106–107; ibid., Av 5684 (1924), 265–266.

\(^{61}\) Apiryon, Adar Alef 5684 (1924), 105; ibid., Nisan 5684 (1924), 157, 160; ibid., Av 5684 (1924), 275.
rabbis sought to strengthen the alliance between Agudath Israel and Mizrachi.\textsuperscript{62} This is the way Agudath Israel’s anti-Zionist positions were portrayed in the Orthodox press:

Agudath Israel or \textit{Shelomei Emunei Yisrael} [the movement’s name in Poland] have not yet been established here as there is no proper soil for such crops. Most American Jews support Zionism and applaud Jewish nationalism. Our Jewish press is practically all Zionist. The rabbinical associations, all three of them, are officially supportive of Zionism. The old and notable great rabbis in this country are all leaders of Mizrachi and work relentlessly for the revival of the people of Israel in \textit{Eretz Yisrael}… And how do our European brothers who are supported by American funding behave?… By gathering forces and launching a holy war against the Zionists and against Zionism.\textsuperscript{63}

In the early 1920s, RIETS Yeshiva, headed by Rabbi Dr. Dov Revel, began encouraging its students to acquire a broad general education, first as part of its religious high school program and, a few years later, by opening a separate institution of higher education, Yeshiva College, that later became Yeshiva University. This was a major step toward the establishment of America’s Modern Orthodoxy, which was also reflected in American rabbis’ criticism of Agudath Israel for its opposition to the opening of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem: “What do the Aguda leaders, those Jewish policemen and supervisors, want to do in \textit{Eretz Yisrael}? What sort of country do they want it to be, and what contribution will it bring to the world? Humanistic? – No way! Science? – God save us! Doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, engineers, technicians, and other professionals? – God forbid!”\textsuperscript{64} These remarks were made in the context of the establishment of the first department of Jewish Studies at Columbia University in New York.\textsuperscript{65}

The continuing religious decline, exacerbated by a lack of cooperation between the Orthodox organizations, was put into sharp relief when compared with the prosperity of the other two Jewish denominations. While the Orthodox \textit{yeshivot} had so far ordained a mere handful of rabbis, the Reform institutions had qualified 256 rabbis and the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), by then regarded as Conservative Judaism’s central educational institution, had ordained

\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Apiryon}, Heshvan 5684 (1924), 25–26.
\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Apiryon}, Elul 5684 (1924), 281.
\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Apiryon}, Iyar 5685 (1925), 187–188.
\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Apiryon}, Sivan 5684 (1924), 218.
164 rabbis and 230 religious teachers. In 1927, amid Agudath Israel’s preparations for its second Knessia Gedola, it sent another representative to America. Once again, the Orthodox press attacked the movement’s zealous and separatist outlook:

Ever since Agudath Israel was founded, it began shouting “Only we are the prophets.” In Vienna Agudath Israel publishes a newspaper which calls itself a true Jewish newspaper. Yet one can find not one antisemitic newspaper in the whole world which displays more venom and hatred toward Jews than the Jüdische Presse… whose editor is a rabbi and one of the leaders of the Aguda and preaches for hatred and boycotts…. Everybody should respect the Jews of America! They lack any hatred and any hostility and the Jews here are closer to each other in their worldviews than all the other Jews in the world.67

Following a short period of intense activity, thousands of members and dozens of rabbis signed up to join the American branch of Agudath Israel. Yet, because it never gained popular support, many failed to pay their dues and the movement disappeared as suddenly as it began.68

The second half of the 1920s saw some improvement in the state of American Orthodoxy. Seventeen new rabbis were ordained by RIETS; Torah Vodaath opened its Mesivta, a yeshiva for older students; the number of Hasidic communities was on the rise; the annual conference of Agudat HaRabbanim was attended by over 200 rabbis; and several important Eastern European rabbis and heads of yeshivot came to America on fundraising missions for their institutions.69 Young Israel, which had hitherto positioned itself between Orthodoxy and Conservatism, finally declared itself an Orthodox organization. It had by this time its own journal and over two dozen affiliates that followed strict religious regulations.70

In addition, several new religious schools were established, and the number of rabbis and yeshivot increased. Yet only about a quarter of all Jewish children received some sort of Jewish education. There were over a

66 Apiryon, Kislev 5686 (1926), 15–16.
67 Apiryon, Shevat 5686 (1926), 61.
68 Apiryon, Shevat 5686 (1926), 62–63; ibid., Nisan 5686 (1926), 166–168.
69 Ha-Pardes, February 1929, 28–29; ibid., May 1929, 31; ibid., June 1929, 2; ibid., July 1929, 28; ibid., November 1929, 30; ibid., December 1929, 30; ibid., June 1930, 2; ibid., September 1932, 5; ibid., November 1932, 4; ibid., January 1935, 15–16; ibid., September 1935, 21; ibid., November 1935, 23.
thousand Orthodox houses of prayer in New York which employed some 450 rabbis and 150 cantors, as well as around 70 Talmud Torah schools and 90 Sunday schools, five religious teachers’ seminaries, and five yeshivot, three of which trained new rabbis.71

However, the status of the congregational rabbis continued to deteriorate. Because most of them were financially supported by non-observant Jews who were reluctant to be reminded of their sins, their role was largely representative, and they were judged on the popular appeal of their sermons rather than on the basis of their scholarship or personal conduct.72 It is no wonder that the level of observance in so many of these communities continued to decline.73

What part of his life does the American Jew devote to his religion and his God? His house? – It is already desecrated by his modern novelties. The noble Jewish women of the past became modern ladies whose table is contaminated by un-kosher food. Family purity laws? – No one cares about them anymore. The synagogue? – Its members publicly desecrate the Shabbat. The Reform movement occupies the place of traditional Judaism. . . . There is not a single Jew who is not a member of many lodges and societies of all sorts. But with respect to sacred issues, he is stingy... tuition for his children’s Jewish education – It’s hard to wrench from his hand... and the result... one by one his children are drifting away.74

In 1927, Agudat HaRabbanim celebrated its 25th anniversary.75 However, the increase in the number of rabbis and the various interpretations given to the term “Orthodoxy” led to the establishment of two additional rabbinical organizations: Knesset HaRabbanim, established in 1920 by Rabbi Gavriel Zev Margolis,76 and Degel HaRabbanim, established in 1926 by Rabbi Yakov Iskolsky.77 At that time RIETS had some 600 students. As many of them were American-born and proficient neither in Hebrew nor Yiddish, a project was launched to translate the Shulhan Arukh and the Talmud into English. The increase in the congregational rabbis’ salaries

72 *Apiryon*, Tamuz 5686 (1926), 247–248, 253; Caplan, *Orthodoxy in the New World*.
73 *Apiryon*, Elul 5687 (1927), 379.
74 *Apiryon*, Tevet 5687 (1927), 96–97.
75 *Sefer ha-Yovel shel Agudat ha-Rabbanim ha-Ortodoksim* (New York, 1928).
76 *Sefer Knesset ha-Rabbanim ha-Ortodoksim be-Amerika* (New York, 1920).
77 *Degel Israel (=DI)*, February 1927, 7, 10; ibid., August 1927, 12–13.
indicated a slight improvement in their social status. More Jewish libraries were available, and more rabbis spoke fluent English and delivered their sermons in English. At the same time, the popular Orthodox newspaper *Yidishe Togblat* ran into financial difficulties and was merged into the *Morgen Journal*.

By the end of the 1920s it had become clear that along with the increase in the number of rabbis, *yeshivot*, synagogues, and Orthodox charities, most of the Jews who belonged to Orthodox communities, including those whose children studied in the religious education system, were non-observant.

Although from the outside... there are many synagogues and study halls in this country, and the buildings are great and very beautiful, and there are also many Talmud Torah schools and famous yeshivas, and countless charity organizations, and a decent number of rabbis and preachers.... Yet all this is from the outside, but inwardly... the heart weeps in sorrow at the sight of spiritual poverty of traditional Judaism in this country. The Shabbat and the festivals are desecrated in the most horrible way, widespread ignorance and lack of knowledge... promiscuity prevails, non-religious and poor education, as well as blasphemy and the desecration of God, the rabbis and the rabbinate... and the number of Torah scholars is shrinking. The young generation does not know nor appreciate their nation’s treasures... and they are alienated from their people and from all that is dear and holy to the nation. Assimilation rules the day!80

Dealing with such challenging problems required both cooperation between the rabbinical unions and the establishment of local organizations such as Greater New York’s Va’ad Ha-Kashrut (Kashrut Committee). However, Agudat HaRabbanim, the most conservative rabbinical union, was reluctant to merge with other more modern and liberal organizations. Nevertheless, following the establishment of Va’ad Ha-Kashrut, the New York City Council amended a law against kosher fraud. Municipal inspectors, some of whom were non-Jews, supervised the slaughterhouses and butchers, and offenders were either fined or brought to justice.82

78 *Ha-Pardes*, Sivan-Tamuz 5687 (1927), 32; ibid., Heshvan 5688 (1928), 52–56; ibid., Kislev 5688 (1928), 81–84; ibid., Tevet 5688 (1928), 109–111; ibid., Tamuz 5688 (1928), 260–261.
80 *DI*, Adar Alef, 5687 (1927), 11.
81 *DI*, Adar Alef, 5687 (1927), 11–13; ibid., Sivan 5687 (1927), 2; ibid., Kislev 5688 (1928), 9; ibid., Tamuz 5688 (1928), 1–5; ibid., Av 5688 (1928), 3–4, 8–9; ibid., Elul 5688 (1928), 13.
82 *DI*, Shevat, 5688 (1928), 4; ibid., Heshvan 5690 (1930), 1–2.
At the end of the decade, New York’s Torah Vodaath Yeshiva celebrated its tenth anniversary. A thousand students attended its elementary and high schools but also studied Talmud at the yeshiva, while a similar number of students attended the elementary Talmud Torah school Tiferet HaGra. Despite the increase in demand, the yeshivot and Talmud Torahs were underbudgeted, so less than a tenth of Jewish students attended these religious schools.

In 1927, Rabbi Shmuel Aharon Pardes from Chicago began publishing Ha-Pardes. This monthly, which he first published in Poland in 1913, became the leading journal of the Eastern European wing of American Orthodoxy and unofficially represented Agudat HaRabbanim and Ezras Torah. It covered many halakhic issues, particularly those relating to Jewish life in America, such as: whether it is permissible to bury in a Jewish cemetery the ashes of a person who ordered his body to be cremated; whether people who could not attend the synagogue on Rosh Hashana were allowed to hear the blowing of the shofar over the radio; the embalming of the dead before burial; the use of an electric refrigerator on Shabbat; shaving one’s beard with the newly invented electric razor; listening to a radio which was turned on before Shabbat; the halakhic status of civil marriage; the use of a microphone in the synagogue on Shabbat; and reproduction by artificial insemination.

Ha-Pardes reported on ongoing events in various Orthodox communities in America. Since Rabbi Pardes lived in Chicago, he frequently reported on the local yeshiva, Beit Midrash La-Torah, which also included the elementary school Etz Chaim Yeshiva, a seminary for religious teachers, and a rabbinical beit midrash which ordained nine rabbis in 1927 and twelve in 1928. America’s third yeshiva, the New Haven Yeshiva, also ordained several rabbis, but a year later it moved to Cleveland and was closed in 1938.

One of the most troubling issues for the leaders of Orthodox Judaism was the production of kosher meat. Unlike Europe, where slaughterers were supervised by local rabbis, in America meat factories were independent businesses and, by employing Jewish slaughterers and butchers,
could claim that their products were kosher. The slaughterers, who were poorly paid, were organized in specific unions that determined their terms of employment and their productivity. Such working conditions made it difficult to maintain a high standard of kashrut.\textsuperscript{88} The controversy that developed between Degel HaRabbanim and Agudat HaRabbanim around this matter symbolizes its complexity. The former agreed to award kosher certificates to factories that produced non-kosher products using meat declared non-kosher, while the latter restricted kosher certificates to meat factories producing only kosher products.\textsuperscript{89}

The locally ordained young rabbis presented another problem: although they had a better understanding of members of their congregations, their familiarity with the local lifestyle and its challenges led them to adopt more lenient worldviews which were regarded with suspicion by their older Eastern European counterparts.

Why would we deceive ourselves? It is impossible to eradicate the desecration of the Sabbath in America because this is an eternal problem. What is possible is to supervise the kashrut, to gather charity and other such matters. And if this is Orthodoxy, then the young American rabbis are Orthodox... [and] it is obvious that as leaders they have a positive effect on their communities... The young American rabbi is what unites the community, and everybody, the old and the young, feels his necessity, and he teaches them the spirit of Jewish Orthodoxy, albeit he does not motivate them to act as true Orthodox Jews.\textsuperscript{90}

\textit{The 1930s: A Turning Point}

The Jewish world in the early 1930s was afflicted by the global financial crisis which erupted at the end of the previous decade as well as by the sharp rise in antisemitism in Europe in the wake of the economic depression, most notably in Poland and Germany. Orthodox rabbis and observant Jews who had never before considered immigrating to America now felt compelled to flee there in order to save their families. Upon their arrival they established several Orthodox congregations that, unlike those already in existence, comprised in the main members who remained fully observant despite the difficulties that this entailed. In the educational institutions they founded, especially the \textit{yeshivot}, the students were taught

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Ha-Pardes}, Iyar 5688 (1928), 4–5.
\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Ha-Pardes}, July 1928, 2–4; ibid., August-September 1928, 2; ibid., December 1928, 32; ibid., December 1929, 3–4; ibid., February 1930, 3–4.
\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Ha-Pardes}, February 1930, 5.
in Yiddish and in accordance with the conservative Eastern European style. The establishment of Agudath Israel in America at the end of this decade provides the clearest indication that, after almost a century, American Orthodoxy had begun to adopt Eastern European standards. In the early 1930s, one rabbi pessimistically commented:

The early generation of immigrants to the United States which brought the treasures of Judaism and Jewish enthusiasm is dwindling, and a new and younger generation, which is completely different from the previous one, is taking its place. . . . With puzzled eyes the father looks at his son and sees him kicking aside all which is holy to our people. . . . Heartbroken he asks himself . . . who will be the heirs of Judaism . . . who will be the bearers of the Torah banner . . . will it be those youngsters who kneel and bow to the golden idol?91

At its annual conference in 1930, the leaders of Agudat HaRabbanim reviewed their past activities and outlined their plans for the future. Ezras Torah’s president, Rabbi Israel Rosenberg, reported that since the war his organization had donated over $800,000 to Torah institutions worldwide.92 One of the more active Orthodox organizations in the 1930s was New York’s Rabbinical Committee which sought to improve the city’s religious infrastructure:

Jewish life in America is different than that of our brothers in other states and countries. . . . New York is a great metropolis and it is impossible to describe the magnitude of its promiscuity. There are many shohtim (kosher meat slaughterers) who desecrate everything which is holy, and many fake rabbis who help the transgressors and in return for money give false kosher certificates. . . . An even greater promiscuity prevails with respect to family purity laws, and many Jewish women ceased to maintain their purity. . . . The only solution for raising the status of Torah and Judaism is the unification of all the forces of the strictly Orthodox rabbis.93

According to the Committee, the diverse background and education of the Orthodox rabbis, along with the absence of a single rabbinical authority on the one hand and the rise in demand for kosher meat on the other, resulted in many disputes between the rabbis, the slaughterers’ unions, and the meat factory owners, each party motivated by different

91 Ha-Pardes, May 1930, 30–31.
92 Ha-Pardes, June 1930, 27–28.
93 Ha-Pardes, July 1930, 2.
interests. In response, the rabbis decided to establish a general kosher supervision committee, which was approved by the municipal authorities. Similar committees were appointed in other cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Detroit. The inspectors acting on their behalf were authorized to impose a fine on anyone violating kosher regulations, and were even backed up by the courts.

One significant improvement was the decision to mark kosher poultry with special metal bands. In 1935, the President of the New York Kashrut Committee declared at the annual conference: “This is the first time that we, the Orthodox rabbis, have jurisdiction over this important function of kashrut, not only as employees who get paid by those whom we are supposed to supervise, but as representatives of the general Rabbinate and the Jewish community.”

After years of blurred boundaries between the Orthodox and Conservative communities, in the 1930s the leaders of Agudat HaRabbanim demanded of their members and their congregations to shun the Conservative Movement in the same way as they had shunned the Reform Movement. They likewise criticized the other rabbinical unions, Knesset HaRabbanim and Degel HaRabbanim, for their lenient worldviews.

These slight changes in American Orthodoxy led to some optimism:

We are used to thinking that in America... it is impossible to sustain a strictly observant Jewish lifestyle, and it is impossible to raise and to educate truly observant children... And sometimes we despair and consider abandoning all Jewish and religious matters... But then came...

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96 Ha-Pardes, December 1934, 3; ibid., February 1935, 2, 17; Der Ortodoks, May 9, 1935, 1; ibid., May 10, 1935, 2; ibid., June 3, 1935, 2; ibid., January 8, 1937, 1; ibid., January 15, 1937, 1.

97 Ha-Pardes, March 1935, 21.

98 Ha-Pardes, June 1931, 29–34; ibid., August 1931, 2; ibid., February 1932, 6–7; ibid., April 1932, 1–2; ibid., December 1933, 11–15; ibid., November 1934, 2–5; ibid., June 1935, 2–5; ibid., September 1935, 7–9; ibid., November 1935, 2–3; ibid., April 1936, 3–4.
the students of the *yeshivot*, RIETS Yeshiva in New York and Beit Midrash La-Torah in Chicago... and their graduates are living symbols for everybody to see that the light of Torah and of Judaism shines in this country too.99

The advertisements and commercial articles published in *Ha-Pardes* indicated the steady increase in the number of kosher food products and included known American brands such as Coca-Cola, Kellogg’s, and Maxwell House coffee, as well as the hitherto unavailable mass-produced dairy and pastry products.100 The journal also published halakhic discussions on the degree of *kashruth* of certain types of fish or smoked meat and on the preference for the Etrogs from *Eretz Yisrael* over those grown in other countries.101 These trends in American Orthodoxy did not influence its views on Zionism, and all the Orthodox organizations continued to support the Zionist national funds and Mizrachi’s settlement initiatives.102

The acceptance of more rigorous religious standards by American Orthodoxy on the one hand and the growing antisemitism in Eastern Europe on the other prompted the immigration of several prominent rabbis to America. Some of these became public figures who shaped the image of American Orthodoxy, such as Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. He was appointed Boston’s chief Orthodox rabbi and subsequently became a leading figure in the formation of Modern Orthodoxy from his perch as *rosh yeshiva* at RIETS.103 Another such figure was Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman, who established the much esteemed Ner Israel Yeshiva in Baltimore.104 At the same time, more rabbis were ordained in the American *yeshivot*, especially at RIETS. As their numbers grew, a group of American rabbis together with the OU established another rabbinical union titled Histadrut HaRabbanim.105 The more conservative rabbis bemoaned these developments:

99 *Ha-Pardes*, May 1931, 2.
100 *Ha-Pardes*, December 1930, 3; February 1931, 1; ibid., October 1931, 4–5; ibid., December 1931, 3; ibid., January 1933, 3–4.
101 *Ha-Pardes*, April 1933, 15–17; ibid., May 1933, 3–4; ibid., August 1933, 3–4, 25.
102 *Der Ortodoks*, October 23, 1931, 1, 3; *Ha-Pardes*, June 1932, 25–27; ibid., July 1933 (an unnumbered pamphlet); ibid., November 1933, 3–4; ibid., December 1933, 11–15, 25–26.
104 *Ha-Pardes*, September 1932, 5; ibid., October 1932, 4–6; ibid., November 1932, 4; ibid., February 1935, 4.
105 *Ha-Pardes*, April 1935, 24; ibid., July 1935, 16.
What was required from that community employee whom they called a rabbi or a preacher? A simple thing – to attract as many people as possible to the synagogue or the temple in order to increase its income. Not to attract the Jews’ hearts closer to God in heaven or to Judaism, only to expand the business, and all the means to this end are justified.  

1933 was a turning point in the history of European Jewry in general and of Orthodox Judaism in particular. Following Hitler’s rise to power, antisemitic acts against German Jews intensified, and American Jews launched a series of public protests that persisted until the Holocaust. At the same time, the persecution of Polish Jews also intensified and the supply of kosher meat was restricted by set quotas. As a result, many Polish Torah institutions collapsed, and American Jewish organizations mounted several relief operations in an attempt to alleviate their plight. As the situation in Europe deteriorated, the American rabbinical unions considered joining the newly established World Jewish Congress which sought to confront the various challenges the Jewish people faced, most notably the rapid rise in antisemitism. The fact that Rabbi Stephen Wise, a Reform rabbi, was one of its leaders was of little significance. 

Another factor that significantly influenced the course of American Orthodoxy was Chabad’s decision in the mid-1930s to build its first institutions in the United States. At that time some 70,000 children in New York studied in private heder (Torah study rooms), Talmud Torah schools and the yeshivot. Another 20,000 received Jewish education in other settings. In 1936, RIETS celebrated 50 years since its establishment and the Beit Midrash in Chicago marked its 35th anniversary. These institutions together with Baltimore’s Ner Israel Yeshiva ordained about twenty new rabbis each year. In 1937, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, a well-known Torah scholar, came to America and became the...
head of Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem on the Lower East Side, and quickly becoming American Orthodoxy’s most influential halakhic authority.\footnote{Ha-Pardes, February 1937, 23.}

In many Eastern European communities, a person’s public status was measured by his piety and Talmudic command. In America, on the other hand, a person’s position in the Orthodox congregation was determined by his socio-economic status, which was directly related to one’s broad education and command of English. Consequently, while East European Orthodox school children were constantly reminded that religious studies were far more important than general studies, the opposite was true in America. One of the more conservative rabbis complained:

We, American Jews, who have distanced the study of the Talmud from our young children’s schools in this land of freedom, we ourselves are helping demolish the great wall, the wall of religion… Can we believe that by learning these modern studies our sons will become true Jews?… If we shall not strive to plant the Talmud in the heart of our children, there is no hope that our sons will hold on to the faith of our ancestors after we are gone.\footnote{Ha-Pardes, April 1937, 23–26.}

Agudat HaRabbanim’s 1937 annual conference was overshadowed by the steady rise of antisemitism in Germany and in Poland and by the Arab revolt in Palestine.\footnote{Ha-Pardes, June 1937, 2–3, 6–10; ibid., July 1937, 2–3; ibid., August 1937, 5–6.} Shortly afterwards Agudath Israel held its third Knessa Gedola in Marienbad, Czechoslovakia, in which it deliberated on halakhic questions regarding the establishment of a small Jewish state. Rabbi Eliezer Silber, Agudat HaRabbanim’s president and a leading figure in American Orthodoxy, participated in the event and upon his return called for the establishment of Agudath Israel in America.\footnote{Der Ortodoks, April 16, 1937, 1; ibid., April 30, 1937, 1; ibid., May 7, 1937, 1; Ha-Pardes, August 1937, 6; ibid., September 1937, 2–31. (Although the establishment of Agudath Israel in America had been “proclaimed” on several occasions it did not actually materialize until 1939.)} In a letter he sent to American Orthodox rabbis he exhorted:

How long, my brothers, shall we remain detached from the world’s geniuses, from our sages and our elders, are we not part of them?… Shall we forever hear false accusations against the most pious ones?… Embrace yourselves brothers, don’t be frightened in vain, no one is haunting us. The time has come for us to unite with the world’s geniuses, many of whom are already with us in our country… The time has come
to unite, and we do not want to separate but to unite. To raise the Torah and the rabbis, to strengthen them and to live in peace with any group that will not fight us.\textsuperscript{117}

Aside from the rabbinical unions, several other organizations operated on the American Orthodox scene by the end of the 1930s: Mizrachi, which was the largest; Young Israel which catered to youngsters between the ages of 18 to 35 and had celebrated its 25\textsuperscript{th} anniversary, with some 60 branches; and Tzeirei Agudath Israel with around fifteen branches in New York.\textsuperscript{118} Agudat HaRabbanim, with approximately 400 rabbis, was the largest rabbinical union. It was also the most influential organization and in the words of one of its speakers at its annual conference in May 1939: “If despite the obstacles from outside and the many opponents from within traditional Judaism still has a foothold in this country, if kosher food and maintaining family purity laws still exist in America, this must be attributed solely to the efforts made by Agudat HaRabbanim.”\textsuperscript{119}

In July 1939, some 600 rabbis convened in order to launch the American branch of Agudath Israel, marking the beginning of a new era in American Orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{120} And as one of its leaders commented: “This is the way of Orthodox Judaism which is always late and begins to talk about organization while its opponents are already firmly established.”\textsuperscript{121} Clearing the way to this new age was the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 which regulated the eight-hour day and the forty-hour workweek, culminating eventually in the five-day workweek that enabled observant Jews to abstain from work on the Shabbat. The new spirit was embodied in the establishment of New York’s Kahal Haredim whose regulations were far stricter than those of other Orthodox organizations.\textsuperscript{122}

The 1940s: In the Shadow of the Holocaust

Amid the persecution on the eve of World War II, more observant Jews from Eastern Europe sought to immigrate to the United States. Reports on the dire situation in Europe from two of the more prominent rabbis who immigrated in that period, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Greenwald and

\textsuperscript{117} Ha-Pardes, December 1937, 2–3.
\textsuperscript{118} Der Ortodoks, February 20, 1937, 1–3.
\textsuperscript{119} Ha-Pardes, May 1939, 2–3.
\textsuperscript{120} Ha-Pardes, August 1938, 2–33; ibid., July 1939, 6–7.
\textsuperscript{121} Ha-Pardes, August 1939, 2–3.
\textsuperscript{122} Der Ortodoks, April 1, 1938, 1–2; ibid., April 15, 1938, 1; Takanot...Fun Hevra Kehal Haredim de-New York Rabati...Gegrindet...5698 (1938) [Hebrew] (New York, 1945).
Rabbi Shmuel Ehrenfeld, prompted American rabbis to call for a day of atonement and to implore President Roosevelt to assist the Jews. In September 1939, Germany invaded Poland and World War II began.

In a public letter sent by Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski from Vilnius, Eastern Europe’s most prominent rabbinic leader lamented: “How terrible is our people’s situation, worse than in the middle ages, and the entire diaspora is burning. Synagogues and Torah scrolls are torched for everyone to see, and our enemies frequently publish anti-Jewish decrees. Large and important Jewish communities are displaced, and the gates of the countries are locked to them.” In response, the Orthodox leaders decided to establish Vaad Hatzalah (Emergency Committee), in November 1939, an Orthodox organization dedicated to assisting rabbis, Torah institutions, and especially yeshivot that were exiled.

At first the Orthodox leaders were optimistic since most of the yeshivot managed to move to Vilnius, which was not yet under German occupation. Later, however, as the list of rabbis, Hasidic rebbes, and heads of yeshivot who died or were murdered grew longer, the American rabbis grasped the gravity of the situation and sought to cooperate with the larger Jewish organizations, such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

In the early 1940s, some of Europe’s top rabbis arrived in America. Among them were Rabbi Avraham Kalmanovich and Rabbi Aharon Kotler, who came to raise money for the yeshivot that fled to Vilnius, and Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe. These three rabbis became dominant figures in America’s post-Holocaust Orthodoxy. The tragedy of Eastern European Orthodox Jewry signaled American Orthodoxy’s new mission. In the words of R. Moshe Soloveichik, head of RIETS, at an ordination ceremony of new rabbis:

At this crucial time, American Jewry has been given the task of resisting the onslaught, to expand and to increase the study of Torah in this country, to salvage what was left and to continue the long legacy for which our ancestors gave their lives. We have a great mission and a great responsibility, and the whole future of Judaism depends upon its fulfillment.

123 Ha-Pardes, June 1938, 6; ibid., October 1938, 2; ibid., November 1938, 2; ibid., December 1938, 2–3.
124 Ha-Pardes, October 1939, 2.
125 Ha-Pardes, February 1940, 2–3; Efraim Zuroff, The Response of Orthodox Jewry in the United States to the Holocaust: The Activities of the Vaad Ha-Hatzala Rescue Committee 1939–1945 (Ktav, 2000).
126 Ha-Pardes, November 1939, 2; ibid., December 1939, 3–5.
127 Ha-Pardes, February 1940, 6; ibid., March 1940, 4–5; ibid., April 1940, 3–5; ibid., May 1941, 2–3.
128 Ha-Pardes, May 1940, 9.
The joint relief mission and the sense of urgency led to a general spiritual and religious awakening that facilitated the introduction of strict religious norms and encouraged the activities of organizations that promoted Shabbat observance and stringent supervision of kashrut.129

Agudath Israel’s leaders, who, because of various restrictions imposed on the Jews in many countries, could no longer operate freely in Europe, moved to the United States, and in its second annual conference in America one of them said: “Agudath Israel in America should from now on become the movement’s international center, to revitalize Orthodox Judaism... and to strengthen the Jewish tradition and its Torah in this country.”130 While in the late 1930s attempts were made to bridge the gap between Mizrachi and Agudath Israel, now, as the latter sought to distinguish itself, the gap between the pro-Zionist Orthodox Jews, who were still the majority, and the non-Zionist ultra-Orthodox widened.131

Under Rabbi Silber’s leadership, Agudath Israel, which by now had hundreds of rabbis from various organizations, became an active movement which engaged in rescue operations, the strengthening of religious norms, and the struggle with the Reform and Conservative movements.132 The older Agudat HaRabbanim was pushed aside by both Agudath Israel and the young American Rabbis who were generally close to Mizrachi.133

The 1940s witnessed a significant expansion in the activities of America’s yeshivot and Torah institutions. Torah Vodaath in New York, Ner Israel in Baltimore, and the Los Angeles Jewish Academy Yeshiva all erected new buildings. They were joined by new institutions including the Novhardok Beit Yosef Yeshiva and the Mir Yeshiva in New York, and the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland.134 The Lubavitcher Rebbe established his own yeshivot and Talmud Torah system.135 Along with the horrendous news from Europe, American rabbis realized that “the great disaster also brought us some light because we became richer because of the

129 Ha-Pardes, June 1940, 8–9; ibid., July 1940, 16; ibid., January 1941, 27–29.
130 Ha-Pardes, August 1940, 3–4.
132 Ha-Pardes, September 1940, 9–10; ibid., October 1940, 23–24.
133 Ha-Pardes, November 1940, 35–36.
134 Ha-Pardes, April 1941, 4–6; ibid., June 1941, 11–14; ibid., September 1941, 48; ibid., October 1941, 7; ibid., November 1941, 4–5; ibid., December 1941, 4; ibid., January 1942, 8; ibid., March 1942, 5–7; ibid., May 1942, 8–14.
135 Ha-Pardes, April 1942, 4–7; ibid., June 1942, 9–11; ibid., August 1942, 14–15; ibid., November 1942, 5–8; ibid., December 1942, 15–16; ibid., March 1943, 10–12; ibid., May 1944, 12–14.
great sages who came to us from Europe. We are now the largest Jewish community in the world.”

The strengthening of American Orthodoxy was manifested in the larger number of religious schools: America’s Education Committee registered some 110 religious schools in New York and a similar number of schools in 55 additional cities. At the same time, the number of students at RIETS, American Modern Orthodoxy’s leading institution, continued to grow, and the number of rabbis who had been ordained there approached 200, of whom 60 had graduated in the previous three years.

Tzeirei Agudath Israel expanded its activity by opening new branches and, in 1943, held its first national conference. Histadrut HaRabbanim also gained momentum and now included some 80 American rabbis, including several military chaplains. Only a few years after its establishment, Agudath Israel had become America’s largest and most influential Orthodox organization:

In Eastern Europe, the community’s public life was rooted in holy foundations and its leadership was essentially Jewish. If there were certain deviants, that was their private business, but the community’s institutions did not compromise. But here, where public life is predominantly based on compromises and concessions, and the leaders of the Orthodox congregations publicly desecrate the Shabbat and everything which is holy... but precisely because the public life here does not have a clear and correct character, precisely because the boundaries of Jewish religion and assimilation are blurred, precisely because some Orthodox synagogues team up with Reform rabbis... Agudath Israel has a special mission in America.

Epilogue

After World War II ended and the horrors of the Holocaust were exposed, the shocked and guilt-ridden American Jews donated to the survivors much larger sums than those collected during the war itself. In addition to the older Keren HaTorah and Vaad Hatzalah, other

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136 *Ha-Pardes*, July 1942, 6–18.
137 *Ha-Pardes*, December 1942, 50–51.
138 *Ha-Pardes*, January 1943, 13–16; ibid., April 1943, 6–9.
139 *Ha-Pardes*, July 1943, 1–12.
141 *Ha-Pardes*, November 1943, 28–30.
organizations, such as Agudat HaAdmorim and Tzeirei Agudath Israel established their own relief organizations. The arrival of thousands of fully observant Holocaust survivors in the late 1940s and early 1950s spurred the establishment of purely religious congregations. While some of these congregations sponsored a more Modern Orthodox outlook, others already adopted a more conservative approach that catered to those seeking an ultra-Orthodox lifestyle.

This was manifested in many ways: the establishment of Torah Umesorah, which promoted the Jewish Day School movement under the energetic direction of Dr. Joseph Kaminetsky; the publication of textbooks and journals for Orthodox youth; the establishment of several Beit Yaakov schools for Orthodox girls; and the establishment of Agudath Israel’s summer camp for Orthodox boys and girls. In addition, the variety and availability of food products that were kosher throughout the year and for Passover was growing rapidly; an elaborate edition of the Talmud was printed for the first time in America; more communities offered an orderly study of the Daf Yomi; and more yeshivot began to ordain rabbis.143

The number of yeshivot and the number of students continued to grow. Cleveland’s Telshe Yeshiva inaugurated a new building; an offshoot of Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin was established in Detroit; a new religious school and a yeshiva were established in Minneapolis; and Lakewood’s Beit Midrash Govoha was on the way to becoming the world’s largest yeshiva. As a declaration of its Eastern European orientation, its leader, Rabbi Aharon Kotler, demanded that students speak and study exclusively in Yiddish.144 This trend was accompanied by a rise in the number of students who continued to devote themselves to Torah study in the kollels even after marriage.145

Modern Orthodoxy also forged its own path in the post-Holocaust age. This was manifested by Yeshiva College evolving into Yeshiva University in 1945. The close affiliation with RIETS underlined the connection between religious and academic studies.146 Another movement

144 Ha-Pardes, January 1944, 18–19; ibid., February 1944, 39; ibid., April 1944, 11–13; ibid., August 1945, 44.
that gained popularity was Chabad, which, although operating separately from the other Orthodox groups and organizations, established a network of yeshivot and schools for both boys and girls.147

On top of these three Orthodox groups, namely Modern Orthodoxy, ultra-Orthodoxy (later called Yeshivish), and Chabad, another group was formed in the late 1940s with the arrival of Galician and Hungarian Hasidic rebbes who survived the Holocaust. The most prominent among them was the Satmar Rebbe, Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum, who established a Hasidic court marked by Satmer’s extremely separatist, anti-Zionist, anti-modern and anti-American orientation. This laid the foundation for the other non-Chabad Hasidic courts.148 The growing intolerance on the part of the rabbis towards those who did not strictly observe the halakha caused hundreds of formerly Orthodox congregations to join the Conservative movement. These were the communities which served primarily as social frameworks for their mostly non-observant members, and whose rabbis functioned more as social activists than as religious leaders. Consequently, despite the strengthening of American Orthodoxy, only ten percent of New York’s roughly 250,000 Jewish children received some sort of religious education with only half of them studying in yeshivot or Orthodox schools.149 Although by the late 1940s they dropped sharply in number, Orthodox communities now contained a much higher share of fully observant members. The “sliding to the right” of American Orthodoxy was under way and continued throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

Appendix: Early Orthodox Press in America

Jewish periodicals in English and German were published in the United States since the early 1820s, while the first Yiddish newspapers, namely those intended for Eastern European Jews, appeared only in the early 1870s.150 Starting in 1885, two Yiddish newspapers, one weekly and one daily, sought to address Orthodox readers. The Orthodox weekly, New Yorker Tudashe Tzeitung, was published between 1885–1903 by Moshe Wexler, the rabbi of New York’s Brit Shalom congregation. The Yidishes

147 Ha-Pardes, December 1944, 28–33; ibid., January 1946, 25–26; ibid., March 1946, 16–17.
149 Ha-Pardes, February 1949, 4–5; ibid., April 1949, 2–9.
Togblat was the first Yiddish newspaper to appear daily, and in 1928 it merged into another Orthodox oriented newspaper, the Morgen Journal. These two newspapers comprised about one third of the overall circulation of Jewish dailies in the 1910s and 1920s.

During the first half of the twentieth century some 30 additional Orthodox periodicals, weeklies, bi-weeklies, and monthlies, were published in the United States, mostly in New York. Some were published by the religious movements (Mizrachi, Agudath Israel); some by professional unions (butchers, cantors); some by rabbinical unions (Degel HaRabbanim, Agudat HaRabbanim VehaMetifim); some by yeshivot (RIETS, Torah Vodaath, Mir); and some by Hasidic groups (Chabad, Modzitz). A few periodicals were published by private persons. The circulation of these publications was probably only a few hundred copies each, and most of them did not last more than a few years.

Of the seven periodicals used as main sources for this article, the two dailies, Yidishes Togblat and the Morgen Journal, reached out to the general Jewish readership. While covering events in the Orthodox communities and institutions, they mainly provided political, cultural, and economic information, as well as news related to the general American Jewish society. Despite publicizing many advertisements on religious events and services, religious books and objects, as well as kosher food products and kosher restaurants and resorts, most of their contents did not bear any religious character, nor were the advertisements they published restricted by any modesty code.

The other five periodicals, however, were aimed at the fully observant Orthodox community. They did not publish general news, but concentrated on information related to the Orthodox world, both in America and in other countries. A large segment of each issue was dedicated to Torah matters and contained halakhic articles and theological essays written by rabbis and religious leaders. They constantly criticized the state of religious observance in the United States, the religious education system, and the activities of the various Orthodox bodies. The periodicals I drew on in composing this article were:

Unlike in America all the workers in the Jewish printshops in Transylvania, Romania, were observant Jews. Consequently, the printing of Orthodox books and journals in Romania was not only cheaper, but also ensured a better proofreading and "kashrut" of the final product (namely that it was not printed on the Sabbath or produced using unkosher materials).