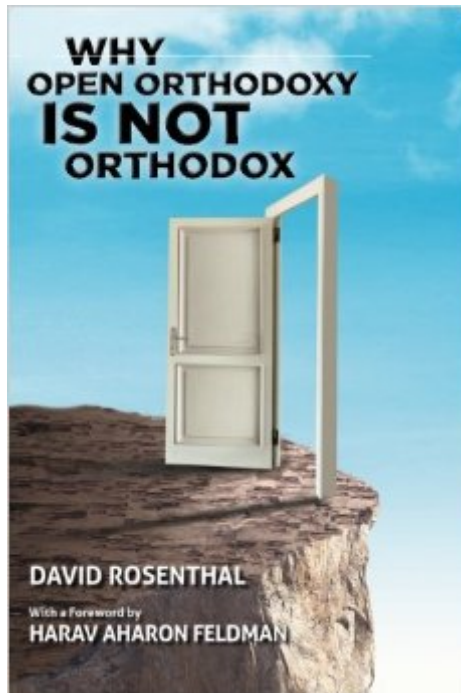


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# Why Open Orthodoxy Is Not Orthodox



## Synopsis

Since 1997, Open Orthodoxy, through its institutions, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and Yeshivat Maharat, has ordained over 100 students, most of whom serve in positions throughout America. It is often viewed as "and claims to be" a branch of Orthodoxy. However, the truth is far from this. Citing countless statements from the leaders and disciples of Open Orthodoxy, this book shows beyond a shadow of a doubt that this movement is not Orthodox and, in fact, seeks to undermine Orthodoxy. "Open Orthodoxy is a movement which poses as Orthodoxy, with teachers who pose as halachic authorities and students who pose as Orthodox Rabbis." -From the Foreword by Harav Aharon Feldman

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## Customer Reviews

Here is a pop quiz. Who wrote the following sentences: a Reform rabbi in 1840, a Conservative rabbi in 1950, or a Reconstructionist rabbi in 1960? "The Torah seems to have evident signs of being an edited work which makes use of multiple sources and contains layers of redaction. Abraham and Sarah are folkloristic characters; factually speaking they are not my ancestors or anyone else's. One may acknowledge the evolutionary nature of the Bible's composition, one may recognize the findings that indicate the Pentateuch's multiple authorship, while still believing (in a theological sense) in the divine unity of the Torah... It is possible, then, to accept that the Torah in its current form is the product of historical circumstance and a prolonged editorial process. The Rabbis reject his [Moses'] judicial views as conservative and archaic. Avraham's willingness to sacrifice Yitzchak went too

far as he has become utterly unrecognizable, losing his essence, his moral intuition. It was God who failed the test here [in the Akeidah]. These assertions sound eerily similar to those espoused by leaders of the groups that have splintered off of traditional Judaism over the past several hundred years. Unfortunately, these words, and numerous similar others, were in fact authored by the leaders of a brand new splinter group; by the Talmud department chair, faculty member, board member, journal editor, and Director of Spiritual Development of Open Orthodoxy's Yeshivat Chovevei Torah (YCT) and Yeshivat Maharat. YCT and Open Orthodoxy were originally presented to the Orthodox community as a movement dedicated to retrieving the Modern Orthodoxy of the 1950s. Rabbi David Rosenthal's 275-page, well-documented book, *Why Open Orthodoxy Is Not Orthodox*, demonstrates that this is no longer (and may never have been) the case. One who reads the numerous quotes of assertions by Open Orthodox rashei yeshiva, faculty members, board members, and students cited by Rosenthal can only conclude that Open Orthodoxy is the newest splinter movement to defect from traditional Judaism. Rosenthal's book is not an academic work. It is not a scholarly analysis of the movement's history, it does not consider the sociological underpinnings of the movement, and it does not look to offer sophisticated analyses of the contentions that it rebuts. It does one thing, but it does it remarkably well: It demonstrates, using the written words of YCT's and Yeshivat Maharat's leaders, faculty, and students, that the beliefs of many within Open Orthodoxy to a large degree align with those of the Conservative and Reform movements and not with those of traditional Judaism. Aside from focusing on issues regarding yesodei emunah, Rosenthal devotes several chapters to topics including homosexuality, feminism, sexuality, ecumenicalism, and biblical interpretation. Regarding each topic, he shows that the approaches advanced by Open Orthodox proponents align not with that of traditional Judaism but rather with that of the contemporary zeitgeist. Regarding homosexuality, for example, one YCT musmach is quoted as celebrating the Supreme Court decision compelling states to recognize same-sex marriage with the proclamation, "Mazel Tov, America." Another informed his readers that the Torah does not oppose gay marriage, but actually favors it. A third compared the "miracle" of the passing of same-sex marriage legislation to the miracle of Chanukah. And a fourth published an article in a major news outlet condemning legislative efforts to protect religious adherents from being forced to participate in same-sex marriages as "sacrilegious and offensive" to himself as "an Orthodox Jewish man and a rabbi." In the chapter regarding biblical interpretation, we are enlightened by Open Orthodoxy's leaders regarding the progressive method through which to view the Biblical

figures. No longer must we make use of the reverence that traditional Judaism has for millennia applied when reflecting on the Avos, the founders of yahadus. In fact, we discover, Abraham was a neglectful father and failed the test of the Akeidah; Jacob was emotionally paralyzed; Moses was a confused philosopher and failed leader; and Korach's egalitarian approach was actually correct. If the reader is not shocked enough, he can read further and discover that, according to an article posted on Yeshivat Maharat's website, Sarah was sexually exploited by Abraham. Rabbi Rosenthal has provided the Orthodox community with a great service in exposing the tremendous dangers posed by Open Orthodoxy. Anyone who takes the future of Orthodox Judaism seriously would be well-served by reading the book in its entirety.

I purchased this book because I wanted to see if my experience with Open Orthodoxy was really representative, or if it was just an aberration. My family is not orthodox, but we joined an Open Orthodox congregation for a while, led by a rabbi who had been ordained at Yeshivas Chovevei Torah. He stated that it was his life's goal to change Orthodoxy. In his sermons, he quoted leftist intellectuals. He admitted to me privately that he does not believe in God, and that he views Judaism as a purely sociocultural phenomenon. Yet he presented himself publicly as an Orthodox rabbi. It became increasingly clear to us that leftist ideology was his actual value system. He was living a knowing deception, a sham in the service of a political agenda. The level of dishonesty we were seeing was eventually too much for us. I still wonder what he was praying to when he led services. This book, "Why Open Orthodoxy is Not Orthodox," brings actual quotes from the writings of major Open Orthodox figures. It then compares and contrasts them with the views of normative Orthodox sources. From the contrasts, it becomes crystal clear that Open Orthodoxy is fundamentally distinct in core ways from Orthodoxy, and in many ways, is the opposite of it. The author's main point in all this is that the Open Orthodoxy movement should just drop the word "Orthodoxy" from their name, because it is misleading. Sadly, this book attests that the kind of misrepresentations as we had encountered in our prior rabbi are not aberrations. Open Orthodoxy advocates, in their own words, admit they view halacha and tradition as obstacles to overcome. Their scholarly work on halacha, when examined carefully, sometimes contains serious misrepresentations of the content and intent of original sources, for example at times claiming the primary texts say the opposite of what they actually say. Some of this might just be due to poor scholarship, or a lack of understanding the texts. However, this book also exposes some Open Orthodoxy errors in scholarship that are so egregious, they can only reasonably be explained as deliberate falsifications. There are, for example, cases where Open Orthodoxy

scholars omitted key sentences of texts that refuted their claims about what the texts said. There was also a case of a fabrication of a primary text. Interestingly, Karl Marx's and Friedrich Engels's scholarship was also characterized by such intentional deceits, claims that original sources said the opposite of what they actually did. Misrepresentation of data, and fabrication of original sources has had a long tradition in leftist scholarship ever since (see *Intellectuals: From Marx and Tolstoy to Sartre and Chomsky* by Paul Johnson). This appears to be the actual tradition that Open Orthodoxy is transmitting, all the while claiming it is trying to make Orthodoxy relevant and save Judaism. I thank the author of *Why Open Orthodoxy is Not Orthodox* for his long-needed contribution. Open Orthodoxy needs to start being honest about itself, and as long as they are not, others will have to do it for them. The leadership of Conservative Judaism, once a "big tent," is now essentially entirely made up of intolerant leftist demagogues. There are still some simple Jews in Conservative Judaism, good people, whom these leftists are misleading. Don't let it happen to Orthodoxy.

This book is not polemical. It is a fast reading but well-researched, logically laid out, non-inflammatory, and meticulously documented argument against the question of fealty of Open Orthodoxy to Torah, Halacha, and meta-halacha (what I would call the halacha about how halacha is argued and determined), things that are the sine qua non of Judaism. Using the very telling and often self-contradictory words of Open Orthodox leaders and students themselves, Rosenthal makes a strong argument that OO is anything but traditional Jewish understanding and is predicated on demonstrably inadequate or even intellectually dishonest use of classic sources of Jewish theology and religious law. I can nit-pick with Rosenthal over some issues like how much weight should be given to the 10-year old quotes of OO rabbis taken from their student days, which may have changed or ameliorated over time, but overall, this book presents a compelling argument for its thesis. I've previously read the arguments of OO for halachic "change" and of those opposed to OO, and I find myself more persuaded by the arguments in opposition to OO. This book doesn't really break any new ground for me other than some surprising quotes from whom people in OO whom I already know. But, it should be read by every Jew so they can make up their own minds about OO.

Mr. Rosenthal does an excellent job assessing whether or not the views of and statements made by the Open Orthodox leaders are in line with Orthodox Judaism. The author takes an objective approach in reaching his conclusions, citing numerous examples and evaluating them against classic Jewish sources. This is a necessary read for any intellectually honest individual.

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