

Shlomo Riskin was born on May 28, 1940 in Brooklyn, New York. He attended the Yeshiva of Brooklyn, and graduated valedictorian, summa cum laude from Yeshiva University in 1960, where he received rabbinic ordination under the guidance of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik. In 1963, Riskin received his Masters Degree in Jewish history, and he completed a Ph.D from New York University in 1982. From 1963 until 1977, he lectured and served as an Associate Professor of Tanakh and Talmud at Yeshiva University in New York City.

At the age of 23, Riskin became the founding rabbi of Lincoln Square Synagogue in New York City and served in that position until 1983. With the full backing of his mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Rabbi Riskin transformed a fledgling Conservative minyan into one of New York's most innovative and dynamic Orthodox communities. The synagogue became particularly well known for its pioneering outreach programs which inspired many secular people to become religiously observant Orthodox Jews. During the 1960s and 1970s, he became a leader of the movement to allow free, unfettered emigration for persecuted Soviet Jews and made several trips to visit and strengthen the Jewish communities in then USSR. He was the chairman of Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, the first American national movement to free Russian Jews.

In 1983, Riskin immigrated to Efrat with his family to become founding Chief Rabbi, a position he still holds. Over the years, he was joined by many former members of his New York congregation. In Israel, Riskin has established a network of high schools, colleges, graduate programs, seminaries and rabbinical schools under the name Ohr Torah Stone Institutions with a total student enrollment numbering in the thousands.

Riskin has dedicated himself to training a new generation of leaders for the Orthodox Jewish world. To this end, he established a Rabbinical Seminary and Practical Rabbinics Program to prepare young men with the scholarship and practical skills to become effective spiritual leaders, teachers and spokesmen for Orthodox Judaism. Riskin now has hundreds of former students serving as rabbis and educators in Israel and throughout the world. He has also pioneered the rights of women in the Jewish world. He broadened women's participation in public religious practices, and declared that women could hold their own celebration of Simhat Torah. He co-founded a women's college, Midreshet Lindenbaum (originally named Michlelet Bruria), into one of the most prominent colleges for Orthodox women. Parallel to these institutions, Riskin also established the first ever programs for young men and women from the Diaspora with severe learning and developmental difficulties to spend a year studying Torah in Israel while also gaining vocational training. In 1991, Riskin issued a challenge in Israel's High Court to the laws which prevented women from serving as Toanot - advocates in the Rabbinic Courts. Riskin won the case and established the first program for the training of women advocates in the religious courts. Graduates of the program now defend the rights of Agunot (women whose husbands refuse to grant them a divorce) in the religious courts, helping them to secure a Get (bill of religious divorce). Riskin is an advocate of the Prenuptial agreement idea as a solution for the problem of recalcitrant husbands. Riskin is an advocate of respectful dialogue with the leaders of other religions to create better understanding, religious tolerance and support for Israel against the forces of fanatical anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. He has also worked to promote good relations with the leaders of the Palestinian villages surrounding the Efrat settlement.

