

RESEARCH

## Survey: Haredim proud of their hospitality, less proud of their gossip

Respondents also rated the community high on chesed and tzedakah.



Hasidim at Tashlich. Credit: Wirestock/iStock

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A recent survey of Orthodox communities shows which general character traits Haredim pride themselves the most on, and which ones leave room for improvement.

According to results of the survey, conducted by the Orthodox-focused firm Nishma Research, Haredi people give their communities very high ratings on chesed and tzedakah, known in English as kindness and charity — but much lower ratings on patience and refraining from harmful gossip.

The survey results blended anonymized data from Haredi and Modern Orthodox respondents, but in emails to Shtetl, Trencher shared the isolated data from Haredi respondents. The data may not fully reflect the Haredi community, though, because the survey was conducted over the internet, which many Haredim are banned from using.

The survey asked: “What ‘grade’ would you give your community on the job people do, in general, in these areas?” then listed several traits, including chesed and tzedakah. The choices were excellent, pretty good, fair, poor, or don’t know.

Sixty-five percent of Haredi respondents said the community was “excellent” at chesed, and 57% said they were “excellent” when it came to giving tzedakah.

They also gave the community high ratings on hachnasat orchim and kibbud av v’em, hospitality toward guests and honoring one’s parents.

However, respondents gave their communities the lowest ratings on savlanut and shemirah halashon, patience and refraining from damaging gossip. Only 8% of Haredi respondents said the community was “excellent” when it came to these two virtues.

The respondents acknowledged their own shortcomings in these areas, with only 8% of Haredi respondents saying they personally did an “excellent” job refraining from gossip, which is forbidden by both the Torah and Talmud.

Nishma’s report shows that it is enduringly hard for people to guard their mouths: in his book, the Sefer Chofetz Chaim, 19th century Litvish rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan described refraining from gossip as one of the hardest Jewish virtues to follow.

"Guarding one’s tongue from speaking evil is the most difficult of all the mitzvot to observe, yet it is the most meritorious," Kagan wrote, according to an English translation.

Haredim also gave their community low ratings on anavah, sameach b’chelko, and dan l’kaf zechut, three virtues that translate as humility, being content with their lot, and giving others the benefit of the doubt.

Respondents clarified their answers in a written part of the survey. The responses ranged from meditative to funny. Some respondents criticized fellow Haredim for talking at synagogue when others are praying, being part of cliques rather than welcoming outsiders, and, for schoolboys, being rude to school employees.

Several Haredi respondents commented on driving and parking habits. Said one such respondent: “Chessed is excellent. Hachnasas orchim is exemplary. Driving habits can use improvement.”

Other respondents argued that the strength of Haredi values sometimes vary based on who a Haredi person is engaging with.

“Your survey should be further divided as to whether dealing with Jews or Gentiles,” one respondent said.

“I think there's a lot of wonderful, sweet, people in my community; and at the same time a general lack of respect for authority of any kind, for other frum communities, and for gentiles,” said another.

A self-described member of the Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic community, which emphasizes outreach to non-Haredim, had the opposite complaint.

“As a community, I feel we have genuinely great middos toward people that are not Chabad,” the respondent said, using a Yiddish term for character traits. “However, I feel that we have a lot of work to do on middos toward our own.”

One Haredi person summarized well the challenges to adhering to all Jewish virtues: “easier said than done.”