

FASCINATING INSIGHT: Study Reveals What Orthodox Jews Think Of Their Middos Ahead Of Rosh Hashana

📅 September 9, 2024



The findings from a survey by Nishma Research released on Sunday has shed light on the *middos* that Orthodox Jewish communities across the US prioritize and where they feel there is room for improvement. The study, which focused on *bein adam l'chavero*, was intentionally released ahead of the *Yamim Noraim*.

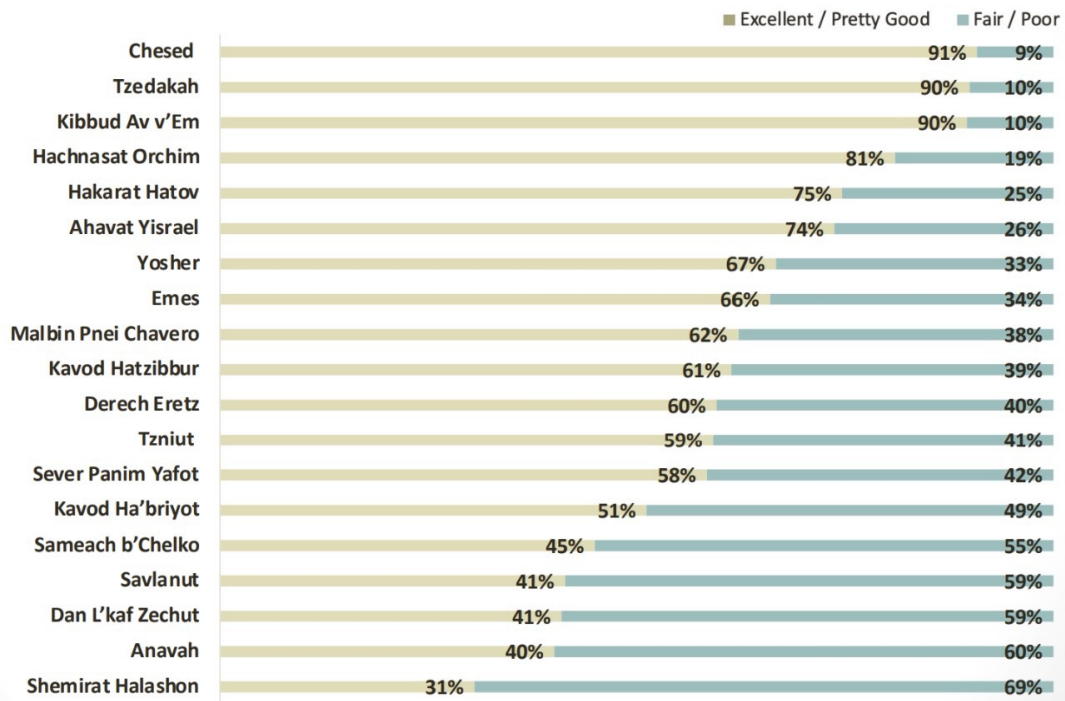
The survey, which is not a demographic profile but rather a resource for community introspection, asked respondents to assess both their personal conduct and their community's performance in cultivating *middos*. The virtues explored included *anavah*, *chesed*, *tzedakah*, and *shemiras halashon*, among others.

Key Findings:

- Respondents identified *chesed*, *tzedakah*, and *kibbud av v'em* as the strongest areas in their communities. The findings suggest that Orthodox communities provide robust support systems for those in need, with many citing the presence of charitable organizations like G'machs and Tomchei Shabbos.
- The survey revealed significant areas for growth, particularly in controlling harmful speech. A staggering 69% rated their community's performance in *shemiras halashon* as "fair" or "poor." Other areas needing attention include *anavah*, *dan l'kaf zechus*, *savlanus*, and *sameach b'chelko*. One respondent lamented, "Lashon hara is rampant, and there is a lot of stereotyping based on what shul or school people attend."

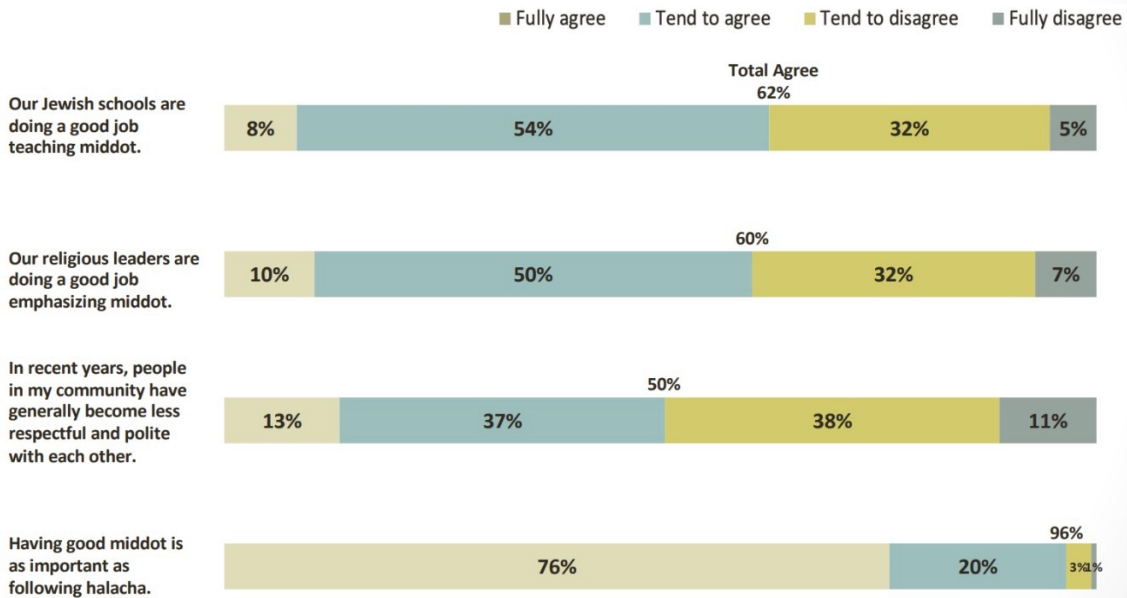
- While about 60% of respondents agreed that Jewish schools and *rabbanim* are doing a good job emphasizing *middos*, only 10% fully agreed, with most believing there is room for improvement. Many called for schools and *rabbanim* to place greater emphasis on teaching good character traits. “It would be great if schools would put more of an emphasis on really teaching *middos* and making meaningful incentives for kids,” one respondent suggested.
- When reflecting on their own behavior, many respondents acknowledged that controlling gossip is an area they struggle with personally. Several expressed a desire to be more proactive in stopping harmful conversations. “I want to work on speaking up when my friends speak *lashon hara*,” one person shared. Others focused on improving empathy and patience, particularly within their families, and developing strategies for better self-awareness and kindness.
- Respondents also highlighted the need to stop being overly judgmental of others, with an emphasis on understanding different perspectives and being more compassionate. One respondent remarked, “I want to work on being less judgmental and more *dan l’kaf zechus*. Sometimes, I make assumptions without knowing what’s really going on in the other person’s life.”

What “grade” would you give your community on the job people do, in general, in these areas? – *Chesed, tzedakah* and *kibbud av v’em* are the top areas of strength. The areas where people see the greatest need for improvement are *shemirat halashon* (the poorest rating by a wide margin), *anavah*, people being *dan l’kaf zechit*, *savlanut* and being *sameach b’chelko*.



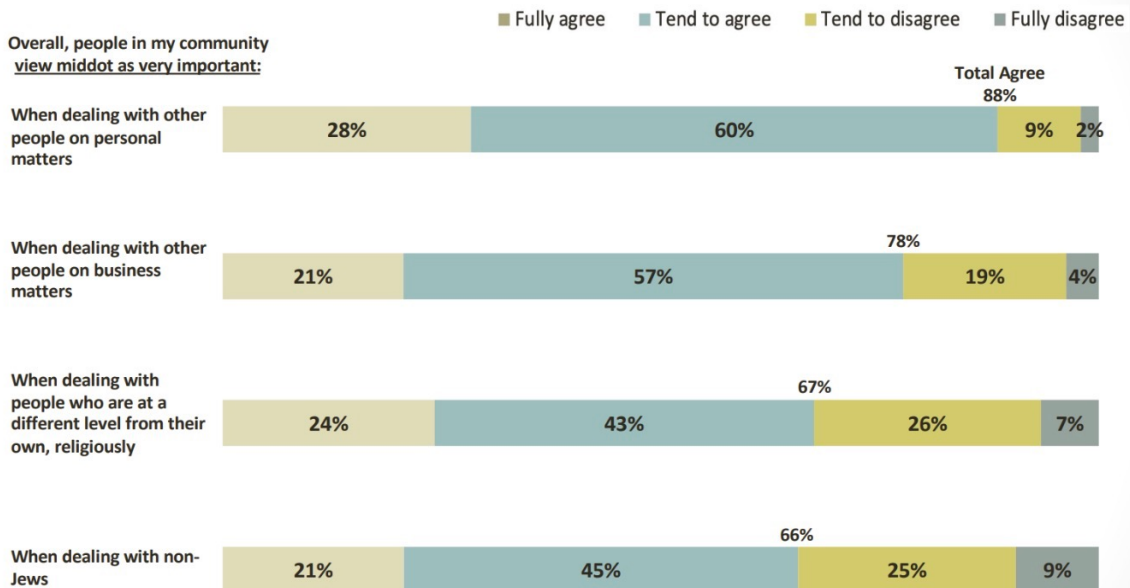
Based on an average of 782 respondents, which excludes an average of 4% who responded “don’t know.”

How good a job are we doing in teaching and emphasizing middot? – While 96% agree that having good middot is as important as following halacha, fewer (about 60%) agree that our Jewish schools and religious leaders are doing a good job teaching and emphasizing middot, with the overwhelming majority of these respondents falling in the “tend to agree” category.



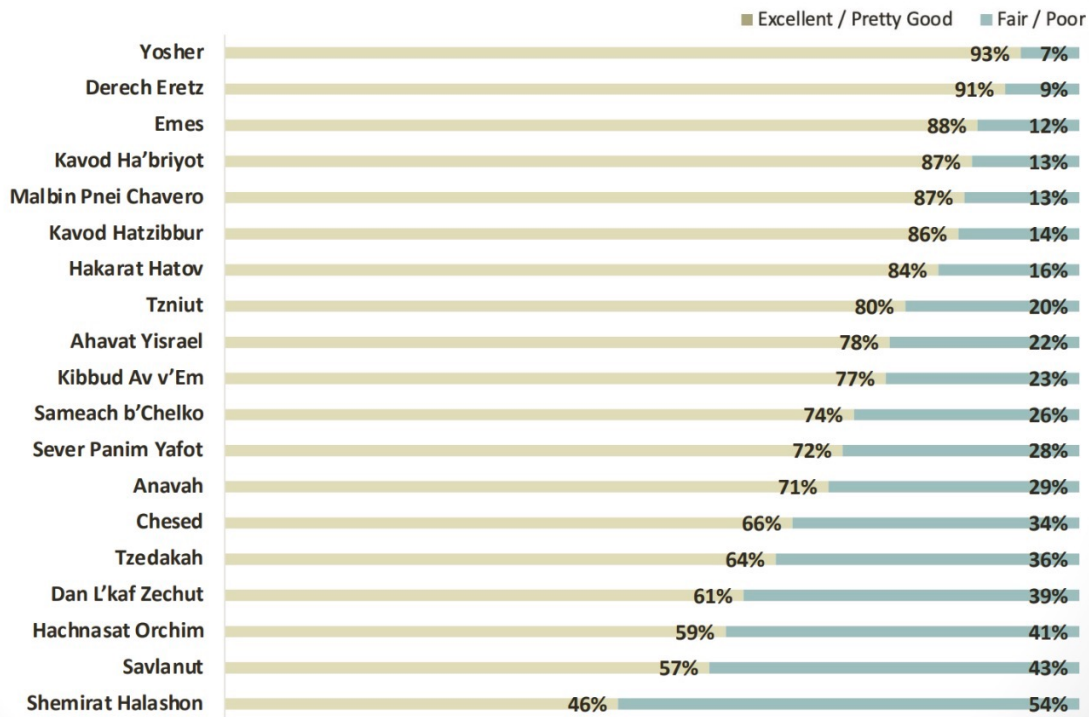
Based on an average of 818 respondents, which excludes an average of 6% who responded “don’t know.”

Do our middot vary, depending on whom we are interacting with? – Generally, middot are seen as very important regardless of whom one is dealing with, although they are seen as a bit more important when dealing with other people on personal matters.



Based on an average of 707 respondents, and excludes an average of 9% who responded “don’t know.”

What “grade” would you give yourself in these areas? – As with the community assessment, people rate *shemirat halashon* as their main personal area needing work. Interestingly, community middot assessments do not correlate strongly with personal middot assessments (see next page); also, personal assessments (average 75% excellent / pretty good) are significantly better than the community assessments (average 60% excellent / pretty good).



Based on an average of 720 respondents, which excludes an average of 2% who responded “don't know.”

Community Middot vs. Our Own Middot – As we live in communities comprised of many different types of individuals, it is not surprising that we seem to be systemically rating the middot of our community as different (often worse) than our own middot. In some cases, we may feel that others are “doing more” than us, and that may spur us to improve. In other cases, there may be a minority (perhaps more “visible”) whose behaviors tarnish our view of the community, and the challenge may be to do the right thing, regardless of what others do. This is perhaps an aspirational view, but ultimately we each need to take ownership of our middot and working together we can hope to influence those around us as well.

	% Rating Excellent / Pretty Good	
	How We Assess Our Community	How We Assess Ourselves
Ahavat Yisrael	74%	78%
Anavah	40%	71%
Chesed	91%	66%
Dan L'kaf Zechut	41%	61%
Derech Eretz	60%	91%
Emes	66%	88%
Hachnasat Orchim	81%	59%
Hakarat Hatov	75%	84%
Kavod Ha'briyot	51%	87%
Kavod Hatzibbur	61%	86%
Kibbud Av v'Em	90%	77%
Malbin Pnei Chavero	62%	87%
Sameach b'Chelko	45%	74%
Savlanut	41%	57%
Sever Panim Yafot	58%	72%
Shemirat Halashon	31%	46%
Tzedakah	90%	64%
Tzniut	59%	80%
Yosher	67%	93%
Ahavat Yisrael	74%	78%