

The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews – Surprise, But No Surprise

BY AVROHOM GORDIMER · PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 28, 2017 · UPDATED SEPTEMBER 29, 2017

The just-released [Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews](#) has generated much

discussion, including detractors who are discounting the project's results due to the fact that many of those involved in conducting and guiding the survey are decidedly pluralistic/very liberal – as well as

others who are pointing to some quite left-leaning outcomes of the survey, in an effort on their part to drive home the (unfounded) point that the Orthodox establishment should take note and comply with these outcomes in a formal capacity.



There is no need to rehash the data, as it is all public and has been given broad coverage in [Jewish media](#). Nonetheless, some of the data should be given particular attention. For example:

- Only 51% of total respondents believe that “Hashem is involved with all day-to-day activities and guides the events of my life”. The same percentage believes that the Oral Torah was fully given to Moshe at Sinai.
- Over one third of the children of Liberal Modern Orthodox Jews, and nearly half of the children of Open Orthodox Jews, are less religiously observant than their parents.
- Only 53% of Liberal Modern Orthodox and Open Orthodox respondents feel that Orthodox Judaism is extremely important in their lives.
- Nearly half of all respondents from the total spectrum of Modern Orthodoxy maintain that Orthodox observance is satisfying because of the “community/sense of belonging” factor; only 19% of total respondents maintain that “connection/service of Hashem” is the main factor for satisfaction.
- Only 58% of Open Orthodox Jews believe that the written Torah was given to Moshe at Sinai.

- Fewer than half (45%) of Open Orthodox (male) Jews lay tefillin daily, and only slightly more than half (53%) of Liberal Modern Orthodox Jews do the same.
- 61% of Modern Orthodox men attend shul on Friday night, 33% of Modern Orthodox men attend shul on weekday mornings, and 21% of Modern Orthodox men attend shul during the week for Mincha and Maariv. Among Modern Orthodox men below age 35, 25% attend shul on weekday mornings, and 18% attend shul for weekday Mincha and Maariv.
- Fewer than one third of Liberal Modern Orthodox and Open Orthodox Jews feel that tefillah is meaningful to them (even though they are for the most part comfortable in shul and they feel welcomed there).
- Most Modern Orthodox respondents support expanded women's communal roles; however, 60% of Open Orthodox respondents strongly support women holding titles of rabbinic authority, while only 14% of respondents from the rest of Modern Orthodoxy strongly support women holding titles of rabbinic authority.
- 35% of Modern Orthodox men learn Torah daily.

These statistics are startling, but not totally surprising, as they confirm what many of us observe anecdotally. The bottom line is that Modern Orthodoxy – especially its left-end components – is in deep trouble. (Although I do not believe that Open Orthodoxy is part of Orthodoxy, I am working within the assumptions of the survey.)

Some have called for the survey to be taken with a grain of salt, due to the pluralistic orientation of many of those who authored and oversaw it. I humbly disagree, as the data was collected in large measure through access channels provided by RCA pulpit rabbis. But more importantly, the survey's results constitute a blistering indictment of Open Orthodoxy and Liberal Modern Orthodoxy, whose commitment to core Orthodox beliefs and observance, as well as their success at passing Orthodox Judaism on to the next generation, receive notably low marks, as it were; why would the survey's authors and advisers, several of whom are leaders in these same groups, portray their own groups in this light, if not for the objective findings of their survey?

JOFA (Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance) [points to the fact](#) that 53% of survey respondents agree fully or agree somewhat to the (vague) question of "Should women have expanded roles in the clergy?" This question does not define what those roles are or what qualifies as "clergy". *However, JOFA omits the fact that only 14% of respondents support women holding titles of rabbinic authority.*

JOFA's Facebook post on this topic tagged "Orthodox Union", in a charge that the OU should take note of the 53% figure. Aside from the fact that the OU should take note of the far more important 14% figure, which is the response to the precise issue of "women rabbis", and aside from the fact that the OU already convened a panel of poskim on the matter (sorry, JOFA – Halacha is not decided by popular poll), JOFA and its Open Orthodox allies continue to allege that rejection of congregations that have "women rabbis" is divisive, all the while JOFA and its Open Orthodox allies fail to mention that it is they themselves who are the source of the division, having broken with long-established Orthodox practice and having knowingly and continuously violated the unanimous ruling of the generation's most preeminent halachic authorities. How one who breaks with the norm can then have the audacity to condemn the norm for being divisive is beyond me.

The Nishma Reserach Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews should serve as a thundering wake-up call. We are in a period of intense introspection; let us all revisit our core commitments and priorities and take corrective action. (I must again cite this [excellent article](#) on our topic as regards Modern Orthodox youth and education.)

G'mar chasima tova and wishes for a good and sweet new year.