

**NISHMA RESEARCH  
CHALLENGES FACING AMERICAN ORTHODOX JEWRY  
APRIL 2026**

In April 2026, a Nishma Research mini-survey asked nearly 500 American Orthodox Jews (across Modern/Centrist, Yeshivish, and Chasidic sectors): “What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the American Orthodox / observant community?” The following ranked list is based on the verbatim responses and shows a few sample responses for each.

**1. Affordability and Economics of Frum Life** – This was by far the most frequently mentioned theme: tuition, housing in walking distance of shuls, kosher food, camps, weddings, and general cost of living.

- “As always, money. It’s expensive to live the life, live near a shul and community, pay for education, etc.”
- “Cost of education/living. Sending 4 kids to yeshiva at \$20,000-40,000 a pop is not sustainable.”
- “Being Orthodox is so unaffordable that it is difficult for us to keep going.”
- “The next generation will not be able to afford the lifestyle in which they were raised.”

**2. Antisemitism, Safety, and America’s Future** – Rising antisemitism from left and right, fear of physical danger, campus hostility, and uncertainty about long-term safety in the U.S.

- “American Jews do not feel as safe in America as we did 20 years ago.”
- “Increasing rates of antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiments in America.”
- “The future. Will America stay safe?”

**3. Materialism, Status Pressure, *Gashmiyus*** – Conspicuous consumption, competitiveness, and external markers of success eclipsing inner *avodah*.

- “Certain communities that are too focused on *Gashmius* (physical existence, worldly and mundane matters) and keeping up with others. Fancy cars, fancy watches, etc.”
- “Over-materialistic ambitions and major indifference to authentic Torah values.”
- “Rampant materialism together with the high cost of being frum.”

**4. Internal Division, Polarization, and Unity** – Splits within Orthodoxy (Modern / yeshivish / chareidi / Open), political polarization, and the difficulty of maintaining *achdus*.

- “The three-way split between Open Orthodoxy, Centrist Orthodoxy, and the yeshivish world is getting bigger.”
- “The schism between ‘modern orthodox’ and ‘yeshivish’.”
- “Finding a way to be unified despite the differences in outlook – we also need to be more inclusive outside of our own range of belief.”

**5. Technology, Internet, and Media Influence** – Smartphones, social media, internet, and now AI as spiritual and social threats, especially for youth.

- “Difficulty figuring out how to insert technology in our lives safely.”
- “Distraction of technology. Using it as a drug to avoid real connection.”
- “Technology and outside influences.”

**6. Chinuch, Transmission, and Youth Alienation** – Concern about whether current educational models and home life are effectively transmitting emunah, values, and commitment to the next generation.

- “We are producing a generation of young people who are very observant but not very religious.”
- “Schools are still teaching this generation as they did past generations, and it is not working.”
- “Transmitting Orthodox values to the next generation while emphasizing tolerance and diversity.”

**7. Politics, Israel, and Ideological Drift** – Challenges to American politics (especially right-wing alignment or Democratic drift), Israel-Diaspora tensions, and the politicization of shul life.

- “Aligning support for Israel without wholeheartedly supporting GOP domestic agenda.”
- “Influence of politically conservative and MAGA values on Orthodoxy.”
- “The democratic party.”
- “Keeping a big tent to accommodate frum Jews on a wide range of perspectives re, views on Israel and the current Israeli govt... and American politics.”

**8. Inclusion, Marginalized Groups, and Welcomingness** – How the community treats women, LGBTQ individuals, Jews of color, people with disabilities, singles, and *baalei teshuvah*.

- “Addressing underlying racism and openly addressing how it will respond to LGBTQ community members.”
- “Figuring out what roles are available to women and how to include less traditional individuals... in the life of the shul/community.”
- “Being more welcoming to less observant.”

**9. Spiritual Depth vs. Externality and Roteness** – Worry about mitzvos-by-rrote, focus on appearances (“looking frum”), and lack of inner connection to Hashem and middos.

- “Authentic belief and intentionality over optics and what is considered ‘looking religious’.”
- “Too much focus on external markers; less on inner spiritual growth and knowledge.”
- “Pushing a relation with G-d and yisrael not robotic, uninspired (or selfishly inspired) halachic movements.”

**10. Community Structure: Housing, Demography, and Small Communities** – Lack of housing near shuls, demographic shifts (people making aliyah, singles, aging population), and the viability of smaller communities.

- “Orthodox communities are typically bounded geographically by walking distance... A lack of affordable housing makes it very difficult for younger families.”
- “How to make Orthodox life viable in smaller communities (e.g. access to kosher markets, restaurants, mikvah, school beyond elementary grades, etc.)”
- “Aliyah – and what the remaining community will look like. Economic stress. Terminal singles population.”
- “Shrinking modern Orthodox community as most committed are making Aliyah – growing Yeshivish community that is very insular.”