

# The Meaningfulness of *Tefillah* Among Modern Orthodox Jews

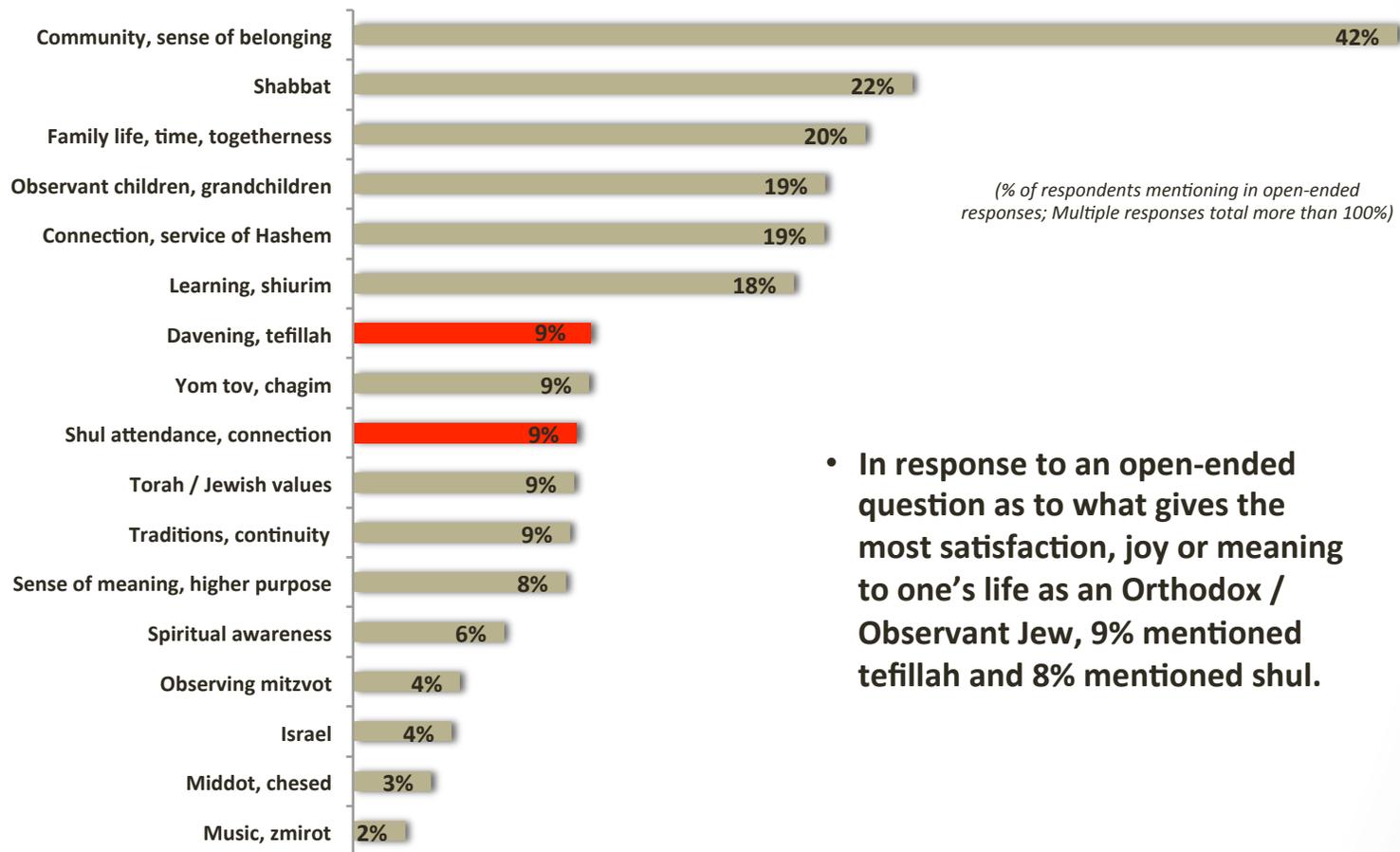
Based upon the 2017 Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews

May 24, 2018



# Where *Tefillah* Ranks Among the Drivers of Orthodox Observance

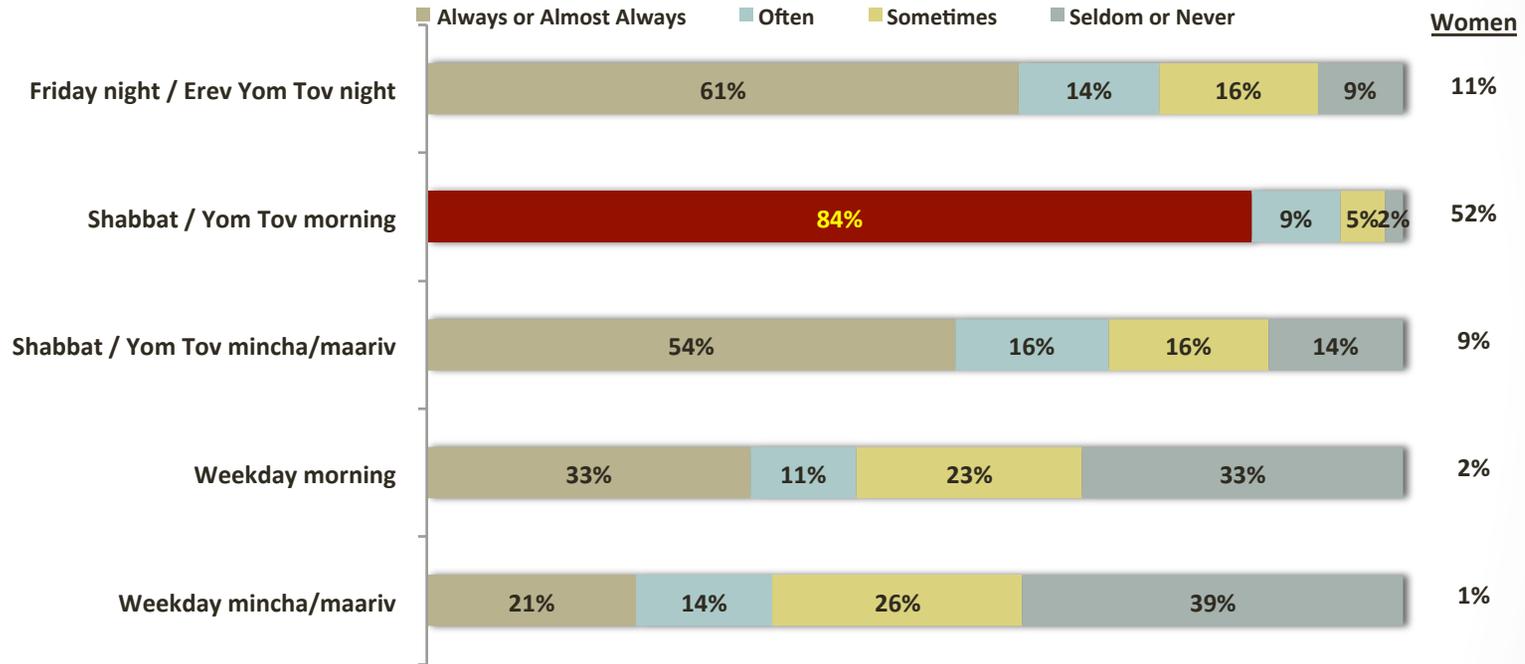
## Why Be an Orthodox / Observant Jew? – What Gives the Most Satisfaction, Joy or Meaning



Q43. What gives the most satisfaction, joy or meaning to your life as an Orthodox / Observant Jew? (Open-Ended); Percentages are based on n = 1865 responses received.

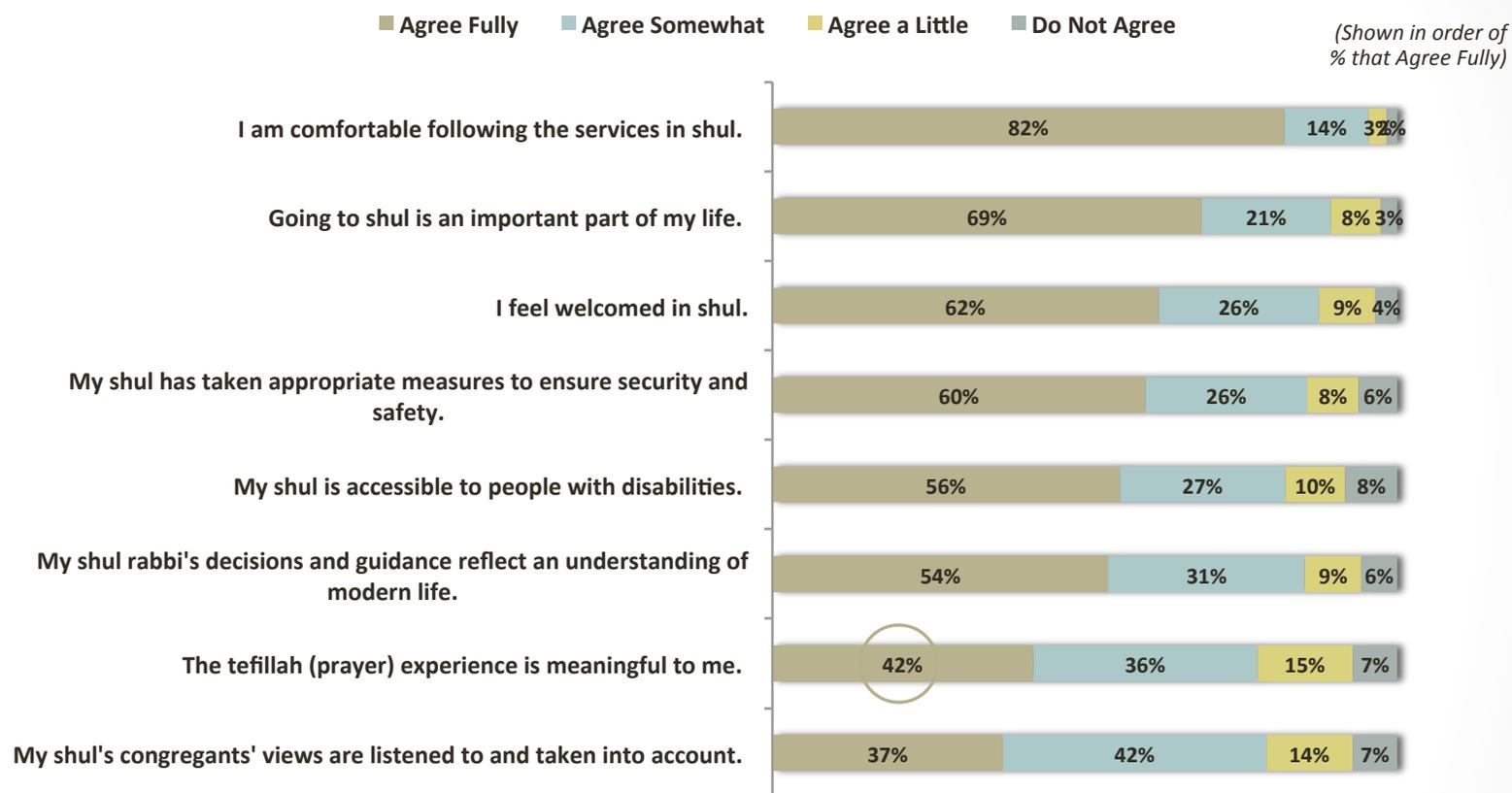
# Frequency of Modern Orthodox Shul Attendance

(All Modern Orthodox Men)



Q4. How often do you attend services in shul (synagogue)? – Friday night / Erev Yom Tov night; Shabbat / Yom Tov morning; Shabbat / Yom Tov mincha/maariv; Weekday morning; Weekday mincha/maariv [Response Scale: Always or almost always; Often; Sometimes; Seldom or Never]; Total n = 1810 men, 1559 women.

## How Modern Orthodox Relate to Their Shul



Q5-6. [Asked of those who attend Shabbat / Yom Tov morning at least sometimes per Q4] Q5. Do you agree with the following statements about your personal experiences in shul? – Going to shul is an important part of my life.; I feel welcomed in shul.; The *tefillah* (prayer) experience is meaningful to me.; I am comfortable following the services in shul. Q6. Think of the shul that you most often attend. Do you agree with the following statements? – My shul rabbi's decisions and guidance reflect an understanding of modern life.; My shul's congregants' views are listened to and taken into account.; My shul is accessible to people with disabilities.; My shul has taken appropriate measures to ensure security and safety. [Response Scale for Q5 and Q6: Agree fully; Agree somewhat; Agree a little; Do not agree; Don't know / Not applicable; Excludes Don't know / Not applicable]; Average n = 3258.

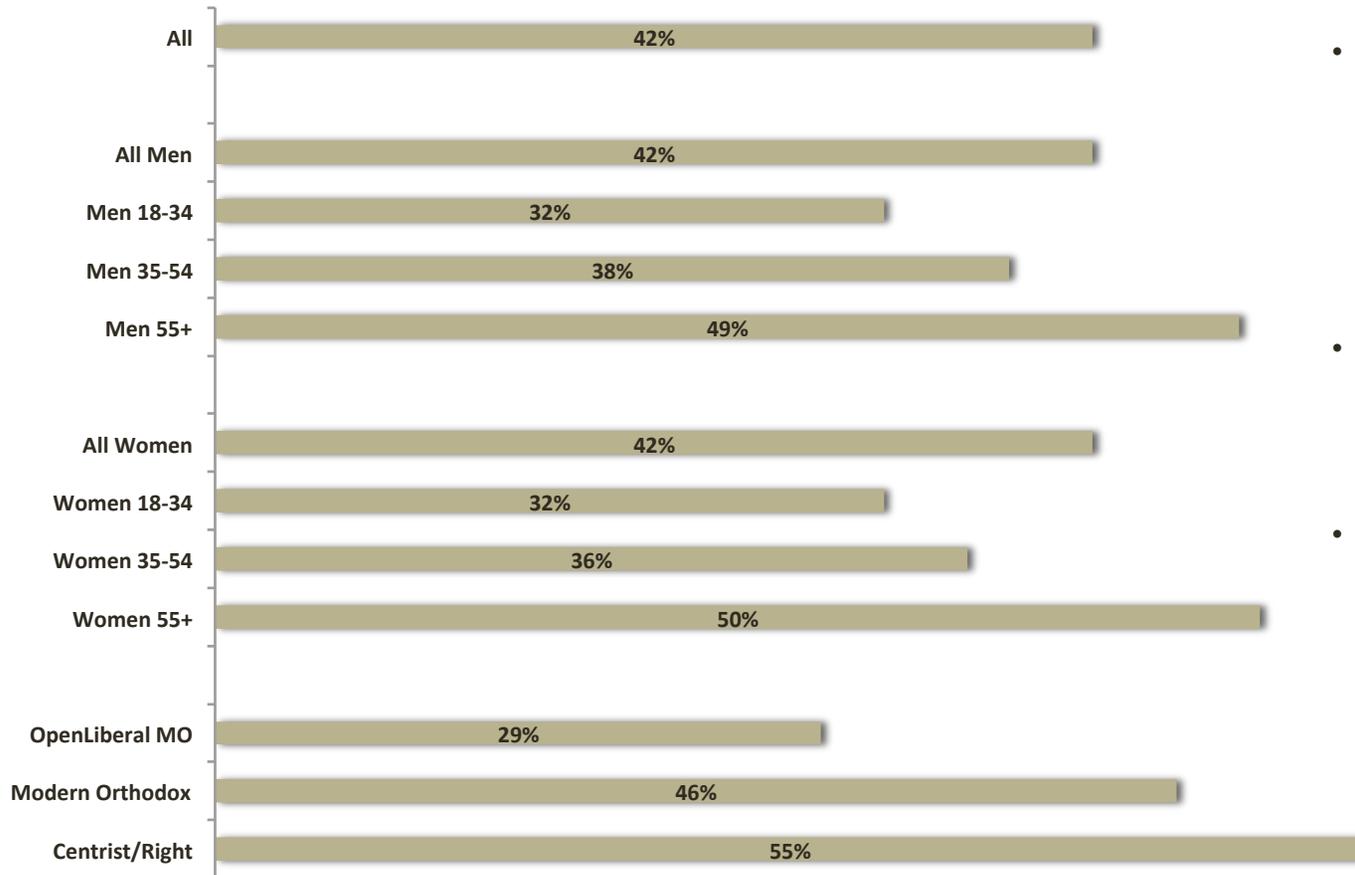
## The Meaningfulness of *Tefillah*

- As shown on the following three pages, 42% fully agree that *tefillah* is meaningful to them, with some notable variations among subgroups.
- Obviously there are interactions among the variables, but these data shed some initial light on factors that correlate with an assessment that *tefillah* is more meaningful: those already more right-leaning, older (age 55+), those who see going to shul as important, those who more often engage in Torah study and, to a lesser extent, those with lower income and Sephardim.
- Overall, 36% “somewhat agree” that *tefillah* is important to them, and engaging these people represents a significant opportunity.
- Following the data charts are sample verbatim comments offered by survey respondents relating to *tefillah*.

Q5 Item 3. [Asked of those who attend Shabbat / Yom Tov morning at least sometimes per Q4] Do you agree with the following statements about your personal experiences in shul?  
– The *tefillah* (prayer) experience is meaningful to me. [Response Scale: Agree fully; Agree somewhat; Agree a little; Do not agree; Don't know / Not applicable; Excludes Don't know / Not applicable; n = 3258.

# The Meaningfulness of *Tefillah*

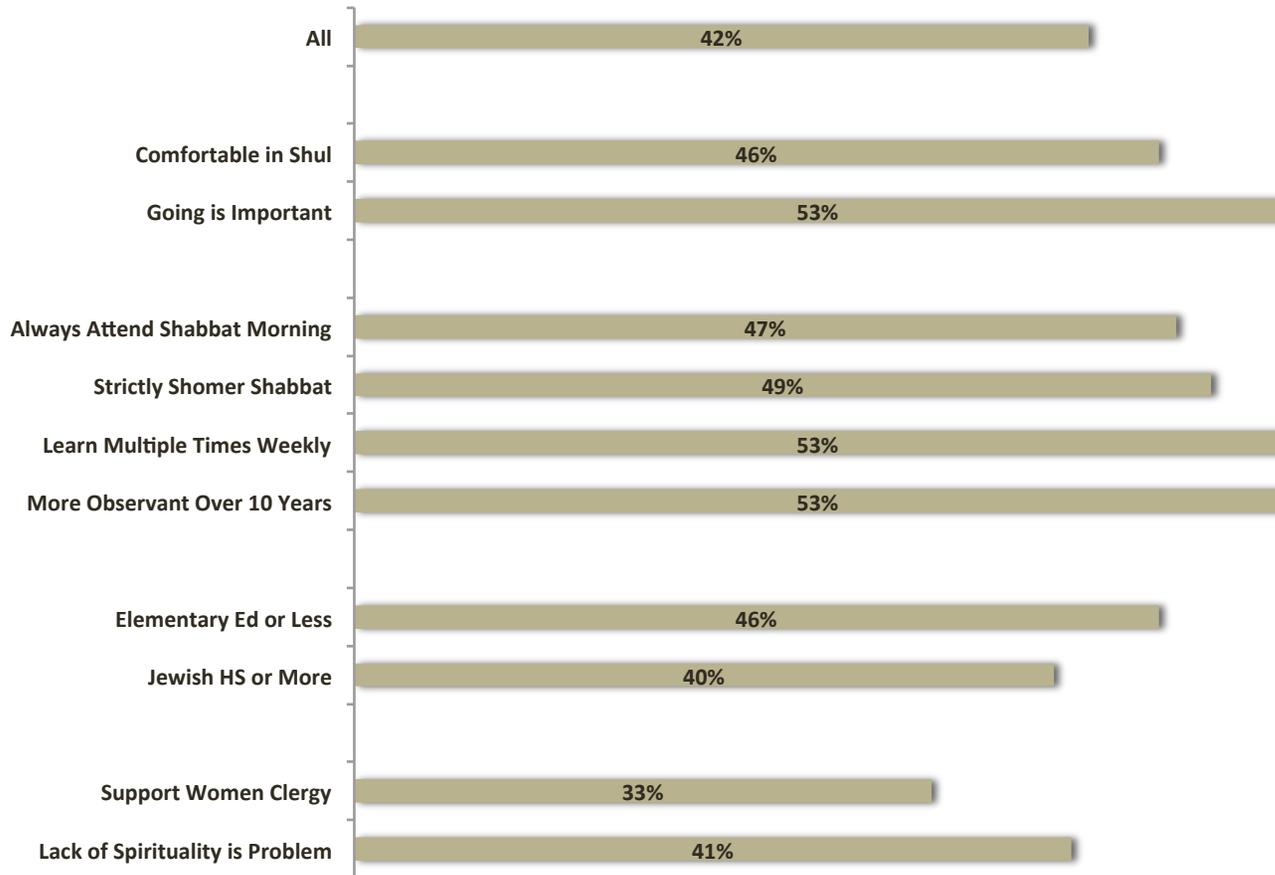
% that agree fully that “The *tefillah* (prayer) experience is meaningful to me.”



- The % that agree fully that *tefillah* is meaningful is virtually identical for men and women (42% for each)
- It is significantly lower among those ages 18-34 (32%).
- It varies significantly across the groups within MO, from “left” (29%) to “right” (55%).

# The Meaningfulness of *Tefillah*

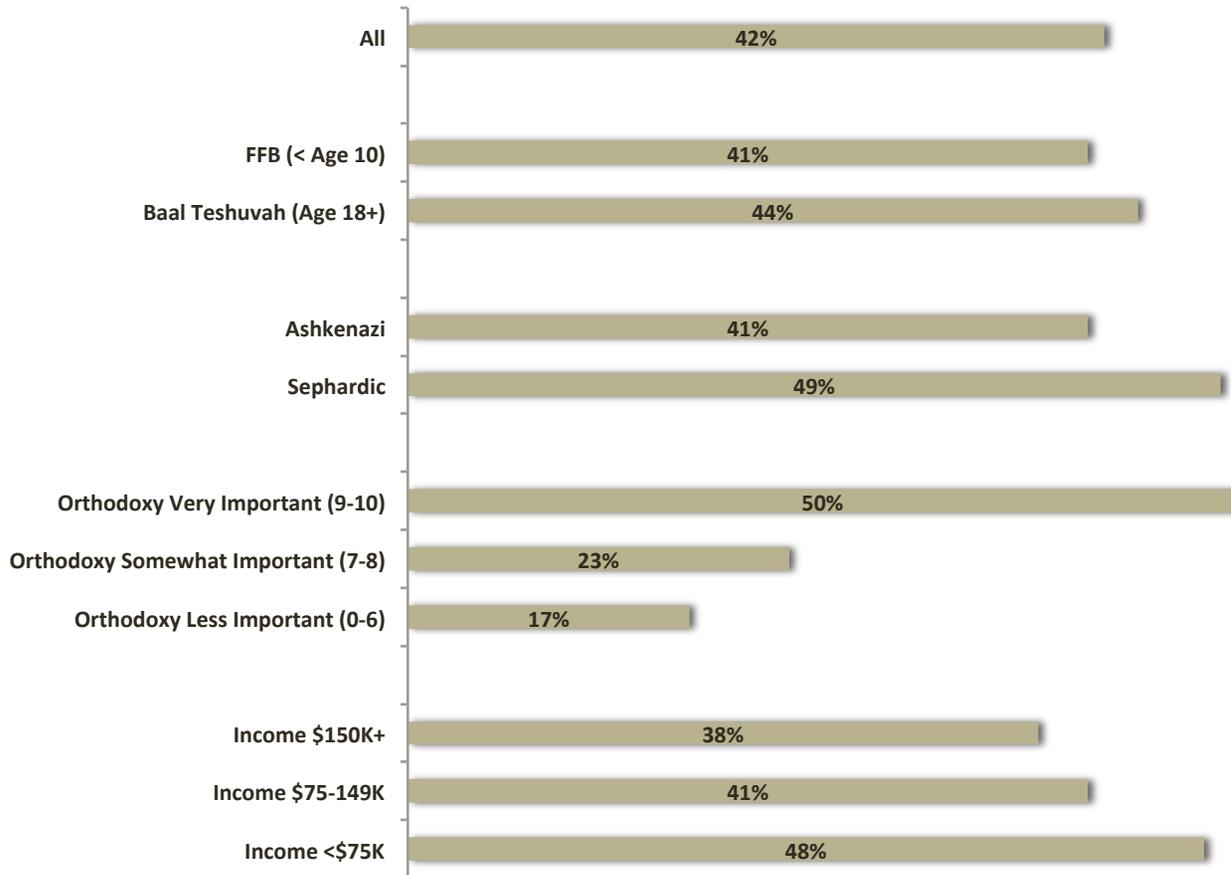
% that agree fully that “The *tefillah* (prayer) experience is meaningful to me.”



- *Tefillah* is more important among those:
- Who feel shul in general is important (53%);
- Who learn often (53% – although, surprisingly, more Jewish education does correlate with more meaningful *tefillah*), and;
- Who have become more observant over the past 10 years (53%).

# The Meaningfulness of *Tefillah*

% that agree fully that “The *tefillah* (prayer) experience is meaningful to me.”



- *Tefillah* is slightly more important to *baalei teshuvah* (44% vs. 41%), and more important to Sephardic vs. Ashkenazi (49% vs. 41%).
- It correlates strongly as a factor that makes Orthodoxy important to people.
- It is negatively correlated with income (note that the incomes of subgroups within Orthodoxy vary substantially, and this drives this relationship).

## Sample Verbatim Comments Relating to Tefillah

- **Positive comments relating to tefillah often mentioned its communal aspects.**
- **Negative comments often mentioned its lack of spirituality.**

### What gives the most satisfaction, joy or meaning to your life as an Orthodox / Observant Jew?

- *Those moments of truly communal, or when a shul is unified in common purpose, is just such a wonderful feeling.*
- *Davening in the kahal before the talkers arrive.*
- *The heart-felt tefillah and the community in which I engage in said tefillah.*
- *I love davening with singing. I feel connected through the song.*
- *I enjoy Tefillah, Shabbatot and Chagim for the opportunities it provides for spending quality time w/ HaShem and family.*
- *Singing with my community members. In prayer or just singing. Very powerful.*
- *My community and the meaning which prayer and faith bring to my daily life.*
- *Being able to turn to prayer and believing that G-D has a plan for everyone.*
- *Singing prayers as a Kahal uplifts me.*
- *Foundational for me -- the words of the prayers remind me of what's important and of who I am striving to be.*
- *Davening as a means of cultivating a sense of kedushah.*

### What, if anything, causes you the most pain or unhappiness as an Orthodox / Observant Jew?

- *Women as observers of tefillah and men the actual participants.*
- *The lack of meaningfulness in our prayer services. This is evident in fewer people attending shul (even on Shabbat), and more people arriving very late*
- *I do not relate to prayer. Mumbling archaic Hebrew words which I do not understand is useless to me. Perhaps the English translations should be in more contemporary language.*
- *Women not being allowed any role or participation in tefillah.*
- *High Holidays is the only moving and inspirational prayer service.*
- *The approach to tefillah in many Orthodox shuls -- "superspeed" davening and talking during davening.*
- *Spiritually vacant davening.*
- *Talking during davening and unruly children.*
- *For late in life ba'al tshuvahs, Davening is WAY too fast.*
- *Shul is WAY too long. 3 hours of davening is way too much. People aren't even thinking of what they're saying, they're just trying to get through it. The beginners are totally lost.*
- *I would be glad if more of the prayers were worded in the affirmative or if some of the sad or violent parts were just removed altogether.*