

**October 7th and the Haredi World:
A Survey of the Current Haredi and Former Haredi Communities**

A Collaborative Effort of Shtetl and Nishma Research

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Introduction

The October 7 attacks and its aftermath shook up the entire Jewish world, including the diaspora. But while much of the focus of surveys, research studies, and news reports has been on its impact on the broader Jewish community, especially those on college campuses, little has been known about the impact of October 7 on Haredim and former Haredim.

This report compares the ways Haredim and former Haredim responded to, and were impacted by, the events of October 7, as well as their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of their post-October 7 world. This report is part of a larger study conducted by Shtetl and Nishma Research that surveyed trends and attitudes among Haredim and former Haredim. Unlike previous studies which have looked at the two groups separately, this survey looks at the two groups side by side.

The Haredim

Haredim is a Hebrew term used to refer to ultra-Orthodox Jews. These include Hasidic sects – such as Satmar, Bobov, Skver, Belz, and Chabad Lubavitch – and Litvish Jews - those of Lithuanian descent, including the Yeshivish community. Stringent Litvish Jews are sometimes referred to colloquially as “black hat” for the black hats worn by Yeshivish and many Litvish men. Haredim also include Heimish individuals who lean toward Hasidic customs but do not affiliate with a specific sect. Finally, some Sephardi Jews, too, are Haredi.

About a third of our Haredi sample consisted of Hasidim (excluding Chabad), a third were members of the Litvish community, and a third were divided between Chabad Hasidim, Heimish, and “just plain Frum,” with a small minority identifying as Haredi Sephardic Jews.

The Former Haredim

Former Haredim come from all of these communities but had indicated that they no longer belong to a Haredi community. Roughly a third of formerly Haredi respondents had been raised in Hasidic communities; a third in Litvish and Yeshivish communities; and the remaining third were from Chabad, Heimish and “just plain Frum” backgrounds, with a very small minority (<4%) having been raised outside of the Haredi community; this group joined the Haredi community at some point in their lives as baalei teshuva (returnees to the faith) or as geirim (converts), and later left the Haredi community.

Former Haredim are sometimes referred to as OTD, or Off the Derech (path), for straying from the Haredi path. Once considered a slur, many former Haredim have adopted the term to refer to themselves.

The majority of our former Haredi respondents were no longer Orthodox at all; a minority (6%) no longer even identified as Jewish; and a subset of the formerly Haredi sample (16%) indicated that they were still Orthodox even though they no longer were Haredi.

This report is divided into three sections. Section I examines the ways Haredim and Former Haredim experienced and perceived anti-Semitism after October 7; section two looks at the places Haredim and Former Haredim found support and community to cope with October 7; and section three explores the ways Haredim and Former Haredim adapted their practices and displays of Jewish identity in the wake of October 7.

- Please find the Methodology section at the end of the report.

Antisemitism

In the JFNA (Jewish Federations of North America) landmark [study](#) of antisemitism post-October 7, 29% of Jewish respondents were aware of acts of hate or physical violence against Jews in their community.

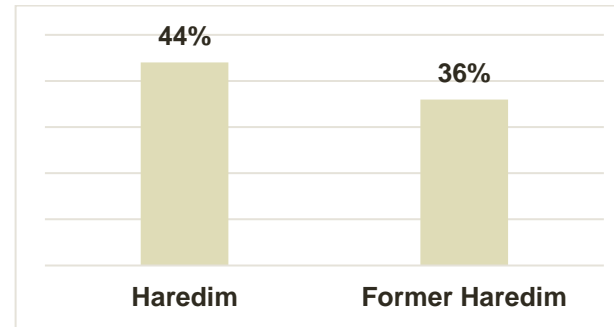
More recently, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) [reported](#) that more than 10,000 antisemitic incidents occurred in the U.S. between October 7, 2023, and September 2024 – up from 3,325 the prior year. That marks the most incidents they have recorded in a 12-month period since it began tracking threats in 1979.

Since October 7, 2023, “Jewish Americans haven’t had a single moment of respite,” ADL CEO Jonathan Greenblatt said in a statement. “Instead, we’ve faced a shocking number of antisemitic threats and experienced calls for more violence against Israelis and Jews everywhere.”

It should be noted that disagreements exist within the Jewish community and beyond regarding the labeling of certain anti-Israel acts and statements as antisemitic. This report does not take a position in that debate.

In conducting this study, we wanted to understand whether Haredim and Former Haredim have similarly been subjected to antisemitic acts. Does being visibly Jewish, for Haredim, make them more a target for antisemitism? Or are they shielded from some of this antisemitism by living in densely Orthodox communities? And for Former Haredim, will they resemble more the Haredim or the mainstream Jews of JFNA’s study in their experiences of antisemitism? Modeling our question on JFNA’s, we asked our participants:

Since October 7, have there been any acts of hate or physical violence against Jews that occurred to someone you know?



Our survey, conducted seven months after October 7, found that, by that time, just over a third of the Formerly Haredi and close to half of Haredim knew someone who was the victim of hate or violence.

Within our sample, Haredim were more likely than Former Haredim to be aware of acts of hate or violence (44% vs. 36%). This may be because their visibility as Jews makes them more likely to be targets of hate. Alternatively, it may have to do with differing definitions of antisemitism: a subset of the Formerly Haredi population is more critical of Israel and may be less likely to label certain acts and speech as antisemitic than their Orthodox and Haredi counterparts.

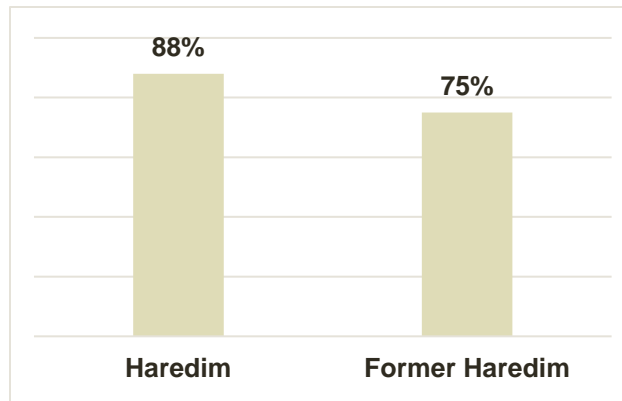
Additionally, those more connected to the Orthodox community (i.e. currently Haredi) have more robust social networks that lead them to be more aware of acts of hate against other Jews in their community than the Formerly Haredi who often lack those robust Jewish communal social networks and ties. As will be seen in the next section (“Community”), Former Haredim were also more likely to feel alone in the aftermath of October 7.

Though many respondents did not personally experience antisemitic hate or violence or personally know someone who had,

a significant portion did (nearly half of Haredi respondents), and the vast majority of respondents believed that antisemitism was rising in the US.

In JFNA’s study of antisemitism conducted immediately after October 7, 86% of Jewish respondents believed there is more antisemitism in the US today than there was 5 years ago. We asked our respondents similarly:

Compared to 5 years ago, do you think levels of antisemitism in the US have increased, decreased, or remained the same?



% saying antisemitism has increased

A very strong majority of respondents – regardless of Haredi status – believe antisemitism in the U.S. has increased. However, more of the Haredi respondents felt that way (88%) than their Formerly Haredi counterparts (75%).

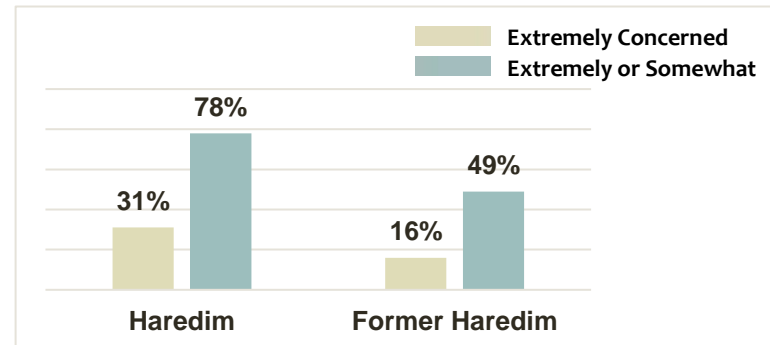
Though Formerly Haredim were slightly less likely than the Haredim to believe antisemitism had risen or to have experienced a hate act or personally known someone who had, a strong majority of these individuals – three-quarters – believe antisemitism has risen, and some shared their personal experiences of antisemitism. As one respondent wrote:

*“Late one night in Union Square, someone speeding by in a car yelled ‘f**k the Jews!’ My non-Jewish friends who I was with and I were totally stunned. I could never have imagined something like this years ago.”*

In recent years, some Haredi spokespeople have attributed rising antisemitism to public criticism of the Haredi community.

We asked our respondents whether they were concerned that public criticism of the Haredi community could lead to antisemitism, and whether their views on this issue had changed after October 7:

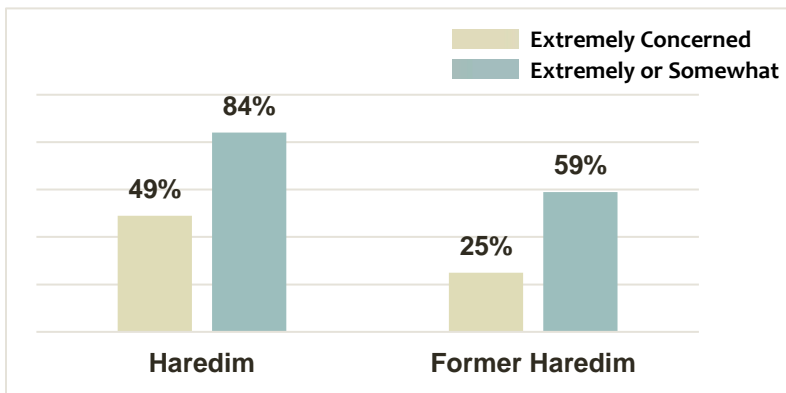
Before October 7, were you concerned that public criticisms of the Haredi community could lead to antisemitism?



Prior to October 7, Haredim were more concerned that public criticisms of the Haredi community could lead to antisemitism, with 78% expressing concern. Former Haredim expressed some concern, with almost half noting some concern, but only one in six expressing extreme concern.

We further asked:

Since October 7, have you been concerned that public criticisms of the Haredi community could lead to antisemitism?



Both groups grew notably more concerned post-October 7 that public criticisms of the Haredi community could lead to antisemitism. Some Former Haredim commented that despite their concern they still see the importance of advocacy efforts for desired changes in the Haredi community, changes they say would make the Haredi world a better and safer place. In the words of one Haredi respondent:

“I have been and remain concerned that charedi community controversy can lead to antisemitism when there’s daylight on it, but I don’t think it’s a reason not to do it. That said, given the kinds of very gross antisemitic jokes that came about after something as relatively small and insulated as the Chabad tunnels fiasco and things it just start to feel fraught if charedim, or whatever kinds of identifiable Jews, are too much in the spotlight.”

Section II

Finding Support and Community

As the Jewish world reeled in the aftermath of October 7, many found themselves turning toward their communities for support. In this section we explore the different sources of support Haredim and Former Haredim found to cope with October 7.

We asked our survey respondents:

Where did you find support, community and comfort to help you cope after 10/7?

Where did you find support, community and comfort to help you cope after 10/7?	Haredim	Former Haredim
Haredim (family, friends, etc.)	54%	14%
Shul community	32%	11%
Rabbi	27%	5%
Social media	24%	27%
The Orthodox non-Haredi community	22%	14%
Online community	21%	26%
Jewish non-Orthodox community	13%	24%
Chabad	12%	5%
Therapist	10%	19%
My children's school	7%	5%
OTD people	3%	21%
Secular group / community	2%	16%
Footsteps	0%	3%
College Hillel	2%	3%
Other	7%	12%
None and felt very alone	3%	15%
I did not need support	34%	26%

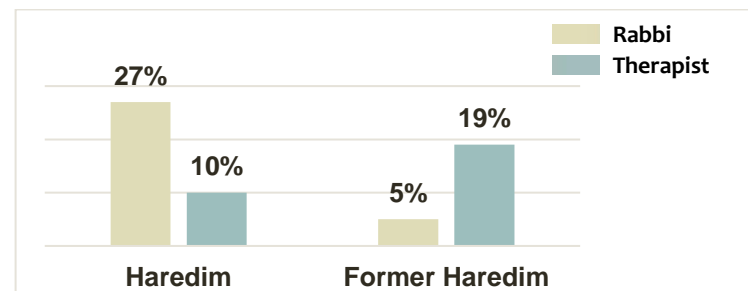
Both current and Former Haredim found support in key figures and communities, with some differences: the former from its Haredi community and the latter online and from the non-Orthodox community.

Haredim and Former Haredim found support in different communities, but Haredim were more likely to find support overall. Half of Haredim found support in their Haredi communities and among their Haredi families, about a third found support through their shul community, and just over a fifth found support in the Orthodox, non-Haredi community.

In contrast, Former Haredim were more likely to find support outside of the Orthodox community, among non-Orthodox Jews, fellow OTD individuals, and in secular circles – in addition to some former Haredim finding support through the Haredi community.

Surprisingly, only 3% of former Haredim (and not surprisingly 0% of current Haredim) found support through Footsteps, the most well-known and established organization serving those who leave the Haredi fold.

In addition to communities of support, many individuals found support in specific figures. We asked whether they found support in Rabbis and therapists:

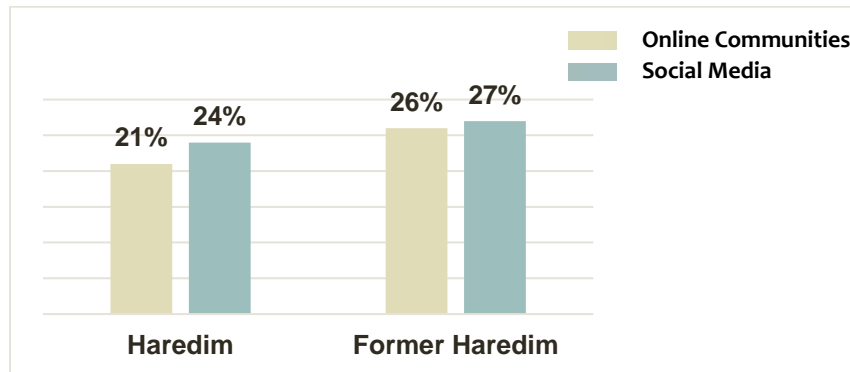


Five times as many Haredim as Former Haredim found support or comfort through a Rabbi, while about twice as many Former Haredim found support through a therapist.

Following October 7, many Rabbis gave sermons to their congregations that dealt with the attacks, which may have helped individuals to cope and find meaning. Haredim are also more likely to have a Rabbi whom they turn to for personal and halachic (Jewish legal) questions or who they look to as a leader in their shul and community, and for personal advice, especially in times of crisis. For Former Haredim, the therapist may in some cases play a similar role.

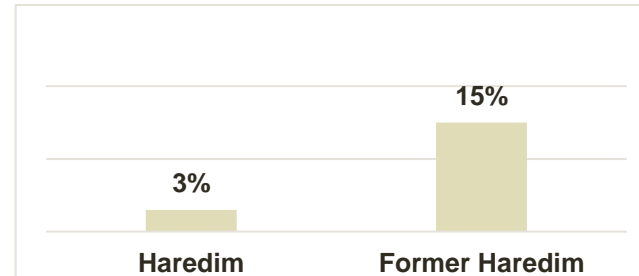
Notably, 10% of Haredim indicated that they too found support through a therapist, as therapy has gained acceptability in the Haredi world in recent years.

Turning to online support:



Former Haredim were somewhat more likely to find support through online communities than were their Haredi counterparts, though, as this was an online survey, there may have been a response bias toward those engaged more online in the first place.

While many individuals found support through virtual and in-person community, a small number of respondents indicated that they found no support at all and felt very alone.



% finding no support and feeling very alone

Former Haredim were five times as likely as Haredim to share they had no support in the aftermath of October 7 and felt very alone.

In the words of one Former Haredi respondent:

"I've been feeling very alone and isolated post-October 7th. My corner of the OTD community is extremely anti-Israel, and I don't feel like I can express my views around them. Meanwhile, my friends and family in the frum community see it as a sign of me wanting to be frum [religious] again if I come to them for support, which it isn't."

Section III

Practices and Identity

October 7 was a wakeup call to many Jews, igniting a new or stronger attachment to their Jewish identity. We wondered whether this was the case in the Haredi and Former Haredi communities, and how these two communities would have expressed these attachments.

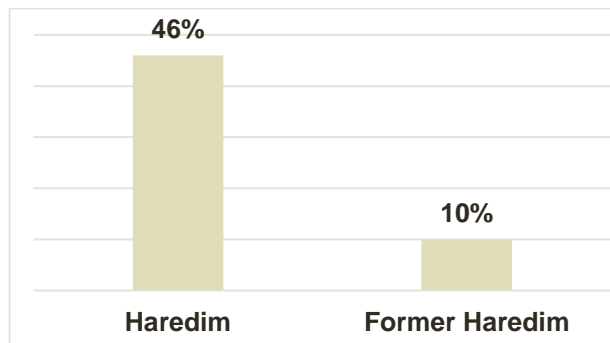
While secular Jews might start wearing star of David necklaces and attending rallies, would that be the case in the Haredi community, where some Rabbis and leaders chafe at Zionist symbols and discourage members from attending pro-Israel rallies which tend to have no gender segregation and often include statements the leaders find objectionable? Or would they express their attachments through their religious practices instead?

And how would the Former Haredi community respond? Would they be more likely to attend pro-Israel rallies, or does this community lean more progressive in their political views, and would thus be unlikely to connect to this issue? Would they respond like Haredim with renewed religious practices, or would they be too averse to any Orthodox practices once they left the Haredi world behind? After all, a small minority (6%) of Former Haredim respondents had even disavowed their Jewishness.

As it turns out, the two groups responded in a variety of ways. Some attended protests; some gave greater expression to their Jewish identity in their appearance and attire; and some – in both groups – strengthened certain religious practices.

We asked respondents:

Since October 7, have you taken on yourself to do a new mitzvah that you had not been doing before, or to be more strict or careful with a mitzvah you had been doing before?



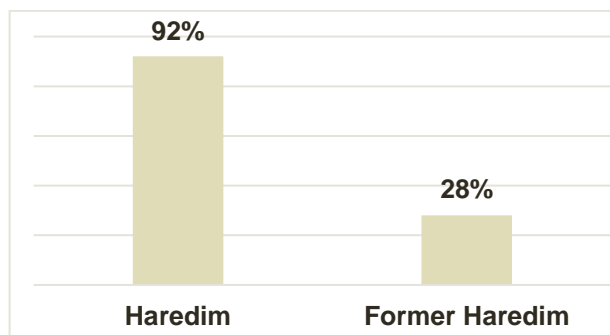
% responding yes to taking on a new Mitzvah, etc.

Nearly half of Haredim shared that they have taken on a new mitzvah or have become more stringent in their observance of a mitzvah since October 7, while 10% of the Former Haredim shared that they had done the same.

A common religious behavior during times of difficulty is the saying of Tehillim (prayers from the Book of Psalms).

We asked respondents:

Have you ever said Tehillim in the last year?



% responding yes to saying Tehilim

While the saying of Tehillim was nearly universal among the Haredim, we found a significant minority of the Former Haredim (28%) also have said Tehillim in the past year.

In both groups, women were more likely to say Tehillim than their male counterparts. Among Haredim, 90% of men and 94% of women have said Tehillim. And among the Former Haredim, 18% of men and 36% of women have said Tehillim.

Though the sample was exceedingly small, several individuals who were formerly Haredi and identified as an “other” gender (including nonbinary and transgender) indicated that they too had said Tehillim in the last year. While the exact percentage is not meaningful because of the small sample, it is nonetheless anecdotally notable that individuals who would feel extremely alienated from the Haredi community over their gender identity still drew upon Orthodox and Haredi customs like saying Tehillim.

Though the question asked them about their past year and was not specifically worded to focus on Tehillim since October 7, we include this data point in this report because a number of respondents volunteered that they joined Tehillim groups or increased their Tehillim specifically in response to the events of October 7. In fact, one respondent critiqued the survey on this point, writing:

“You did not leave space in last section to say what it was specifically that we took on as of Oct 7, for example lighting shabbos candles 10 min earlier & praying with a hostages name at that time or saying more tehillim then you usually do.”

A sample of comments from Haredi respondents that relate to their Tehilim recital after October 7 is below:

1) *“October 7 has motivated me to say tehillim and daven daily for the chayalim and hostages as well as cholim [the sick], to give more tzedekah, especially Israeli organizations, and to actively look to open other Jews to see any rays of hope at this time.”*

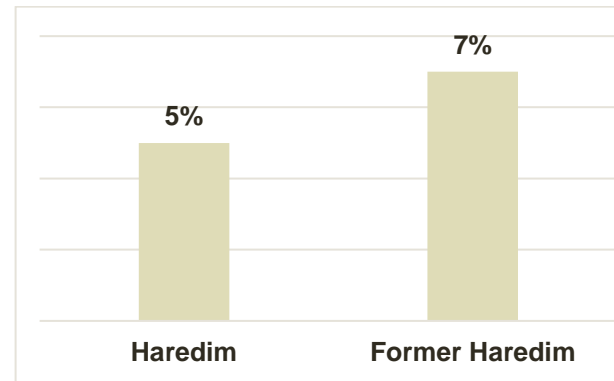
2) *“I am part of a Tehillim group that has gone from once weekly to nightly meetings after October 7.”*

3) *“I said tehilim with a group to complete Sefer tehilim daily for the protection of a chayal.”*

4) *“I say tehillim daily and added prayers for the hostages and soldiers after Oct 7.”*

While many individuals took on religious practices after October 7, we wondered if the events of October 7 would have led others to feel more disconnected from observance, perhaps blaming God for the catastrophe and distancing themselves, or questioning whether there could be a God at all who would let that happen. We asked respondents:

Since October 7, have you become less religious, or stopped observing Mitzvot you used to keep?



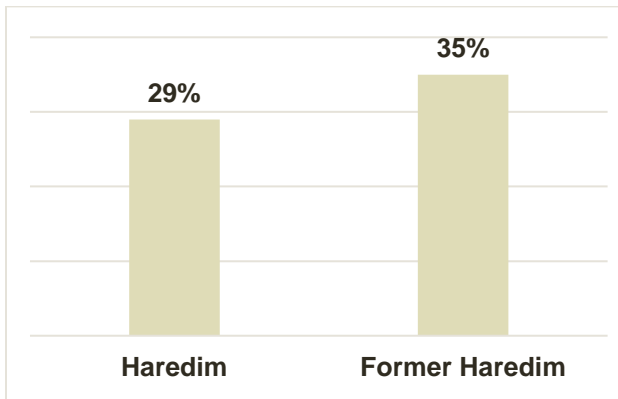
% who responded “yes” to becoming less religious, etc.

Very few responded that they became less religious / observant. The difference between the two groups is small and may well be unrelated to the events of October 7 per se. There is always movement in and out of Haredi life. In the words of a Haredi respondent who had become less observant:

“My slips in mitzvah observance have nothing to do with Oct. 7. They come from other issues in the Chareidi community.”

We also asked whether respondents had made an effort to demonstrate their Jewishness or express Jewish pride since 10/7:

Since October 7, have you taken on other Jewish practices or made more of an effort to demonstrate your Jewishness or Jewish pride (for example, wearing a star of David [Magen David] necklace, wearing a dog tag “free the hostages” necklace, participating in Jewish cultural events, playing Jewish or Israeli music more often than you did in the past)?

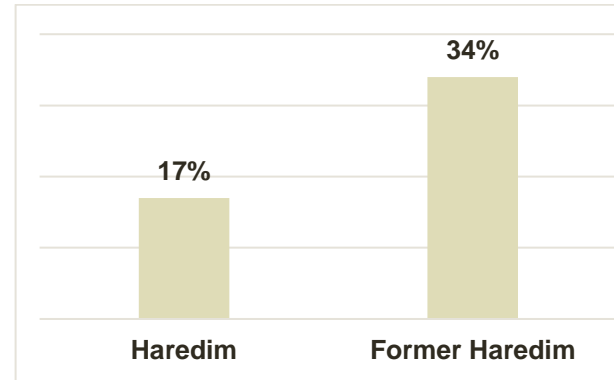


% who say they have increased their Jewish, but not specifically religious, practice

Here we find that the Former Haredim slightly more often took on such non-religious Jewish identification practices. While we did not ask respondents why they did or did not express Jewish identity in these manners, we believe that some of these practices have what some Haredim view as a secularish (not frum) aspect, and this may be why fewer of them have adopted such practices.

On the other hand, we asked whether fear of experiencing of antisemitism motivated respondents to hide their Jewish identity:

Since October 7, have you tried to hide your Jewish identity in public spaces out of concerns about antisemitism? (for example, worn a baseball cap instead of a yarmulka sometimes, specifically not worn jewelry with Jewish content like Hebrew letters or Magen David)



% who said they tried to hide their Jewishness post 10/7

While the majority of respondents have not tried to hide their Jewish identity over concerns about antisemitism, a significant minority has done so – more often among Former Haredim, with far fewer among current Haredim.

Despite being much more visibly Jewish, many Haredim work and socialize in Haredi circles, decreasing their encounters with non-Jews in settings where they would be a minority and have reason for concern. Additionally, Haredim are more likely to consider their religious garb an obligation and are perhaps less likely to remove their Yarmulka, for instance, even if they fear being identifiably Jewish with it on. Finally, it may simply be less practical, especially for the men, to hide their Jewishness, given the peyos, beard, and religious attire.

A sample of written comments from Former Haredim follow:

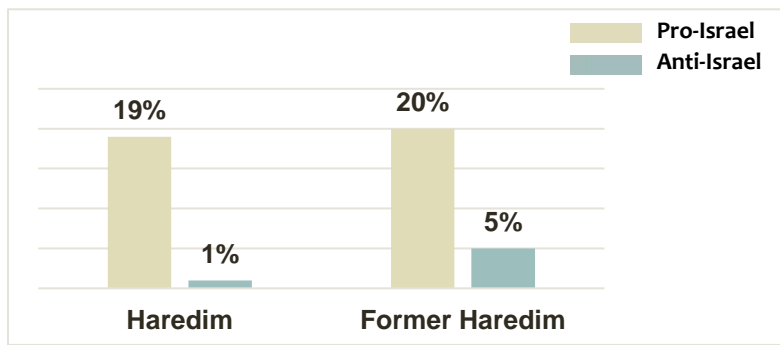
1) *“While I have not experienced any personal assaults or attacks IRL (plenty online) I have found myself tucking in my Magen David (which I’ve been wearing for 9+ years) when entering certain spaces. Never out of shame, always out of fear.*

2) *“I didn’t wear Hebrew letters for a few weeks after the original attack as I was afraid. It quickly became clear that there was nothing for me to fear so I went back to it.”*

The Haredi community tends to have mixed feelings when it comes to Israel. On the one hand, they view the land as holy, given to the Jews by God. On the other hand, they detest the secular government and their attempts to draft Yeshiva boys into the army and to require secular education in Yeshivas. Former Haredim tend to be split between those who retain their support for Israel, without the religious animus, leaving them staunchly pro-Israel and those who, after leaving the conservative Haredi world, take on far left political beliefs and affiliations and are thus anti-Zionist or vocal critics of Israel.

But October 7 changed things, and our survey sought to get clarity on these sentiments.

Have you joined a rally or protest – either Pro-Israel, or Anti-Israel / Pro-Palestine?

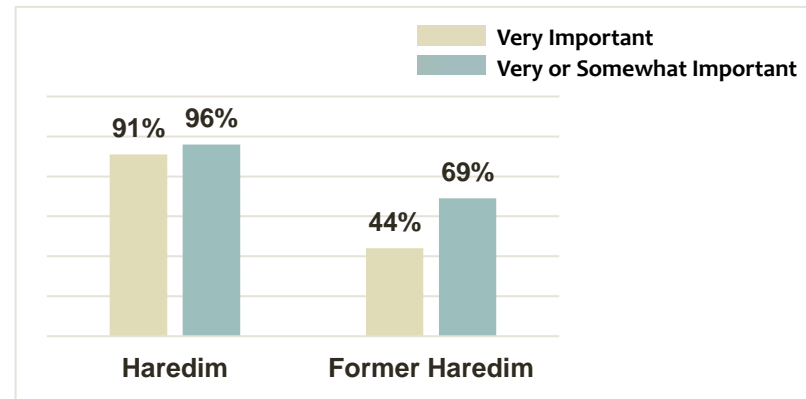


While the majority of individuals surveyed did not attend protests or rallies, among those who did, the vast majority attended pro-Israel rallies. While percentages attending anti-Israel protests were quite small, the figure was notably higher among the Formerly Haredi.

Although not strictly related to October 7, it is worth including here the responses to a question we asked on the importance of Jewishness because of its foundational value to the discussion, and because it may help explain what to some readers would seem startling that many Former Haredim were so shaken by the October 7 attacks.

We asked respondents:

How important is your Jewishness to you?



Jewish identity was important to the majority of respondents in both groups. However, among Haredim, nearly all of respondents rated their Jewish identity as important, and over 90% ranked it very important. In contradistinction, while more than two thirds (69%) of the Former Haredim rated their Jewish identity as important, only 44% rated it as very important.

Despite exiting the Haredi world, Jewishness is salient for the majority of those who leave the Haredi community.

While our survey did not ask individuals about whether their Jewish identity became more important to them after October 7, some individuals' comments suggest that that was the case. In the words of a formerly Haredi respondent:

"I used to identify as non Jewish. But after October 7 I couldn't stop crying...it was like something from the Holocaust turned on in my DNA. I'm still an atheist but for the first time I identify as Jewish. I've repaired some relationships with my haredi family. I'm trying to find a place for myself in Judaism that is not religious and doesn't overlook some toxic Jewish cultural practices. I haven't found it yet."

Yet there were others (these were in the minority) for whom the events of October 7 did not rekindle or strengthen their Jewish identity. In the words of another Formerly Haredi respondent:

"October 7 means very little to me. Insane religious desert people killing each other is pretty tragic, but also none of my business."

Conclusion:

Our study sought to answer the question of whether the October 7 attacks and their aftermath affected the Haredi and Former Haredi communities. Based on the feedback from our respondents, it does appear that their communities have been greatly affected by the war. Those Former Haredim who are pro-Israel appear at a particular disadvantage because they lack the communal comfort received by those still in the Haredi world, and they feel unsupported amongst their non-Haredi peers.

This October 7 report is just one cohesive package extracted from the study, which also sought to take the temperature on the relationship between Haredim and Former Haredim. An additional report with those findings will be published in 2025.

Methodology:

This study was conducted in June of 2024, as a collaboration between Shtetl and Nishma Research.

The survey was circulated in various ways, through eblasts, social media, WhatsApp groups, and online forums.

This online survey received 668 responses (376 Haredi and 292 formerly Haredi).

To identify members of the two groups we explored – Haredim and the Former Haredim – we relied on responses to several questions: 1. In what community were you raised? 2. What community do you belong to now? 3. Would you use any of the following terms to define your identity? 4. Verbatim responses to several questions.

Those in the Haredi sample include those who indicated that they currently belong to a Haredi community (Hasidic, Chabad, Litvish, Yeshivish, or Heimish). This sample includes both those raised in one of these communities and currently identifying as belonging to one of these communities (including those who moved between Haredi communities -- for instance, someone raised Heimish who now identifies as Hasidic, or raised Yeshivish who now identifies as Litvish), as well as those who were not raised in Haredi communities but today belong to a Haredi community (Baalei Teshuva). Individuals who indicated that they are leading Haredi lives and living in Haredi

communities despite the fact that they did not want to be Haredi or keep all the laws were included in the Haredi sample.

Those in the formerly Haredi sample include individuals who indicated that they had been raised in a Haredi community but identified as not belonging to a Haredi community any longer.

There was an additional category that individuals could have selected: "just plain Frum." For those who responded thusly, we imputed either a "Haredi" or "formerly Haredi" identity based on their answers to other questions, including their answer to the question of what terms they would use to define their identity. Those who indicated they were just plain frum and also selected "formerly Haredi" or "OTD" were included in the formerly Haredi category. We additionally relied on their verbatim responses to make these determinations. (For example, one individual wrote that she was still observant and had been raised Haredi but that she wears pants and that the religious community did not consider her Haredi. Individuals like this we included in the "formerly Haredi" category.)

For questions and comments, please contact:
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