

# The Nishma Research 2023 Jewish Community Profile Key Observations and Summary of Findings

**Beliefs, Practices, Attitudes and Priorities Across the Jewish Community  
With a Focus on U.S. Modern Orthodox and Haredi (Chasidish and Yeshivish) Sectors**



Conducted by Nishma Research  
West Hartford, Connecticut  
<http://nishmaresearch.com>



Sponsored by Micah Philanthropies  
Agawam, Massachusetts

**March 1, 2023**

## Key Observations

**There is “Jewish Fulfillment” Across All of Orthodox Jewry –** Orthodox Jews – across all sectors and equally for men and women – find their lives Jewishly fulfilling. In total, 65% agree with this strongly, and 93% agree strongly or somewhat. This is among the commonalities that connect Orthodox Jews.

**Growing Support for Modern Orthodox Women’s Roles, Including “Clergy-Related” Positions –** Support for women serving in positions increased across all of Modern Orthodoxy, from 34% in 2017, to 38%. We see increased mainstreaming within many Modern Orthodox communities, which accept more involvement in learning and public Judaism by women, including leadership roles and roles in ‘clergy-type’ positions.

The idea of women in these roles (viewed through the joint lenses of what they do and how they are addressed) is gaining traction. In the center of Modern Orthodoxy, 9% see the combination of the two (women having such positions, with a “clergy” title) as very important and 47% see this as some-what important, for a total of 56% ... up from 26% in 2017.

**Dealing With Those Who Commit Abuse Is Now a Top Priority –** This issue shot up in importance, from nearer the bottom of an issues list in 2017, to now being virtually tied (with addressing the cost of Jewish education) as the top priority. 82% cited this as an issue that the community must address in the next decade.

**Modern Orthodoxy: A Niche With Much Internal Diversity –** While there is much commonality across the spectrum of Modern Orthodoxy, there are also points of disagreement between the more liberal Modern Orthodox and those who are more centrist or right-leaning. This study helps us to understand where there is agreement across Modern Orthodoxy (e.g., attitudes toward both Jewish and secular education, Israel, women's role in religion, even dress), and where there is divergence.

While this survey did not probe directly how people perceive the

differences (a useful future research topic), impressionistically, points of difference appear to persist, but not to have widened appreciably since the Nishma study implemented in 2017. Still. While a majority (51%) of Modern Orthodox are optimistic about its future, a not insignificant minority (29%) are pessimistic, and these people fall more often in the right-leaning segment of Modern Orthodoxy..

**Israeli Politics Generates Divergent Views –** While Modern Orthodoxy’s more stringent wing is pleased with the new government by more than a 2-to-1 margin, its liberal wing is concerned by a 6-to-1 margin. In contrast, the Haredi sector as a whole is pleased with the new government by a 12-to-1 margin.

**Davening/Prayer Not Universally Observed –** Some 19% of Haredi men and 34% of Modern Orthodox men say they do not always daven Shacharit. The Haredi figure is surprising, suggesting that a not insignificant number of Haredim are as prone to their own form of "social Orthodoxy" as are Modern Orthodox.

**Climate Is Not Viewed as an “Orthodox Issue” –** The extent to which all groups – including Liberal Modern Orthodox – rate this as a low priority may indicate that most do not see it as an “Orthodox issue”; or that (as some of the verbatim responses suggest) we have enough other issues to address.

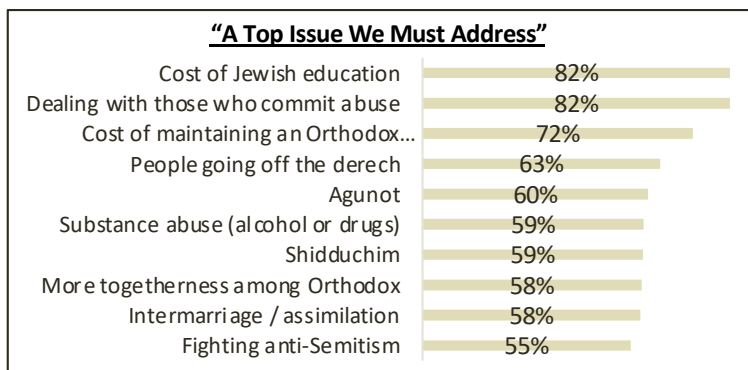
**Haredi are Concerned About OTD (Off the Derech); Modern Orthodox Are Less Concerned –** Despite the lack of quantitative data, conventional wisdom is that more people leave Modern Orthodoxy than Haredi sectors, so the lower concern among MO is surprising.

**Family Planning is Common –** 60% of families have done family planning, and nearly half of all families managed (reduced) the number of children they had, although the reasons were seldom financial.

## Summary of Findings (Page 1 of 3)

### Top Communal Priorities for the Next Decade (Pages 10-12)

**U.S. Orthodoxy Overall** – The cost of Jewish education remains the community’s top priority. However, while “physical or mental abuse” ranked in the bottom third in a 2017 survey, “Dealing with those who commit abuse (physical, mental, sexual)” now virtually ties as the top priority, perhaps due to publicized incidents in recent years.



**Differences Across Orthodoxy** – Priorities are generally similar, but with a few notable variations, e.g., off the derech and shidduchim rank in the top 5 for Haredi, but #12-13 among MO; agunot ranks #3 for MO, but #9-12 for Yeshivish and Chasidish.

**Differences Within Modern Orthodoxy** – Priorities vary as much within Modern Orthodoxy as they do across the sectors of Orthodoxy. The liberal-leaning wing of MO sees some issues as more important (e.g., approaches to LGBTQ+, climate and environment), while for others the priorities of the right-leaning wing more closely resemble Yeshivish views (e.g., off the derech, shidduchim). Comparing men and women, top priorities are similar, but the issue of agunot shows a large difference (82% of women say it is a top priority, compared to 63% of men).

### Religious Beliefs, Practices and Shul Connections (Pages 14-19)

Belief in key theological principles is high overall, averaging 91% across all of Orthodoxy. Full belief among Modern Orthodox is lower

than among Haredi, and notably more of the Modern Orthodox respond that they “tend to believe,” e.g., in Torah mi'Sinai (21%), Oral Torah tracing back to Sinai (28%) and Hashem’s involvement in all of the world’s day-to-day activities (26%).

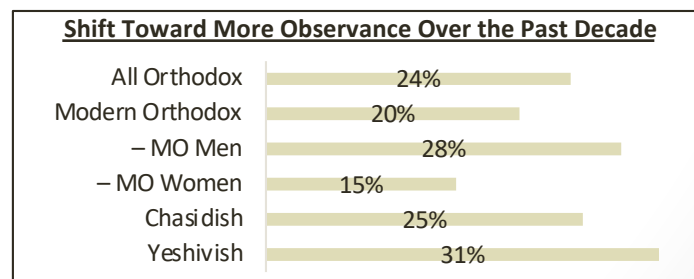
Observance is near universal (90%-99%) for three fundamental halachic precepts (Shabbat, Kashrut, Taharat Ha’Mishpacha), and moderately high in other areas – daily Shacharit and tefillin (although the percentage of men who say they always daven Shacharit and put on tefillin is perhaps unexpectedly low, even among Haredi) and head coverings for men; brachot, asking of halachic questions. Across all areas, Yeshivish had the highest levels of observance, followed closely by the Chasidish, with the Modern Orthodox lagging.

In the area of tzniut, 73% of all Orthodox see current practices as appropriate, and the rest are evenly split between seeing it as too lenient and too extreme.

Shul connections are very high among all Orthodox sectors, with 90% saying there is a shul they consider to be their primary shul. Among those who have a primary shul, a substantial majority attend, feel welcomed, cared for and valued in shul, and get halachic guidance there, with little variation among the sectors.

### Shifts in Religious Observance (Pages 21-22)

All sectors show shifts toward more religious observance over the past decade, with the strongest shift reported among the Yeshivish. Among Modern Orthodox, both men and women shifted toward more observance, but the shift among men was more pronounced.

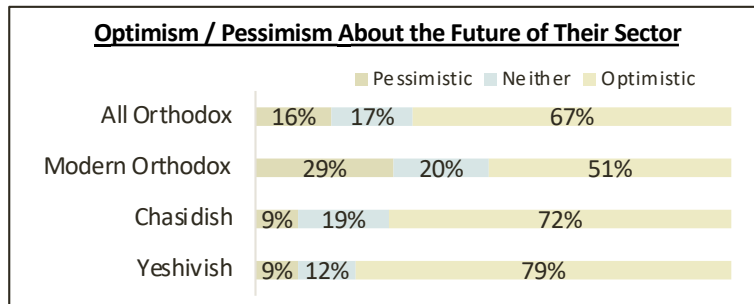


## Summary of Findings (Page 2 of 3)

### Religious Fulfillment, Optimism and Pessimism (Pages 24-26)

Orthodox Jews say they often (and, for many, always) feel Hashem’s presence in their lives, mostly among the Haredi but also to a notable extent among Modern Orthodox. Orthodox Jews – across all sectors and equally for men and women – find their lives Jewishly fulfilling. In total, 65% agree with this strongly, and 93% agree strongly or somewhat.

While all groups are more optimistic than pessimistic about the future of their sector, the Modern Orthodox are most pessimistic about their future, while the Yeshivish are most optimistic about their future.

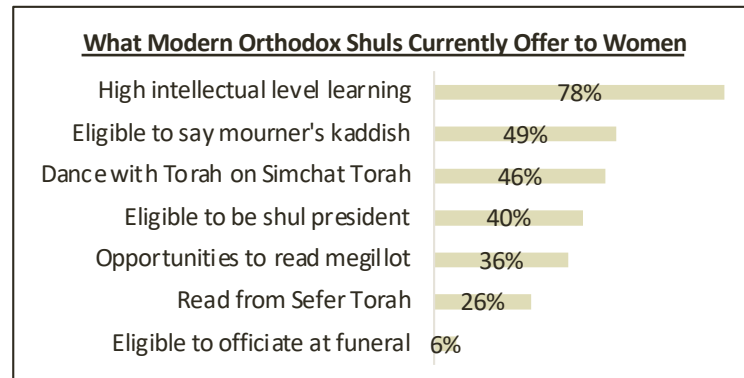


### Practices and Attitudes Relating to the Role of Women (Pages 28-34)

Three-fourths of Modern Orthodox respondents say their shul has women in lay leadership and paid staff positions, while far fewer Haredi respondents report their shul having women in such positions.

There is universal support for high intellectual level religious classes, and high levels of support for serving as shul president and eligibility to say Kaddish, read megillot and dance with a Sefer Torah. The views of men and women are not very different across these roles and activities (on average, 3% more women agree), and there are virtually no notable differences by age in the levels of support for women’s roles and activities.

In terms of what shuls currently offer, a strong majority of Modern Orthodox (78%) say their shul offers high intellectual level Judaic learning to women, but other shul practices relating to women generally have lower (in the 35%-50% range) levels of adoption.



**Views on Women Serving in “Clergy-Related” Types of Positions in Modern Orthodox Shuls** – Across all of Modern Orthodoxy, 38% strongly agree that women should have opportunities to serve in such positions, up from 34% in a 2017 survey. The percentage agreeing somewhat increased notably, from 22% to 31%.

### Attitudes Across All of Modern Orthodoxy on Women Serving in “Clergy-Related” Types of Shul Positions

	2017	2023	Change
Agree Strongly	34%	38%	+4%
Agree Somewhat	22%	31%	+9%
Total Agree	56%	69%	+13%

## Summary of Findings (Page 3 of 3)

**Transformed ideas of women's religious capacities are being mainstreamed in Modern Orthodoxy** – To test the “mainstreaming” hypothesis, we looked at those who identify as “In the center ... Centrist Modern Orthodox,” thus eliminating the effects of the left (more liberal) or right (more stringent/machmir) groups. In this group, 31% agree strongly that women should have opportunities to be in “clergy-related” types of shul positions and another 39% agree somewhat, for a total of 70% ... Up sharply from 46% in 2017.

A total of 9% see the combination of the two (i.e., women should have such positions and they should have some type of “clergy title”) as very important and another 47% see this as somewhat important, for a total of 56% ... also up sharply from 26% in 2017.

The data suggest that the idea of women having such roles is gaining traction, as is the level of support of their having commensurate titles.

### Family Issues (Pages 36-39)

**Divorce and Agunot** – The Orthodox community is knowledgeable of the halachic pre-nuptial agreement, especially the Modern Orthodox, where 83% are familiar and 63% have used it. While there is moderate awareness among the Haredi, adoption remains low.

**Family Planning** – In the Orthodox community as a whole, about two thirds have done some type of family planning. Close to half have made decisions to limit their family size for various reasons, although cost is not often cited as the driver of this decision.

### Israel Connections – Among U.S. Orthodox Respondents (Pages 41-44)

Emotional attachment to Israel is strong across all of Orthodoxy (a few points higher for Modern Orthodox than for Haredi), as is providing support, visiting and keeping up-to-date on Israel-related news.

Between 5% and 9% of the various sectors say it is very likely they will make aliyah in the next five years. Reasons most often cited are spiritual, religious, and communal and family connections.

#### Top Reasons Why People Consider Making Aliyah



**Reactions to the New Israeli Government** – While Modern Orthodox are more concerned than pleased, the Haredi sectors are very pleased. Divergent views are also found within Modern Orthodoxy.

#### % Concerned About New Israeli Government

