

Nishma Research Selected Findings About the American Modern Orthodox Community

Presentation to the PORAT Synagogue Initiative

January 8, 2020



Nishma reports and related materials are available at <http://nishmaresearch.com/social-research.html>

Surprising
Findings
About Modern
Orthodoxy

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Nishma Research Studies Conducted

- **Starting a Conversation: A Pioneering Survey of Those Who Have Left the Orthodox Community (2016)** – Why people leave Orthodoxy, the nature of their journeys, practices, beliefs, identity, community and relationships – across Chasidic, Yeshivish and Modern Orthodox segments.
- **The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews (2017)** – Religious beliefs and practices, Orthodox observance as a part of life, shul life, Jewish study, women's roles, children's education, sexuality, Israel connection and advocacy, overall successes, opportunities and challenges.
- **The Successes, Challenges, and Future of American Modern Orthodoxy (2019)** – Exploration of challenges – internal and external – unique to Modern Orthodoxy and the impacts, both positive and negative, of interactions with secular society.
- **The Journeys and Experiences of Baalei Teshuvah (2019)** – Why people become observant, challenges and joys, the nature of their continuing journey, how they are different or comparable to those who are "frum from birth" and what baalei teshuvah want the rest of their community to know about them.

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Goals in Researching the Jewish Community

- **Nishma Research goal: providing our community with quality, affordable, needed, independent research**
- **Getting people to listen and consider appropriate policies, etc.**

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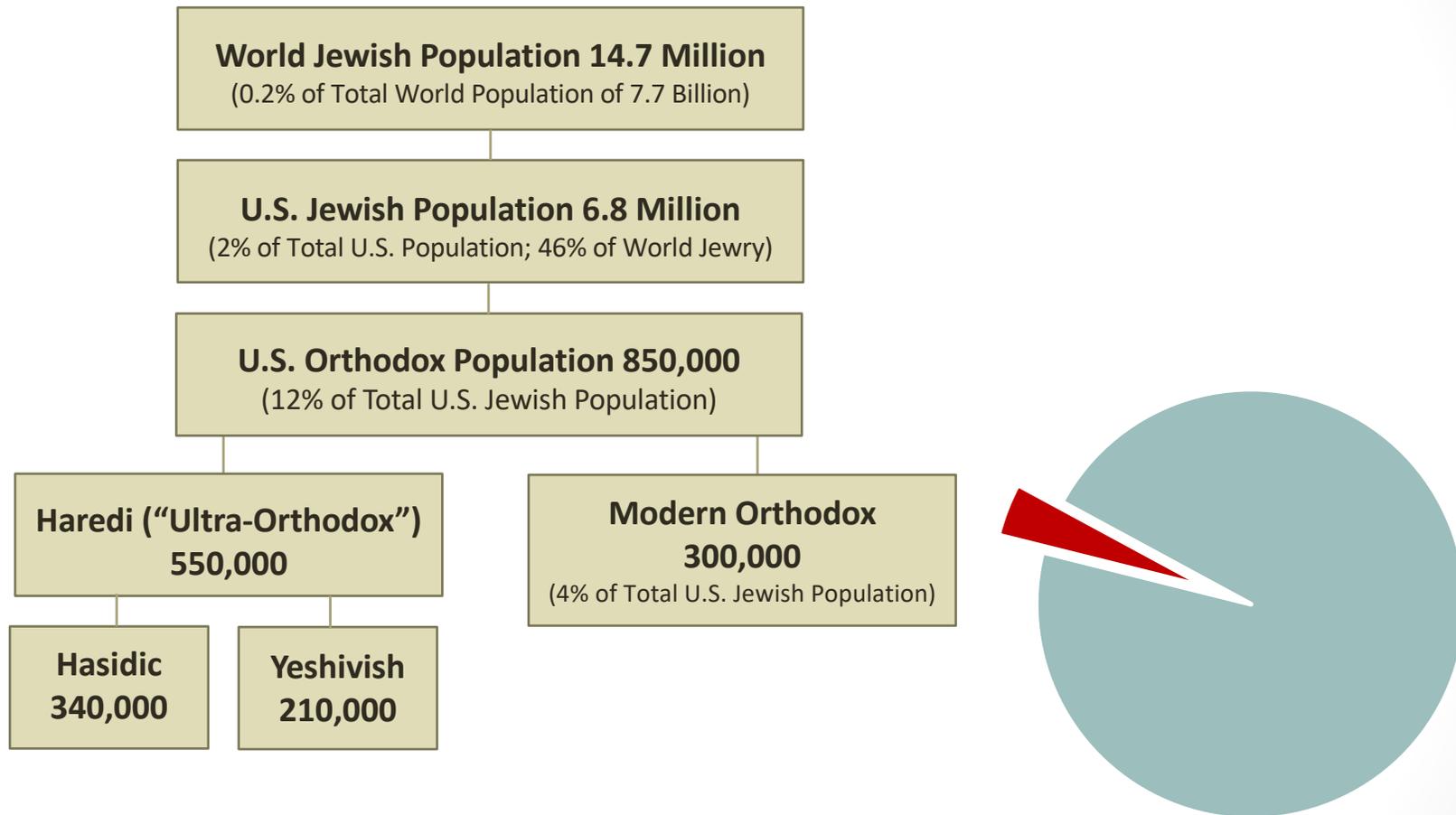
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1. Size and diversity of the Modern Orthodox community
2. Modern Orthodox beliefs and practices
3. Interactions with secular society: positive, negative, and effects
4. Importance of orthodox observance as part of peoples lives; why?
5. Is Modern Orthodoxy moving right or left
6. Shuls – Davening and attitudes
7. Learning
8. Role of women
9. Children's education
10. Journey and experiences of baalei teshuvah
11. People leaving Orthodoxy
12. Connections to Israel
13. The Most Important Problems Facing Modern Orthodoxy

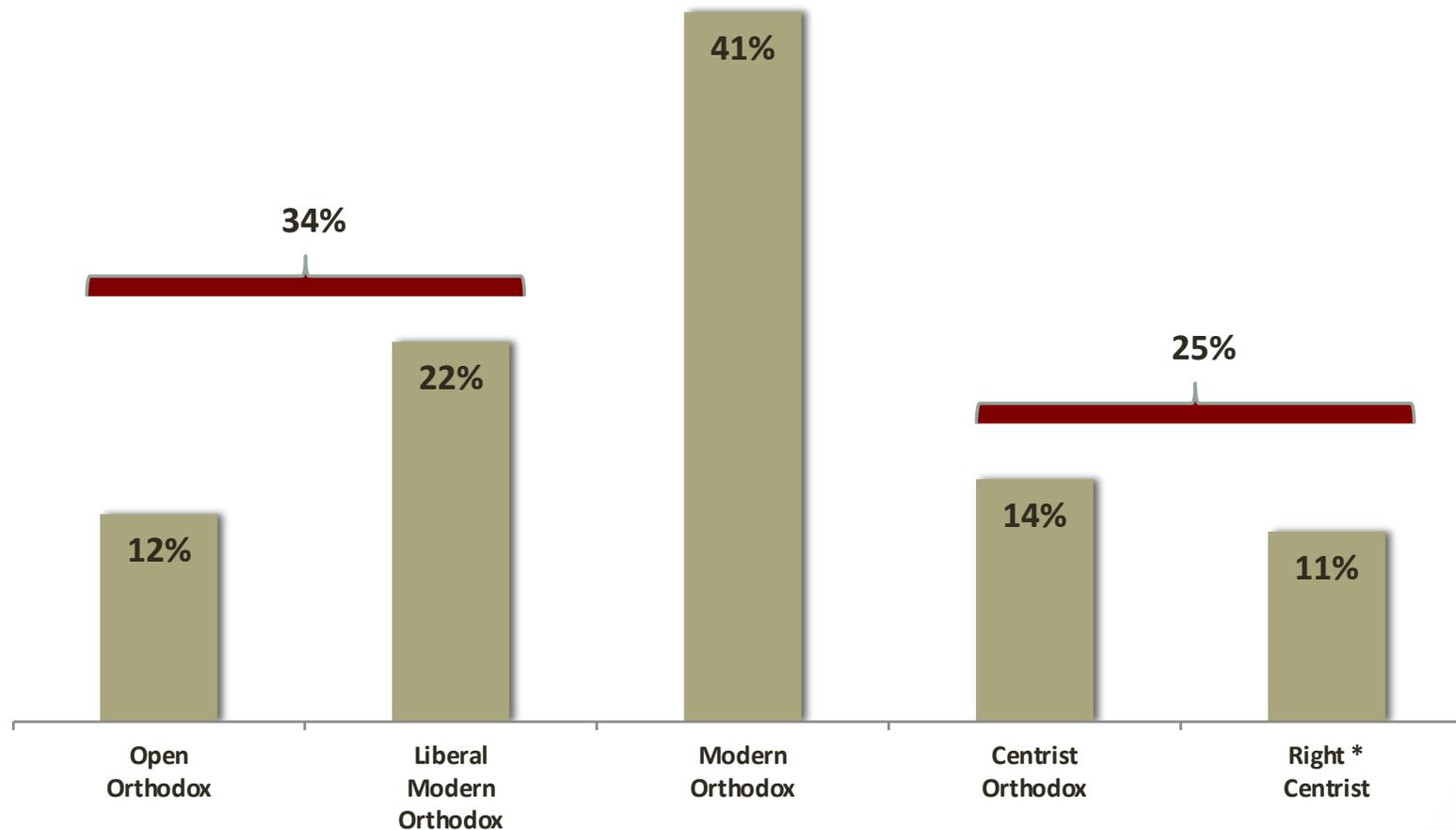
1a – Size and Diversity of the Modern Orthodox Community



Sources: World Jewish Population – Sergio Della Pergola, Hebrew University, *The Times of Israel*, (September 8, 2018); U.S. Jewish Population – Ira M. Sheskin and Arnold Dashefsky, *American Jewish Yearbook 2017*, (Cham, Switzerland, Springer, 2018), 179; U.S. Denominations and % Modern Orthodox / Haredi – Luis Lugo, Alan Cooperman, et al, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Findings from a Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews*, (Washington, DC, October 1, 2013), 10, updated projections to 2018 by Nishma Research. The data above have been estimated and projected as of January 2020.

1b – Modern Orthodox Diversity – The Most Heterogeneous in American Jewry

You indicated that you are Modern Orthodox or Centrist Orthodox. Within that group, which of the following labels best describes your personal approach to your Judaism?



Source: The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews (2017)

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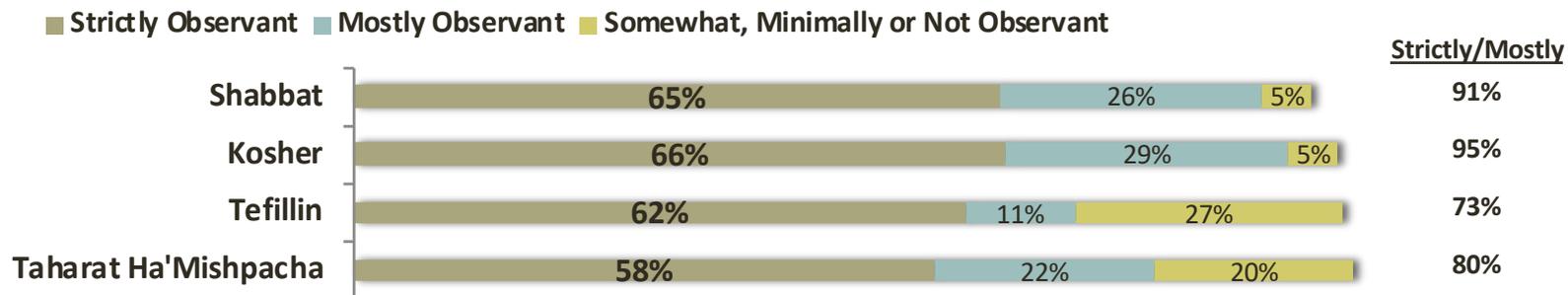
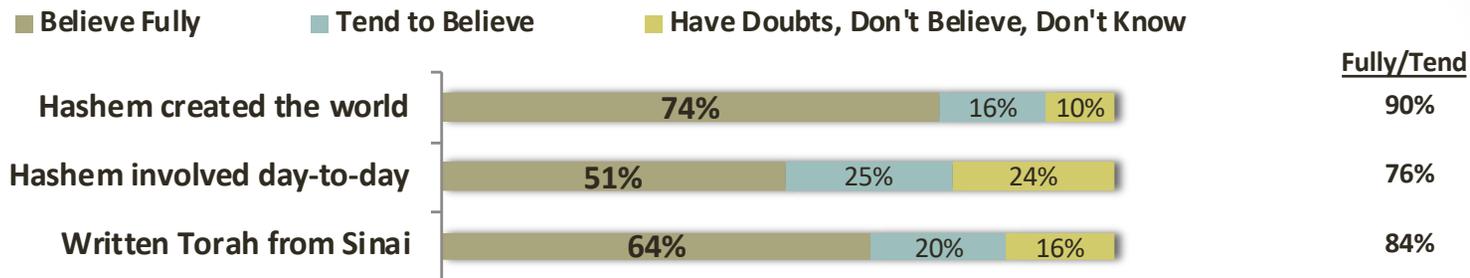
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2 – Modern Orthodox Beliefs and Practices: Uniformity of Normative Behaviors

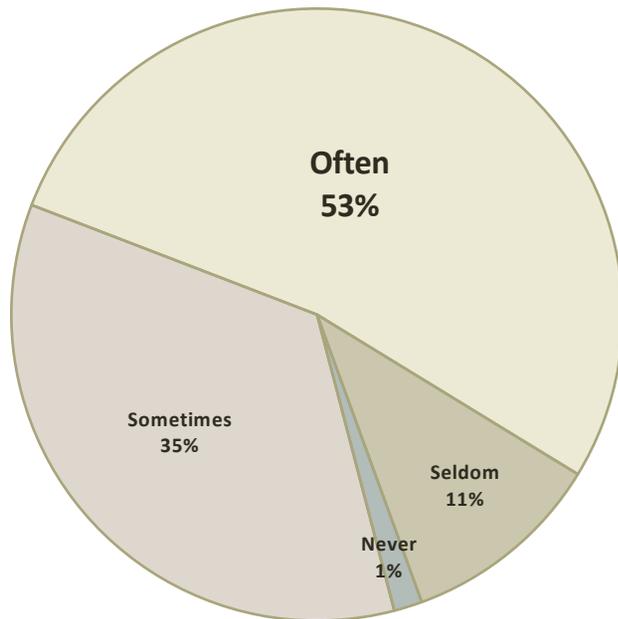


- Gender – Men and women have equally strong religious beliefs and are similarly very observant of Shabbat and kashrut. Women are a bit more observant of *taharat ha'mishpacha*.
- Age – Younger respondents (ages 18-34) less often believe in the divinity of the Torah, both written and oral, and less often put on *tefillin* (lower among those ages 18-44).

Source: The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews (2017)

3a – Positive Interactions With Secular Society

Frequency of Positive Interaction
Between Orthodoxy and Secular Society



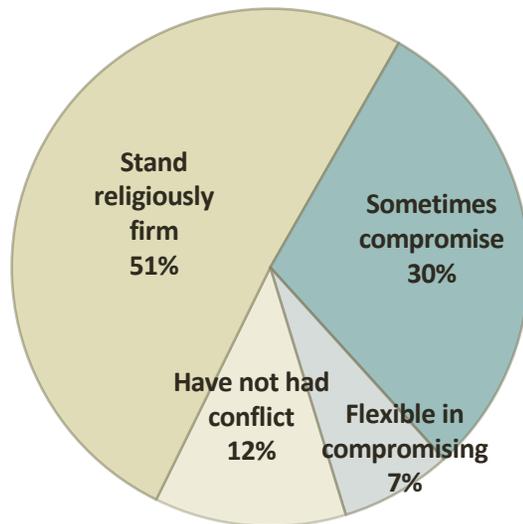
Positive Interactions – Sample Verbatim Responses

- *As an orthodox Jew and a professional woman, I find that often one can create a positive impression of orthodoxy.*
- *Active support for policies I view as consistent with Jewish values, such as taking care of the stranger and support political candidates who embrace those values.*
- *Judaism has core values and principals that are of interest to non-Jews, and those principals guide me every day and help me be centered and productive in a world that is anything but centered. They keep me grounded in truth and focused properly.*
- *Religious values and commitment ground me and help me to act with integrity in the secular world. Non-Jewish coworkers appreciate my sincerity and willingness to respond to their inquiries about religion. I where it proudly and see myself as an ambassador for Orthodox Judaism that is also willing to treat them with respect.*
- *Maybe not secular society -- but within world of non-Orthodox Jews. I feel that I present myself as an open-minded Orthodox Jew, which is sometimes new to Jews who have only met judgmental Orthodox Jews.*
- *Science and secular research inform my religious views, and my religious views allow me to think critically about secular issues.*

Source: Nishma Research – The Successes, Challenges, and Future of American Modern Orthodoxy (2019)

3b – Challenges Arising From Interactions With Secular Society

How Conflict With Secular Society is Handled



Area	%	Sample Verbatim Comments
Kashrut, work-related	25%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nibbling at foods at a work event that are not strictly kosher. • Business meetings at non-kosher restaurants. • Kashrut is the biggest challenge, interacting with society and work colleagues.
Kashrut, family, socially, in general	18%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My family is not religious, they buy kosher meat but I eat off their dishes. • Non-kosher restaurants in order to satisfy family obligations.
Shabbat, driving or other violation	11%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driving when family drives to religious events, such as shul or a faraway seder. • Early breaking of Shabbos to participate in social engagements.
Shabbat, actions not in proper spirit	8%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spend Shabbos somewhere to attend a work function that spills into Shabbos. • Not necessarily breaking Shabbos but definitely compromising the spirit.
Shabbat, working	6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obligations to serving clients sometimes gets me home late on a Friday. • Conferences over weekends made keeping Shabbat impossible.
Head covering	6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May leave yarmulke off for certain meetings. • Stopped covering my hair ... it was just weird to wear a hat every day.
Working on chag	3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes do not observe the second day of yontif (due to job). • Two-day chagim are difficult to observe in the business world.
Ideological compromise	3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have a gay (relative); attended his wedding. • Legal views (comment by an attorney) in conflict with my Orthodox beliefs.
Hiding one's Orthodoxy	3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being less vocal about my Judaism, taking the attention away from myself. • Generally not wanting to appear Jewish in work-related circumstances.

3c –Are Interactions With Secular Society a Cause of Fragmentation?

	Area	%	Sample Verbatim Comments
Changes That Are Desired	Role of Women ↑	52%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Many more women in clergy and leadership positions, more honest conversations about sexism and racism in the community and how to educate against them, compassion and welcoming toward LGBT members of our community, more focus on spirituality ... a more world-centric focus toward the very real problems humanity is facing right now.</i> • <i>Our women (and men) are crying out for female leaders. Our current (male) leaders are (more) obsessed with figuring out what titles female leaders should have ... than in serving the needs of Orthodox women and girls.</i> • <i>I don't believe Modern Orthodoxy's "halachic leadership" has a coherent plan on any women's issues, especially since none of them are women.</i>
	LGBTQ	17%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>More accepting of LGBTQ Jews. It's not our place to judge them. We need to support these members of our community.</i>
	Agunot	6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The agunah problem should have been resolved years and years ago.</i>
	General Thoughts		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The halachah needs to be seen as a living document that changes in response to the times. Our poskim need to understand the enormous social trends occurring in our society and change our standards accordingly.</i> • <i>It's about respecting diversity of opinions within Orthodoxy and not trying to always define people as in or out.</i>
Changes Viewed as Not Desirable	Role of Women	14%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The role of women as "clergy" ... more equality for women. A liberal agenda similar to the secular liberal agenda.</i> • <i>It's great to have women role models, and Yoatzot for women, and women that other women can turn to, but the official labeling of Rabbi's and having them as pulpit figures, I think is going a bit far.</i>
	LGBTQ	5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Celebration of LGBT activity (we must accept everybody ... but not celebrate that which is prohibited)</i>
	Tzniut	2%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tzniut -- low necklines, high hems, cap sleeves -- in shul, no less!</i>
	The Move to the "Left" in General		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>There is a general understanding that the communal norms of Modern Orthodoxy are more important than the Mesorah and minhag, in strong contradistinction with the thought of the Rav.</i> • <i>Letting secular values dictate how we decide halacha (feminism, homosexuality, etc.) instead halachic process.</i> • <i>Children going to public school is too accepted as a norm. Dressing modestly is not seen as a value.</i>

Role of women is the most desired change, but also where some see changes as not desirable

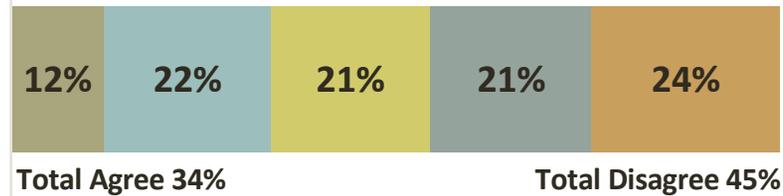
Source: Nishma Research – The Successes, Challenges, and Future of American Modern Orthodoxy (2019)

Q. You indicated that Modern Orthodoxy is too focused on “drawing lines” ... and not focused enough on making changes. What changes do you feel are needed? ... and ... Q. You indicated that Modern Orthodoxy is too focused on making changes and does not preserve tradition enough. What changes do you feel are not desirable?

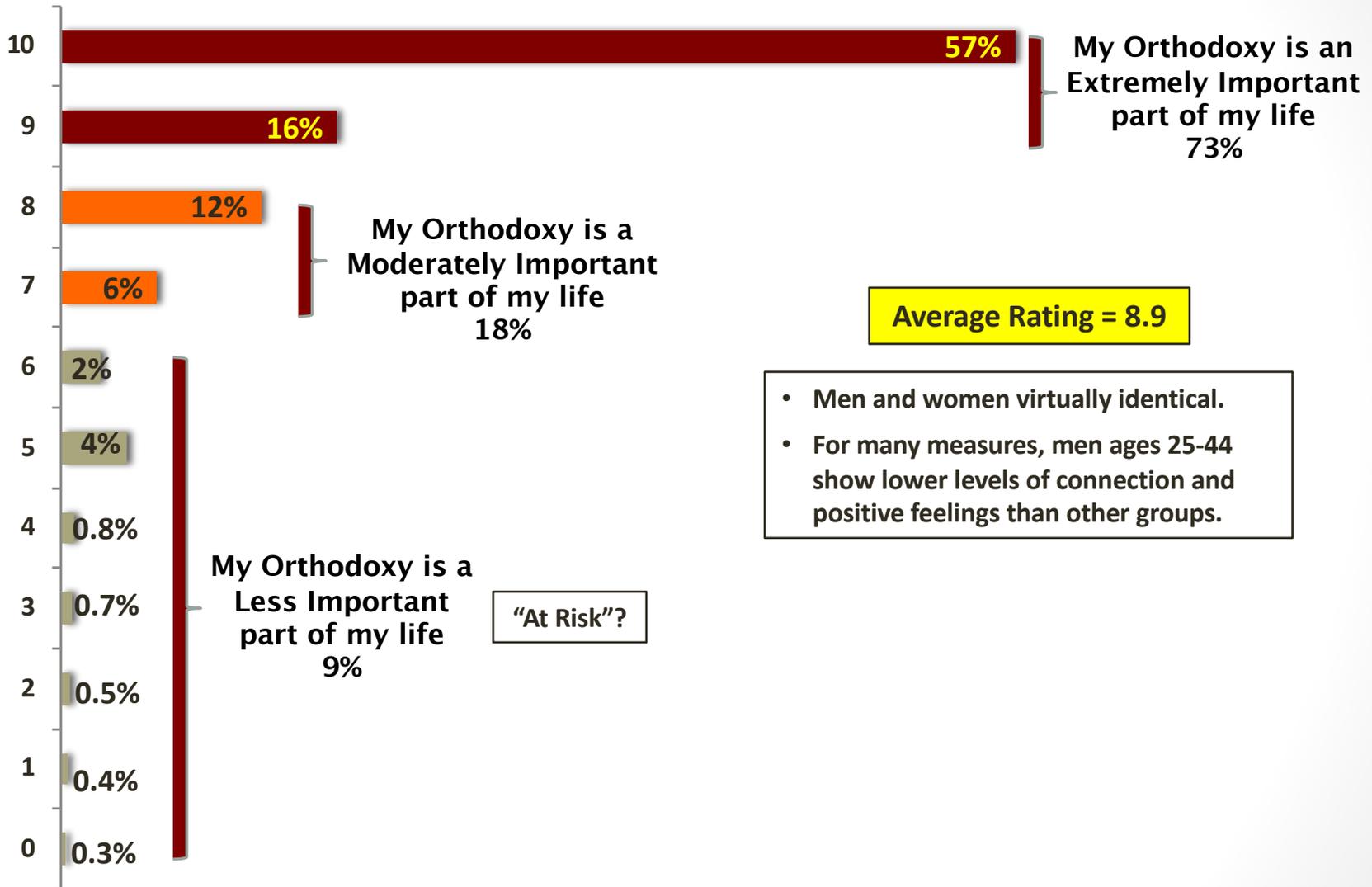
3d –Are Interactions With Secular Society a Cause of Fragmentation?

■ Agree Fully ■ Agree Somewhat ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree ■ Disagree Somewhat ■ Disagree Fully

There is no longer a single, cohesive Modern Orthodox community. Modern Orthodoxy should acknowledge this and would perhaps be better off splitting into separate camps.



4a – Importance of Orthodoxy / Observance – "On a scale from 0 to 10 — where 0 = do not agree, 5 = somewhat agree and 10 = fully agree — to what extent do you agree with the statement: Being an Orthodox / Observant Jew is an important part of my life?"



Source: The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews (2017)

4b – Importance of Orthodoxy / Observance - Drivers of Orthodox Observance

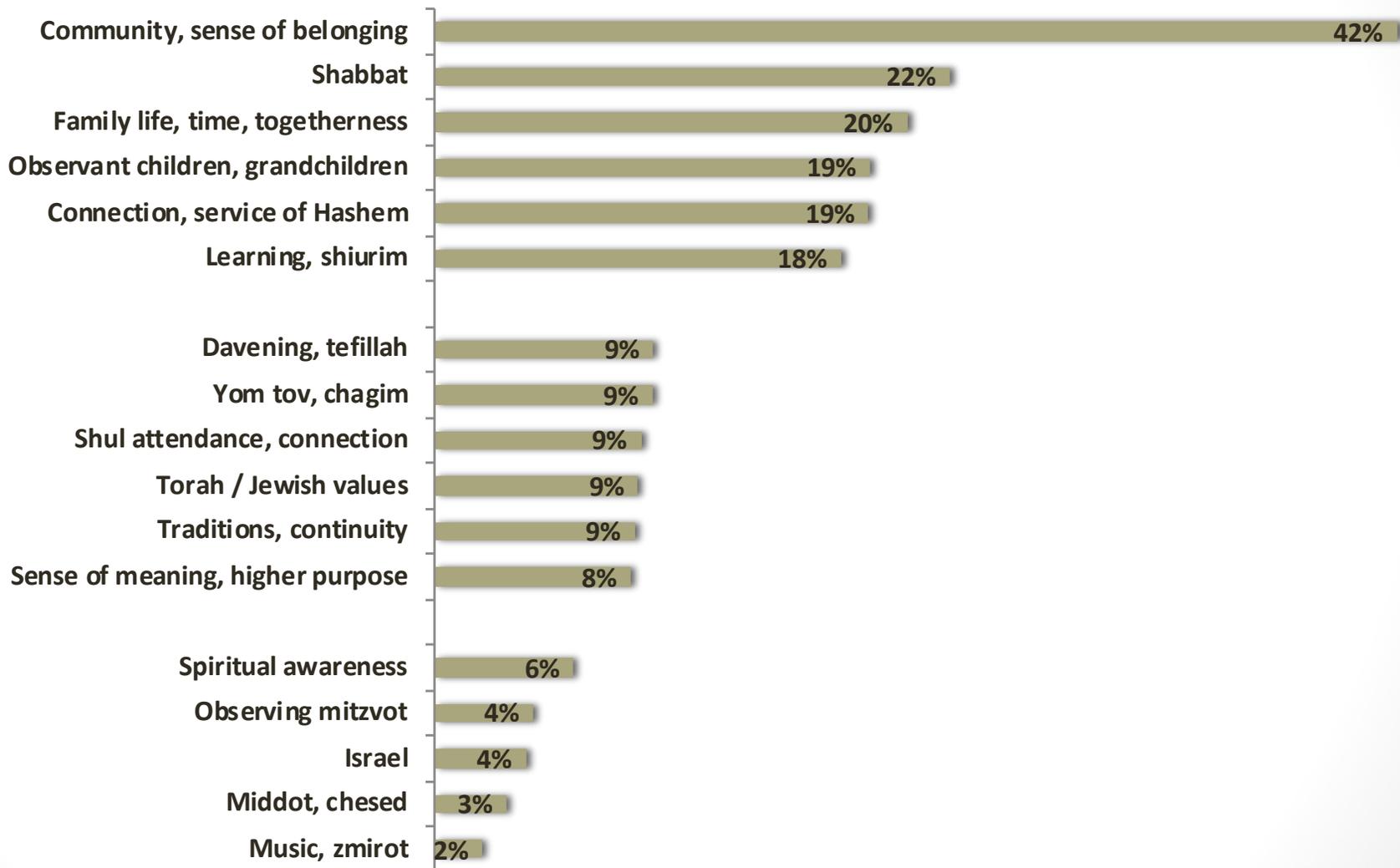
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What gives the most satisfaction, joy or meaning to your life as an Orthodox / Observant Jew?



Source: The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews (2017)

4c – Importance of Orthodoxy / Observance - Drivers of Orthodox Observance

"I think community is what gives me the greatest happiness. Being around other like-minded people who share a Torah lifestyle together is where it all starts."

"Being part of an observant community in which Shabbat and chagim and smachot are celebrated with joy."

"The strong family values and lessons for children; The "forced" breaks from everyday life to appreciate family and rest; Knowing there is more meaning to life than going to work every day and accumulating material objects."

"Trying to be a better person, including relations with others. Acting ethically according to Jewish orthodox values. Continuing to learn more to understand Hashem's direction for us in the world."

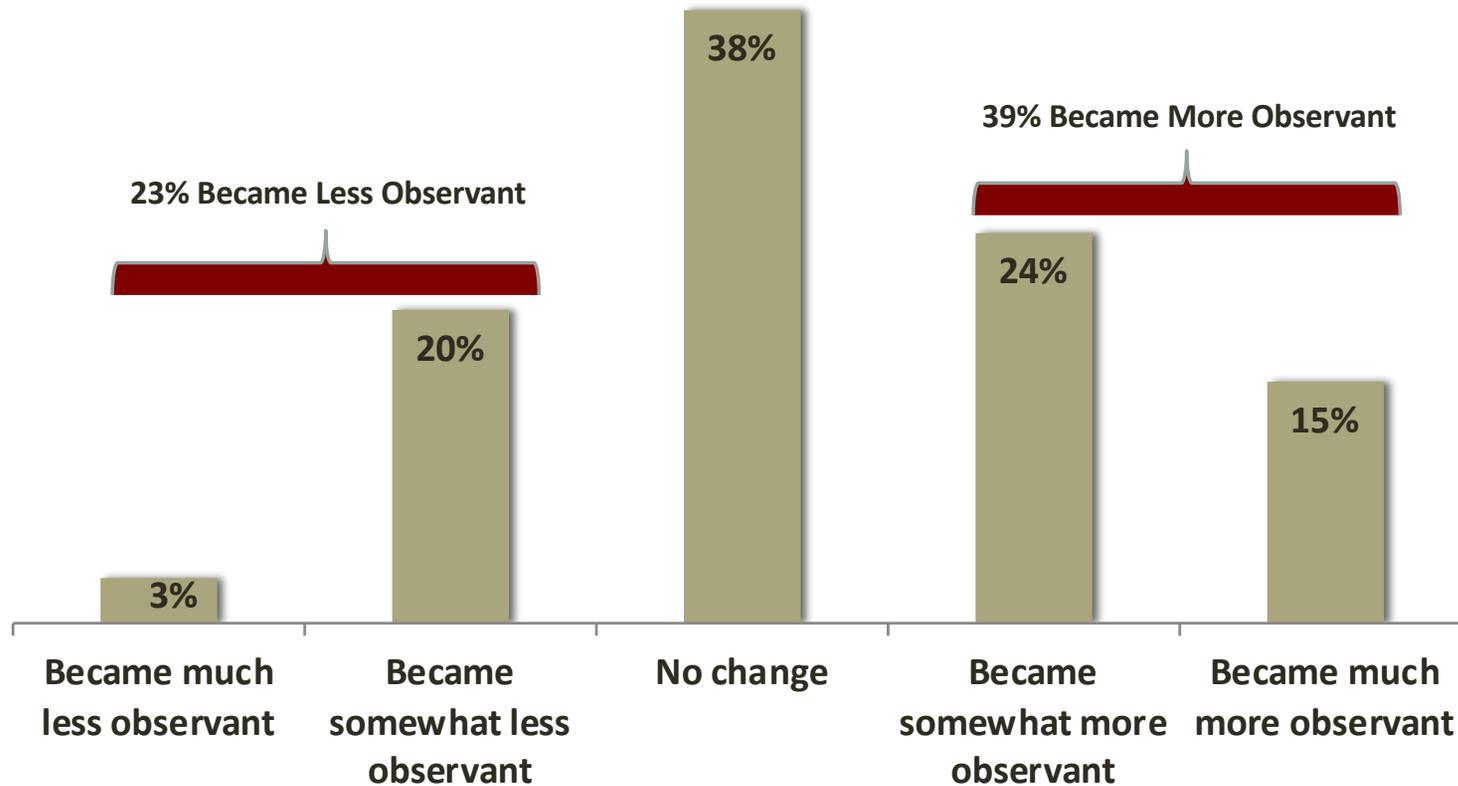
"I feel like I'm making the world a better place by being an oved Hashem."

"Seeing the children follow in the orthodox tradition and raising the grandchildren this way."

"Being part of a community that will help one another in good and difficult times and together grow in acts of Torah and chesed."

"I love my religion and community. I am blessed to be able to raise my children in such a committed community, both synagogue and schools. Shabbat is wonderful but there is so much torah learning going on during the week as well."

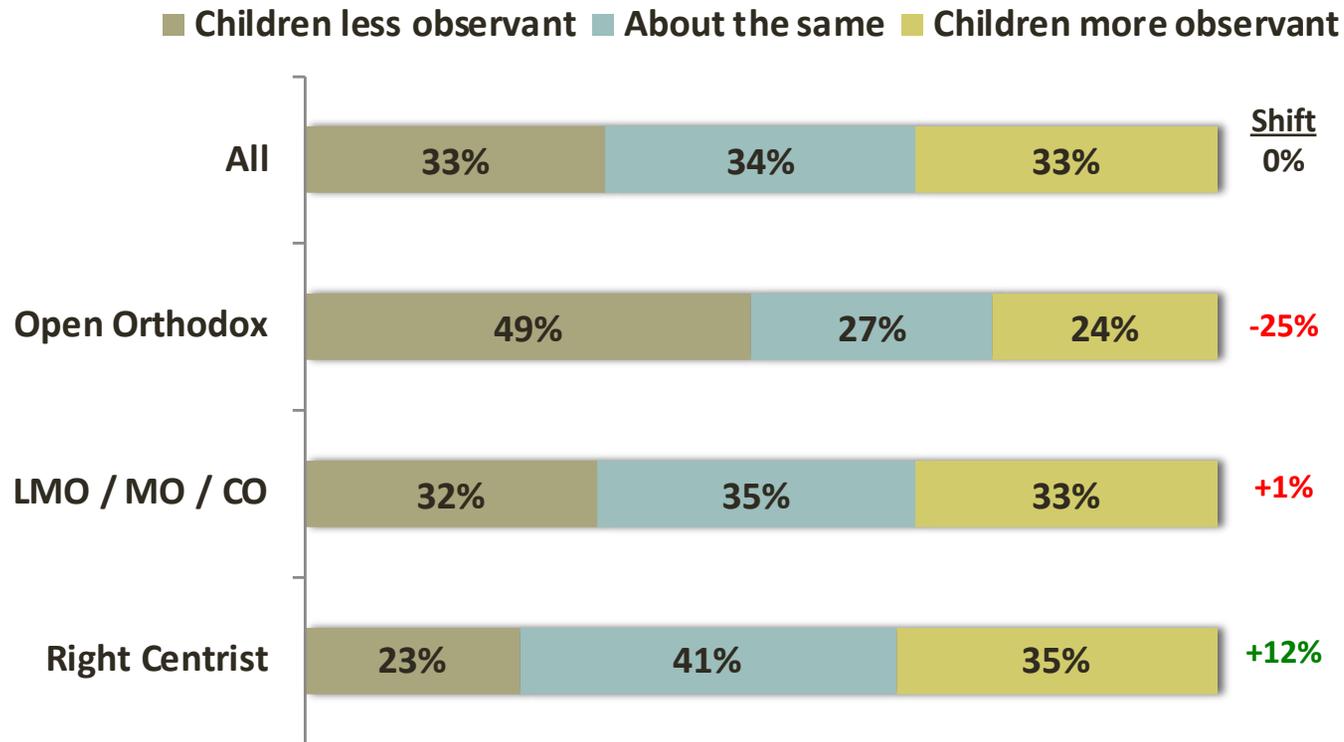
5a – Shifts in Observance



The Shift to the Right:

- **Overall +16%** (39% minus 23%)
- **Men +21%** (41% minus 20%)
- **Women +12%** (37% minus 25%)

5b – Shifts in Observance – The Next Generation



Is there a future for social orthodoxy?

5c – Shifts in Observance – The Next Generation

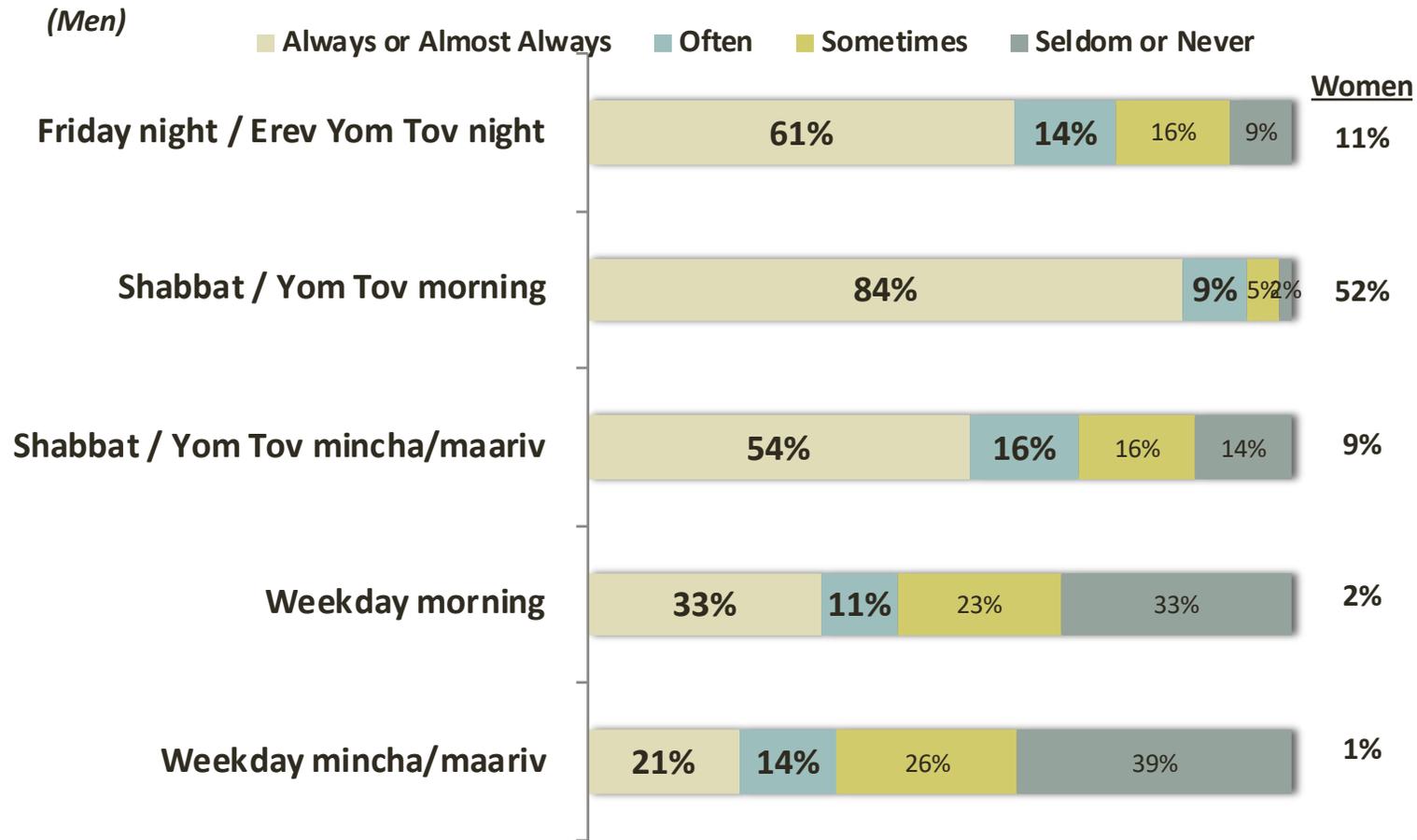
Children Less Observant

- *Difficulty believing in Hashem. Questioning the value of halachah.*
- *Does not appear to have any issue having a non-Jewish partner. Non-practicing; maintains an agnostic/atheistic perspective.*
- *Involvement of women in synagogue services.*
- *He is not completely shomer Shabbat*
- *His wife does not always cover her hair and occasionally wears shorts and pants.*
- *Far too liberal.*
- *Doesn't follow halacha but has a very strong Jewish identity.*
- *My oldest child has come out as gay. I want to find a place within Judaism in which s/he feels accepted, included, and not 'b'dieved.' I don't believe this will happen in the Orthodox world.*
- *More progressive on women's issues.*
- *We are in sync theologically and halachically. Getting him to daven regularly is a hurdle, but that's an action issue, not perspective.*

Children More Observant

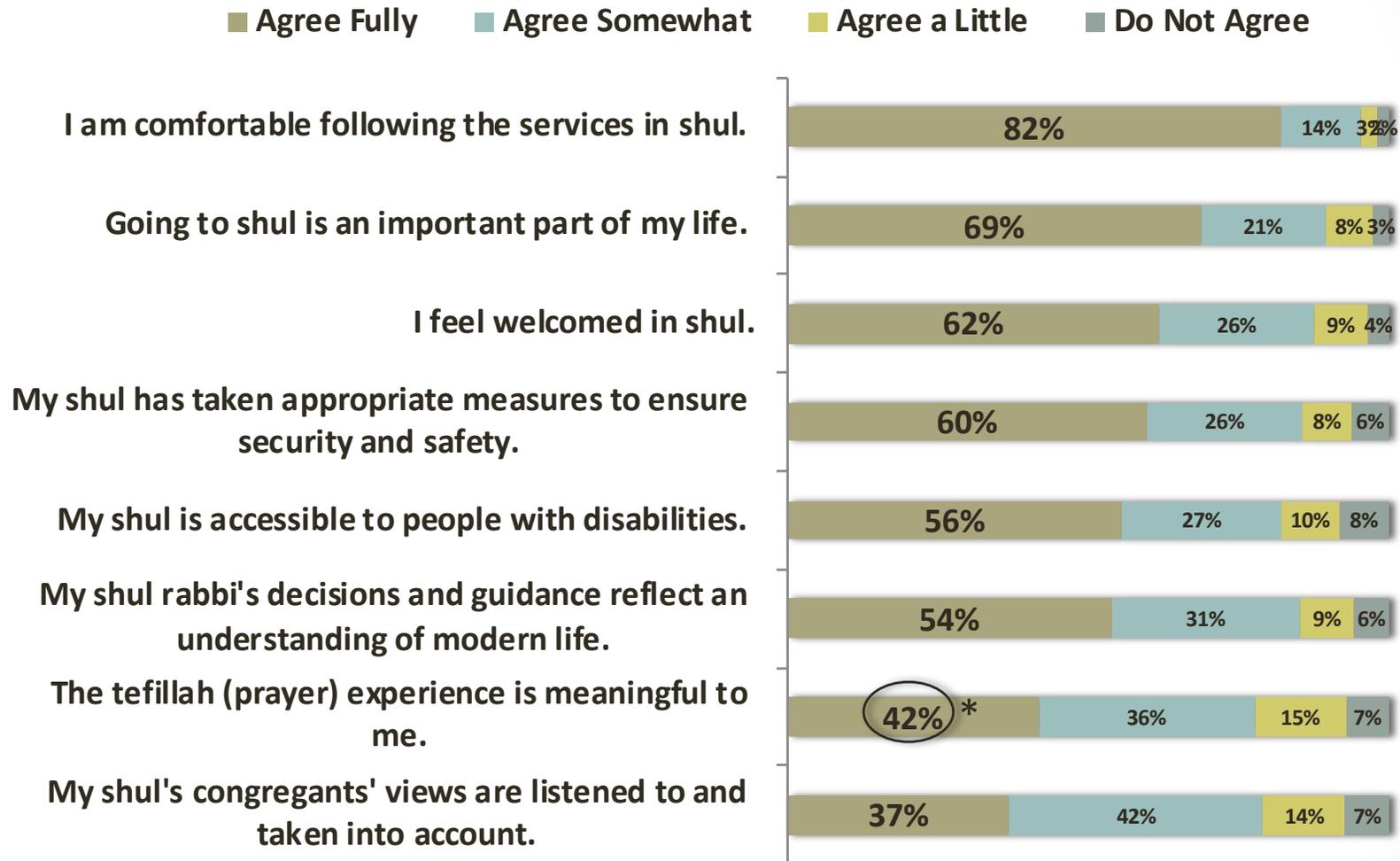
- *Covering her hair.*
- *Daas Torah. She has a "rebbe." We do not.*
- *Davens every day. Wears his Yarmulka always at work.*
- *The degree to which girls and women must cover up their bodies and hair (married women), not go mixed swimming, not use hot water on Shabbat.*
- *He is much more personally committed to Judaism as the central core of his identity.*
- *More "Yeshivish" and married to a more halachically aware person, thus they tend to be more engaged.*
- *More oriented to his Yeshiva rabbeim for guidance; desire to live a more cloistered life; less comfortable engaging with those who are not similar to him in religious observance and perspective; less comfortable pursuing college education and employment while maintaining a strong connection to torah learning.*

6a – Shul Attendance



Source: The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews (2017)

6b – Shul Attitudes



* Age <45 32%; Age 45-54 37%; Age 55+ 50%

Source: The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews (2017)

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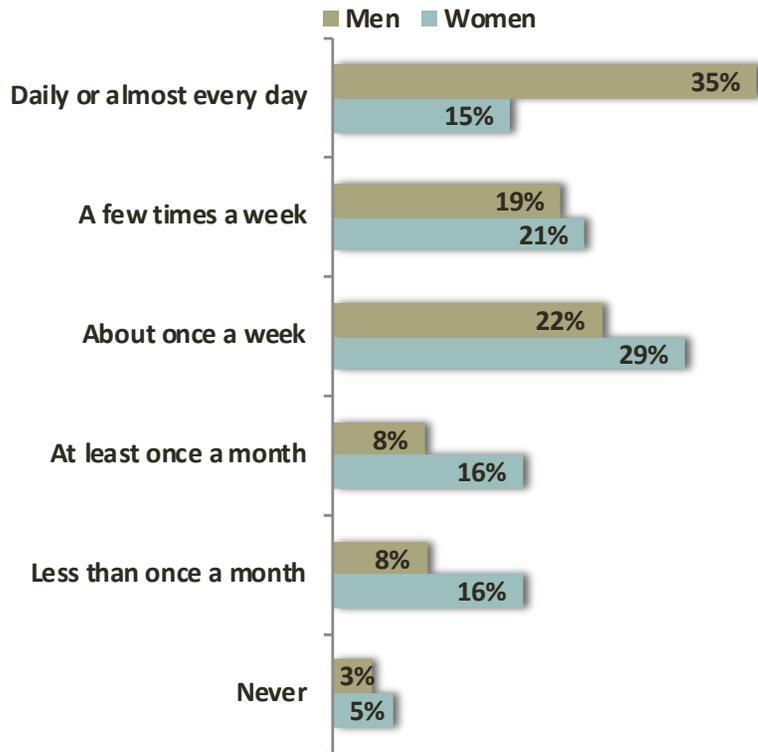
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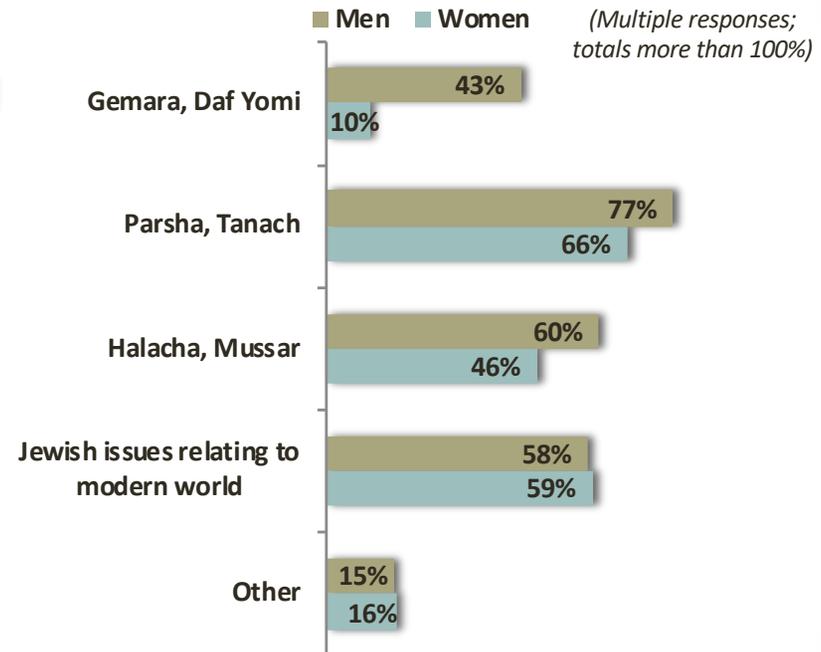
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7a – Learning – Frequency and Topics

How Often People Study Jewish Topics



What Topics Are Studied

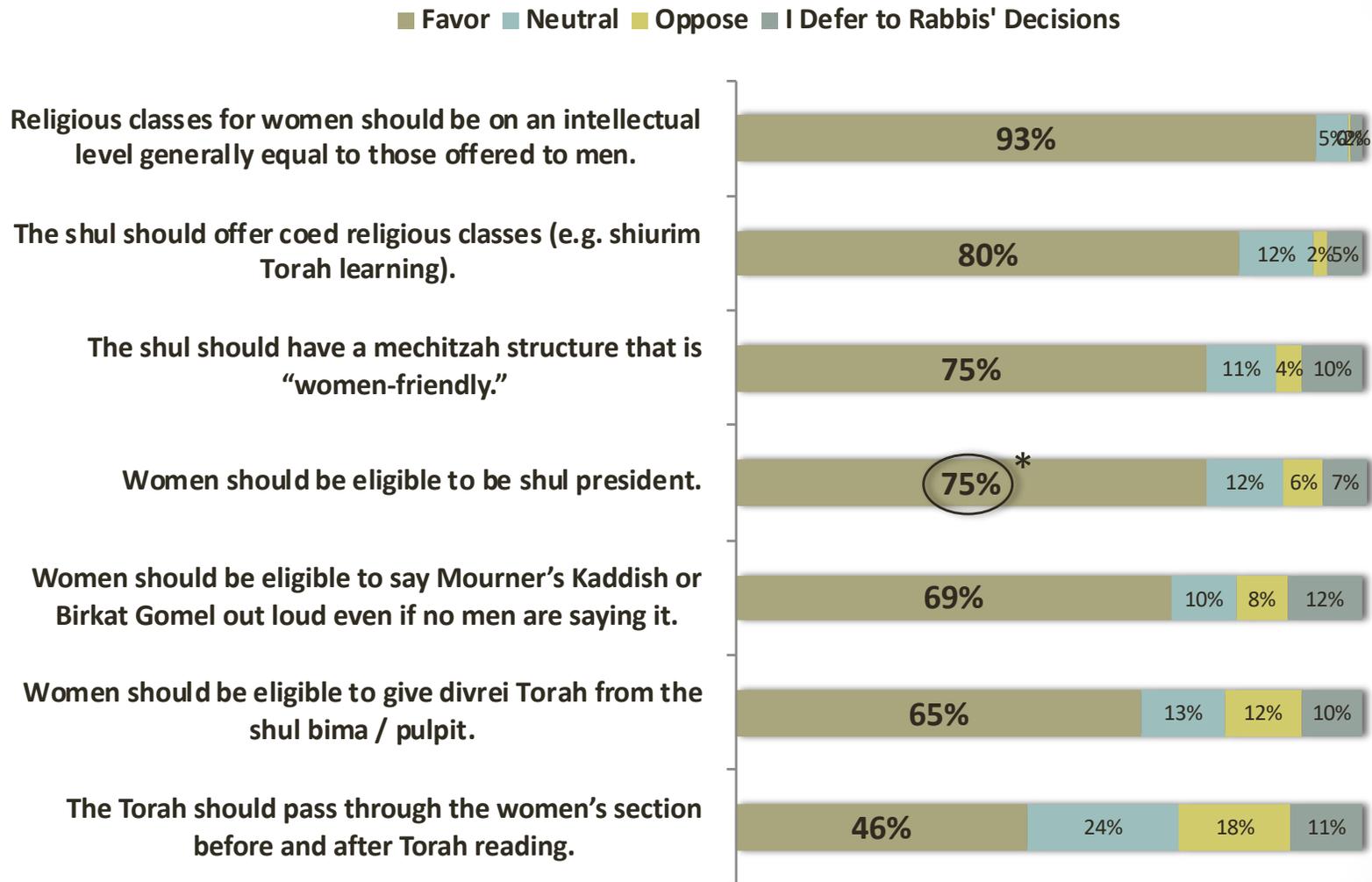


- Among other topics, those mentioned by more than 1% of respondents were Jewish history (2%), Jewish philosophy (2%), Mishna (1.5%), Chasidut (1%) and tefillah (1%).

7b – Learning – What People Want to Learn

- *Sensitivity toward shul and davening.*
- *Understanding that Judaism is incompatible with homophobia, Islamophobia, and all the other hatreds that so many Jews have.*
- *Beginner levels. Every synagogue assumes all are familiar and know all topics. Introducing basics is important for all to follow.*
- *Mishmar for women on Thursday nights.*
- *Chillul Hashem, business ethics, actual halachos of tznius (not chumros).*
- *Classes in learning davening for the Amud.*
- *Classes on how to pray, follow the Siddur. Talmud classes for women.*
- *Moral challenges that leaders and lay people face in the community*
- *Ethics and halachah as it pertains to modern life.*
- *Training for all Rabbis and teachers in Yeshiva day schools in how to resolve seeming contradictions between science and religion and comparative religion. These are topics that many high school kids bring up and they need to be addressed.*

8a – Role of Women – Shul Policies and Practices



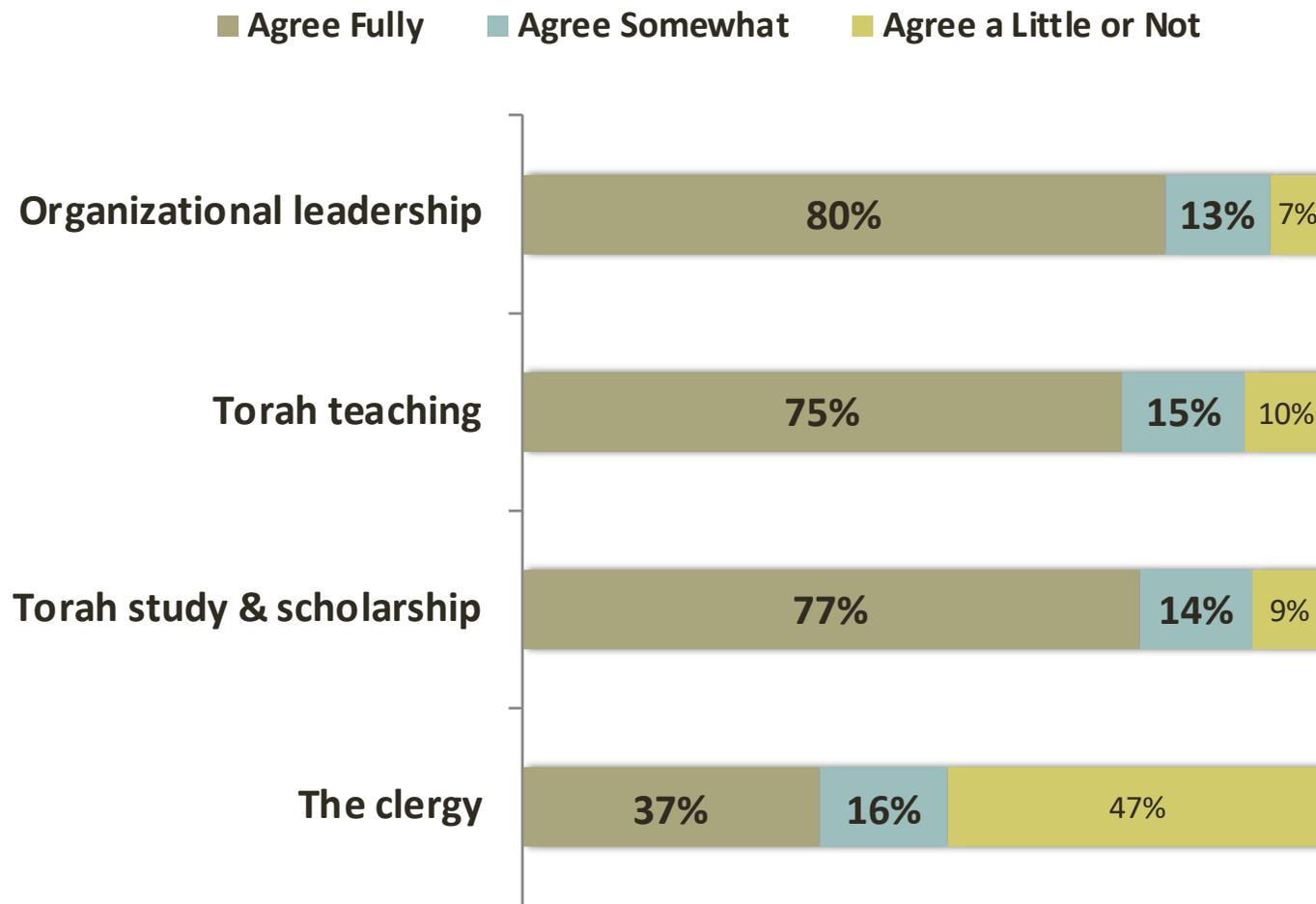
* Open/Liberal 95%, MO 73%, Centrist 58%, Right Centrist 29%

Source: The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews (2017)

8b – Role of Women – Shul Policies and Practices – Importance and Satisfaction

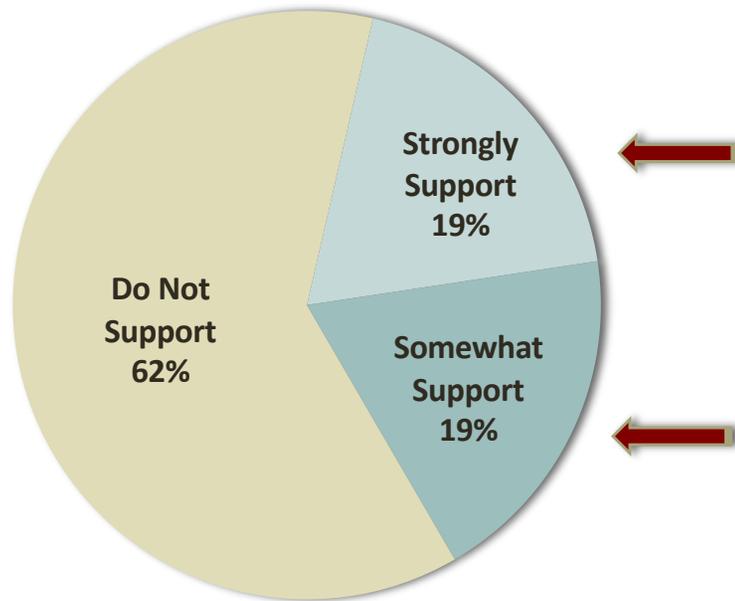
Practices and Policies		Very Important	Very/Somewhat Satisfied
1. High intellectual level of women's classes		92%	49%
2. Women-friendly mechitzah	Extremely Important	91%	43%
3. Women say mourner's Kaddish		90%	47%
4. Speak from the amud/pulpit		89%	49%
5. Honor female life cycle events		85%	62%
6. Women on ritual committee		82%	29%
7. Women may be president	Very Important	81%	54%
8. Women say Birkat Gomel		81%	54%
9. Coed religious classes		78%	39%
10. Have lulav and etrog		77%	72%
11. Torah passes through women's section	Somewhat Important	65%	29%
12. Women carry Torah		61%	23%
13. Religious positions with "rabbinic title"		56%	23%
14. Lead Kiddush and Havdalah		39%	12%
15. Prayer for agunot		33%	11%
16. Women do keriya Hatorah	Less Important	32%	13%
17. Lead parts of service not requiring minyan		32%	9%
18. Torah olim names of both father & mother		31%	21%
19. Wear tallit and/or tefillin		24%	24%
20. Women's tefillah group		22%	31%

8c – Role of Women – Attitudes toward opportunities for expanded roles



8d – Role of Women – Clergy Positions

“If Modern Orthodox or Centrist Orthodox women are given expanded roles in the clergy (of those who agreed), how important is it to you that they also be given some sort of title signifying their “rabbinic authority”? – Very important; Somewhat important; Not too important; Not at all important; Don’t know”

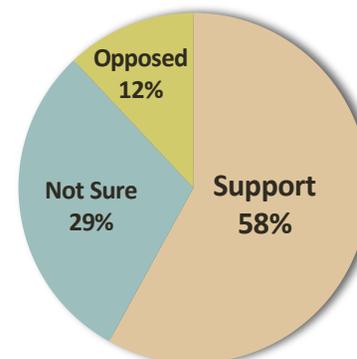


Agree fully that women should have the opportunity for expanded roles in the clergy and rate it as very important that they have a title signifying rabbinic authority.

Support among segments: Open Orthodox 60%, Liberal MO 33%, MO/Centrist/Right-Centrist 8%

Agree fully or somewhat that women should have the opportunity for expanded roles in the clergy and rate it as very or somewhat important that they have a title signifying “rabbinic authority” (net of those strongly supporting)

Impact of Societal Trends on Modern Orthodoxy: Support for Shuls Accepting Gays



35% among Centrist and Right Centrist

Source: The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews (2017)

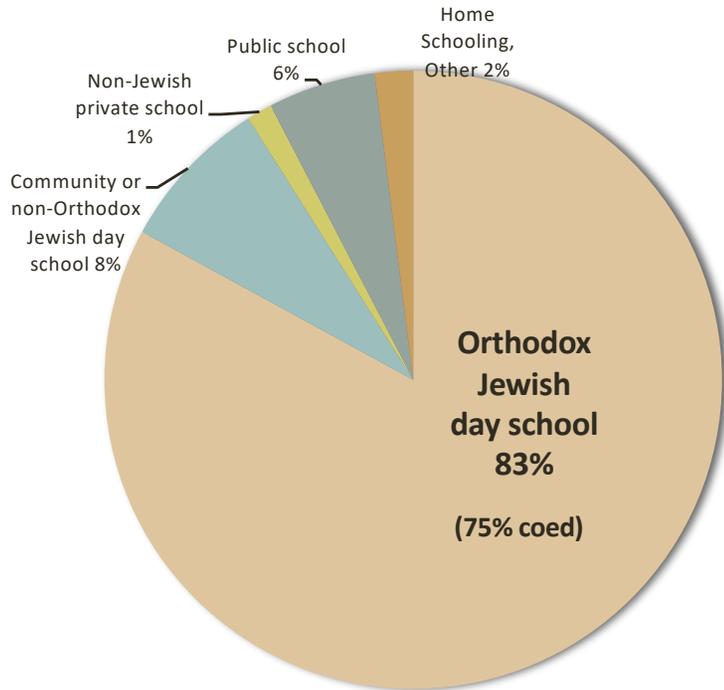
8e – Role of Women

“Orthodoxy has been unwilling to deal meaningfully with many modern challenges, including women's issues, gay issues, cultural issues (especially with regard to children), and academic issues (like Biblical scholarship and other challenges to traditional faith).”

“Being excluded as a women from leadership, ritual, etc. Wondering how I can raise my daughters to feel that they are fully equal in the Orthodox community. Seeing LGBT friends leave Orthodoxy ... because communities don't make a place for them and would rather pretend they don't exist.”

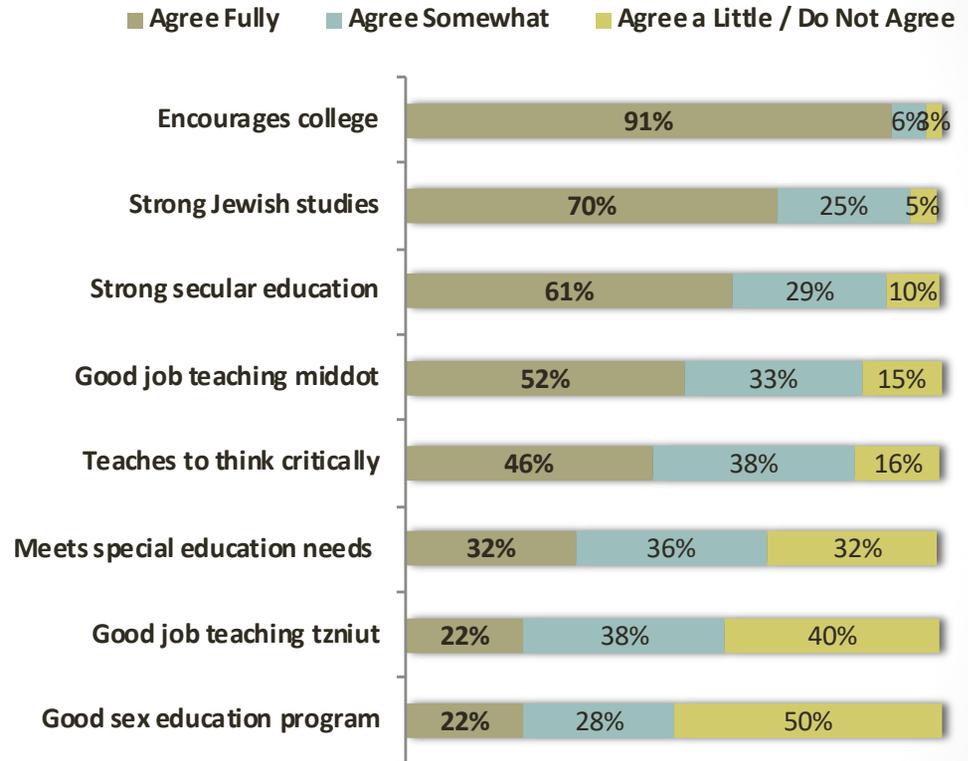
9 – Children’s Education

Type of Schools Attended



“Eventually, sending my child(ren) to a public school might be an option to consider.” 14% agree fully; 17% agree somewhat (2019)

Rating Orthodox Day School Performance

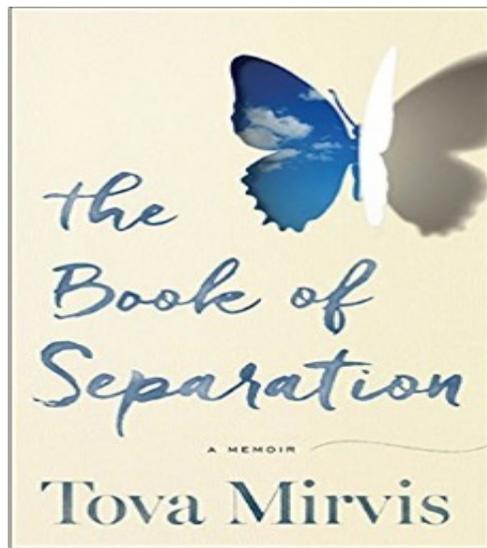
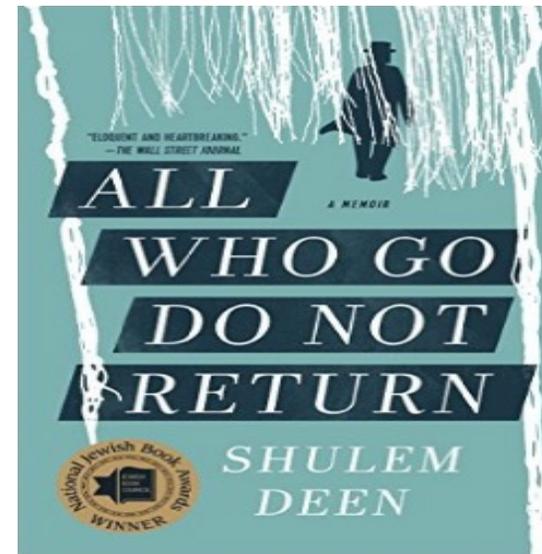
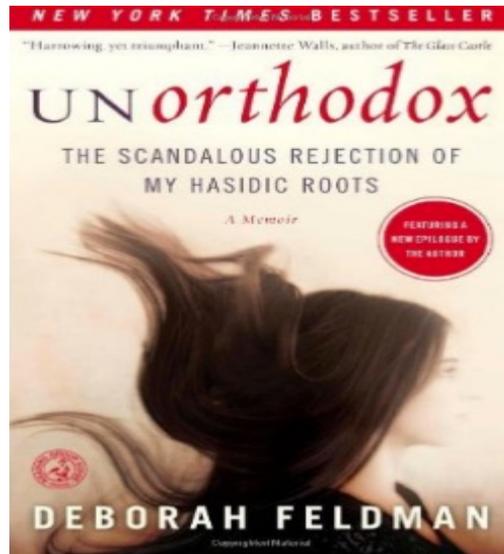


Sources: The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews (2017) and The Successes, Challenges, and Future of American Modern Orthodoxy (2019)

10 – Baalei Teshuvah

- 42% of MO are baalei teshuvah.
- The top reasons why they became Orthodox are intellectual attraction or curiosity (53%), seeing Orthodoxy as more authentically Jewish (52%) and more truthful (35%), and connection to Jewish roots and heritage (36%).
- By a very wide margin, the top challenge faced in becoming Orthodox was in their relationships with their parents and family (37%). These relationships were far more challenging than learning and knowing what to do as an Orthodox observant person (cited by 16%), social aspects and friends (13%), and kashrut (12%).
- Levels of religiosity continue to change. Half say they continued to become more observant over time, as they have learned more and as they gradually moved toward greater observance. But one in four says they have become less observant and gradually more lenient.
- 83% say that they have “held onto” things from their pre-Orthodox life, which are not commonly found in the Orthodox world, most often citing left-of-center political views (20%) and socially liberal views (12%).
- Between half and two-thirds are fully or mostly comfortable with davening (65%), Jewish learning (53%), and day-to-day Orthodox living (65%). But their comfort levels are significantly lower than those of FFBs for all of these aspects of Orthodox life.

11a – People Leaving Orthodoxy



+ One of Us (2017) ★ 7.1 /10 2,764 Rate This

1h 35min | Documentary | 20 October 2017 (USA)

NETFLIX ORIGINAL DOCUMENTARY (TV-14)
ONE OF US
Leave the faith. Play the game.
NETFLIX | OCTOBER 20
2:14 Trailer
1 VIDEO | 3 IMAGES

Penetrating the insular world of New York's Hasidic community, focusing on three individuals driven to break away despite threats of retaliation.

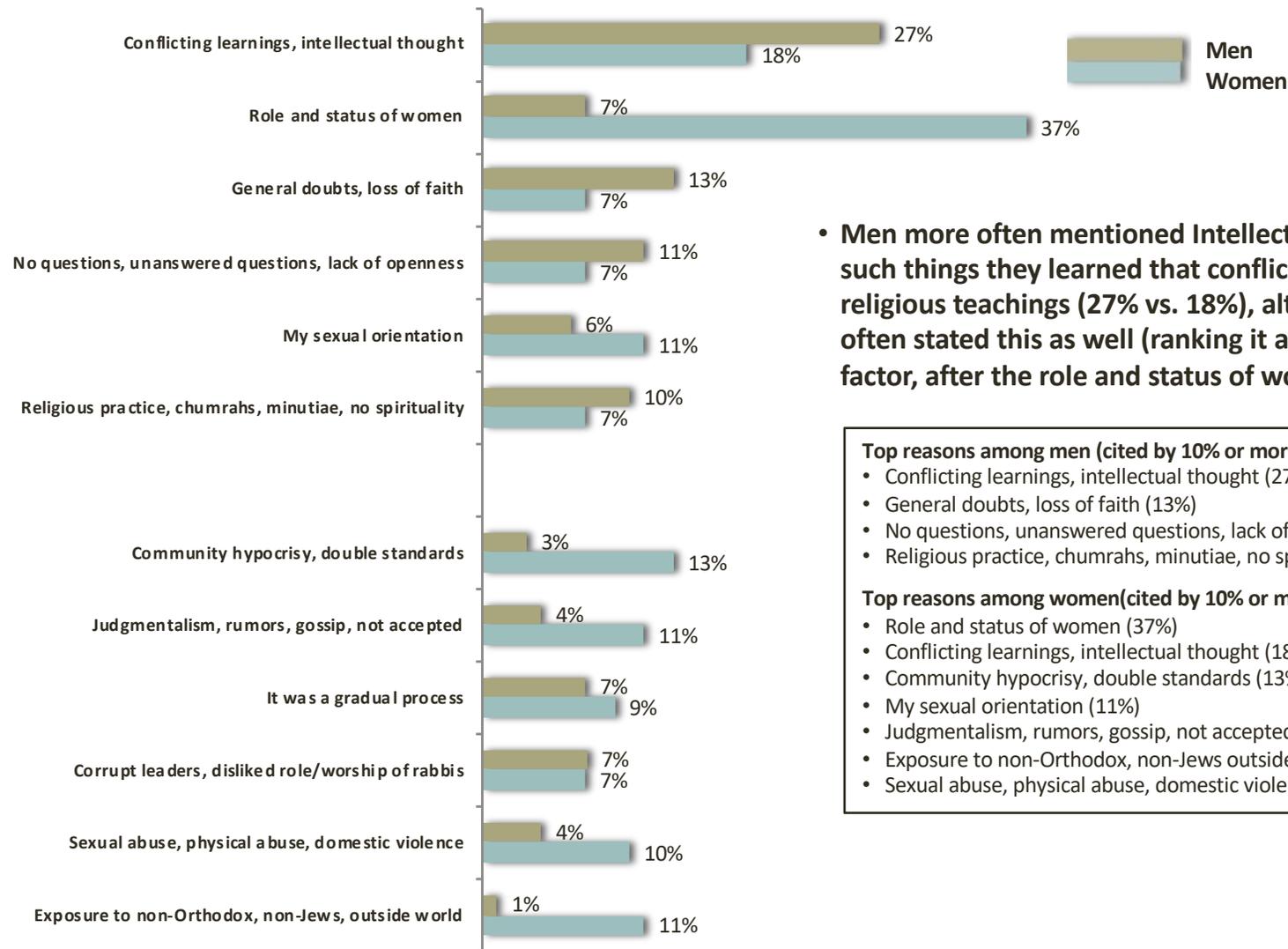
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11b – People Leaving Modern Orthodoxy



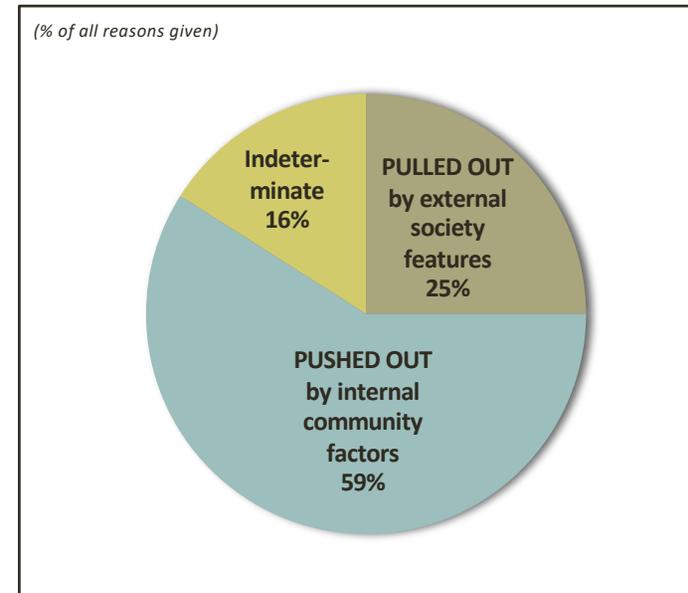
• **Men more often mentioned Intellectual factors, such things they learned that conflicted with religious teachings (27% vs. 18%), although women often stated this as well (ranking it as their #2 factor, after the role and status of women).**

- Top reasons among men (cited by 10% or more):**
- Conflicting learnings, intellectual thought (27%)
 - General doubts, loss of faith (13%)
 - No questions, unanswered questions, lack of openness (11%)
 - Religious practice, chumrahs, minutiae, no spirituality (10%)
- Top reasons among women(cited by 10% or more):**
- Role and status of women (37%)
 - Conflicting learnings, intellectual thought (18%)
 - Community hypocrisy, double standards (13%)
 - My sexual orientation (11%)
 - Judgmentalism, rumors, gossip, not accepted (11%)
 - Exposure to non-Orthodox, non-Jews outside world (11%)
 - Sexual abuse, physical abuse, domestic violence (10%)

Source: Nishma Research – Starting a Conversation: A Pioneering Survey of Those Who Have Left the Orthodox Community (2016)

11c – People Leaving Modern Orthodoxy: Push vs. Pull Factors

- We divided the reasons given for leaving their community into:
 - **Push Factors** – Internal conditions, perceptions or awareness that people dislike and that therefore “push” them away from their community, such as the role/status of women and community hypocrisy/double standards; and
 - **Pull Factors** – External conditions or sources of awareness that are attractive to people and therefore “pull” them out the community, such as scientific knowledge or reading things that contradict beliefs.
 - A few of the reasons given could not be definitively categorized, and are labeled as “indeterminate.”
- The Push Factors exerted more of an influence overall on people leaving their community. Thus, we can conclude that, generally speaking, the community is pushing people out more than the people themselves are seeking to leave.



11d – People Leaving Modern Orthodoxy – In Their Own Words

Responses by Men

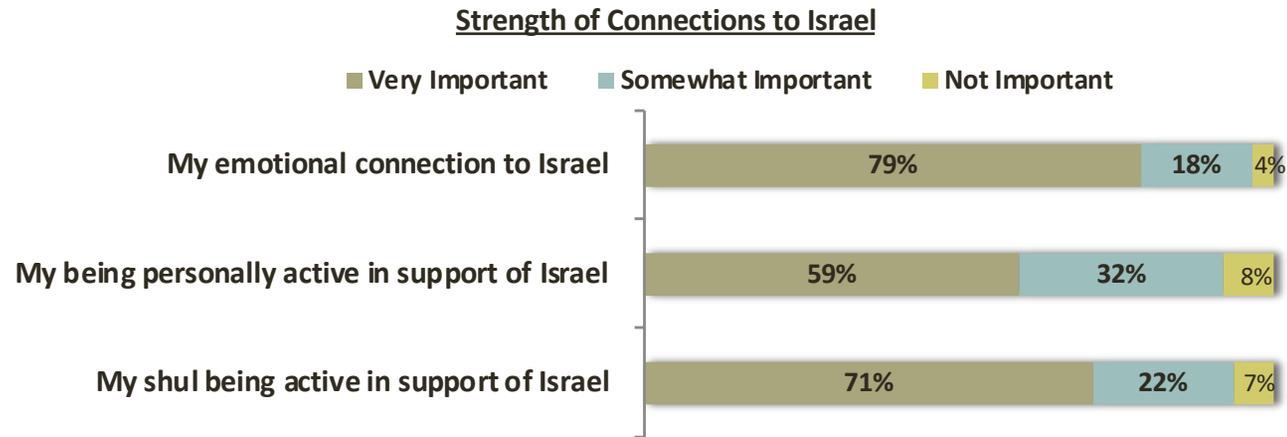
- *I was exposed to new worldviews and philosophies that I preferred to Judaism.*
- *Following halacha made me anxious and made me feel bad about myself whenever I violated it.*
- *1. The immorality of the Biblical God 2. Biblical criticism 3. Lack of egalitarianism 4. Attitudes towards LGBT 5. Halakha man made.*
- *Did not feel comfortable in rigid structure of Orthodoxy, unsatisfied when my questions in class would be answered by the rebbe "because Hashem said so."*
- *Disagreement with elements of Orthodox theology, role of women, perspectives on non-Jews, attitude toward homosexuality.*
- *I never believed, and didn't follow halacha in private, but remained part of orthodox community because I loved the social part of orthodoxy (holidays, shabbat dinners, etc.). Once you hit a certain age (late 20s), there is no comfortable place within the orthodox social structure. Many folks I know stopped practicing when single and reaching their late 20s, though most of those returned to full orthodox practice once they got married and had kids, etc.*

Responses by Women

- *As a woman I could not face a life of being a second class citizen or marrying an Orthodox man who would always see me as lesser. Without that, I would probably have found ways to reconcile my other problems with Orthodoxy.*
- *Couldn't deny my atheism any longer. Was tired of suppressing key parts of myself (bisexuality, atheism, supporter of biblical criticism). Being a victim of rabbinic abuse and seeing the community's really problematic responses.*
- *Enforcement of little things like skirt length in school without penalizing major moral violations like stealing and cheating. Laws don't seem relevant to modern life.*
- *Feminism and lack of acceptable answers as to women's role in Judaism.*
- *I was 14 when I moved away to a religious high school. My parents raised me religious-observant. It was a big "u can't do this. You can't go here. You can't wear this..." Religion had no joy. It was restrictive and suffocating. In this "religious" school I was too modern. Expelled. This may have reinforced my view of religion in a negative light.*
- *Seeing women as nothing but mothers and wives, maybe a teacher, and that's it. Seeing the double standard for men in Judaism and women are merely fluff.*

Source: Nishma Research – Starting a Conversation: A Pioneering Survey of Those Who Have Left the Orthodox Community (2016)

12 – Connections to Israel

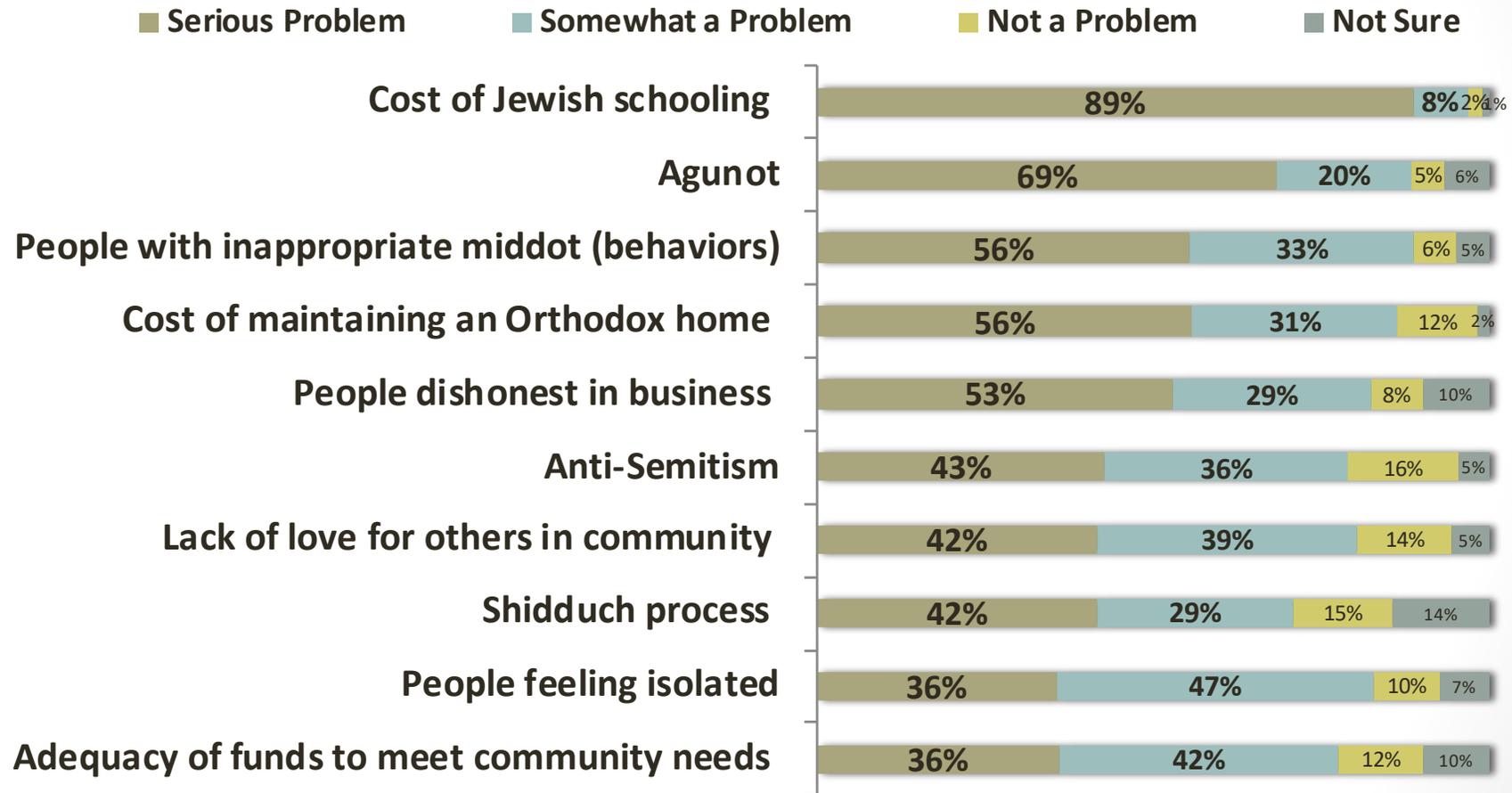


Strength of the Connections to Israel – by Gender, Age and Denominations

% rating very important	All	Men	Women	18-34	35-54	55+	Open /Liberal MO*	MO / Centrist *	Right Centrist
My emotional connection to Israel.	79%	80%	78%	65%	76%	87%	74%	82% ↑	78%
My being personally active in support of Israel.	59%	60%	59%	43%	57%	71%	54%	65% ↑	55%

13a – The Most Important Problems Facing Modern Orthodoxy

Asked for 27 issues: “Do you regard the following as problems facing your Jewish community? – Serious problem; Somewhat a problem; Not a problem; Not sure”



Source: The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews (2017)

13b – The Most Important Problems Facing Modern Orthodoxy

Rank	Issue	% Serious
11	Observant lifestyle but little spiritual meaning	34%
12	Availability of special needs education	33%
13	Rabbis opposed to increased women's roles	32%
14	Needs of the elderly	29%
15	Raising children with religious Jewish values	28%
16	Substance abuse	26%
17	Day school / yeshiva admission policies	26%
18	Rising divorce rates	25%
19	Physical or mental abuse	25%
20	People leaving Orthodoxy	25%
21	Poverty	25%
22	People not committed enough to religious growth	23%
23	Technological and cultural threats	20%
24	Modern Orthodoxy becoming less observant	19%
25	Not enough outreach/ kiruv	18%
26	Modern Orthodoxy becoming more observant	16%
27	Rabbis advocating for increased women's roles	7%

13c – The Most Important Problems – In Their Own Words

“The cost of educating my children. The stress it causes us as parents takes away from whatever benefit they have going to a Jewish day school.”

“The lack of total and unanimous acceptance of the halachic prenuptial agreement and the lack of unanimity in support for Agunot/unwillingness to be an active supporter.”

“Religion is a personal choice. How you behave and conduct yourself and your middot ben adam l’chavero are much more important.”

“The cost of the lifestyle is debilitating ... Food, tuition, and housing! Some of us work three jobs to pay it all. It has pushed me away emotionally. It also caused me to stop having children.”

“Orthodox Jews who are dishonest and unethical in their business and every day lives yet outwardly want the appearance to mask the reality of who they are.”

“Anti-Semitism is all around us. Nothing has really, really changed in the last 100 years!”

“I live in a big community with tons of shuls, schools, grocery stores, and kosher restaurants. However, it feels like people are unfriendly, not interested in meeting new people, and just don't care.”

About Nishma Research

- Nishma was founded in 2015 by Mark Trencher, a former financial industry executive, professor and Jewish communal lay leader (a 1971 *musmach* of the Rabbi Jacob Joseph School).
- Nishma Research focuses on larger-scale communal sociological studies in the Orthodox Jewish community and also provides marketing research to Jewish organizations.
- Nishma is a full-service research firm that supports synagogues, schools, community organizations and other researchers. Nishma conducts custom research, data collection, analysis and presentations employing both quantitative and qualitative research approaches.
- In 2016-2017, Nishma conducted **Starting a Conversation: A Pioneering Survey of Those Who Have Left the Orthodox Community** and **The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews**, both being the first-ever broad, quantitative studies of these groups. In 2019, Nishma conducted **The Successes, Challenges, and Future of American Modern Orthodoxy** and **The Journeys and Experiences of Baalei Teshuvah**, the latter also the first quantitative study undertaken among this group.
- In addition, Nishma has conducted several Jewish organizational member surveys, synagogue member surveys, demographic studies, provided educational consultation, and has shared research findings since 2016 at approximately two dozen synagogues and conferences.
- “Nishma” means “we listen” – and our mission includes conducting more than 50% of our research on a pro bono basis, on topics that will promote greater listening among the diverse strands of the Jewish people. Findings and additional information are available at <http://nishmaresearch.com>.



Surprising
Findings
About Modern
Orthodoxy

Presentation
to the PORAT
Synagogue
Initiative

Jan. 2020

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