

Starting a Conversation: A Pioneering Survey of Those Who Have Left the Orthodox Community

An exploration of journeys, practices, beliefs, identity, community and relationships across the Orthodox segments, with a focus on Modern Orthodox

Presented at Kemp Mill Synagogue – December 10, 2016



Full survey results and this presentation are available at
<http://www.nishmaresearch.com/social-research.html>



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Social Research

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Nishma Research conducts research into important social issues facing our people. "Nishma" means "we listen" – and one of our goals is to fund and conduct one study a year on a topic that will promote greater listening among the diverse strands of the Jewish people. The 2016 Survey of Those Who Have Left the Orthodox Community (a pioneering quantitative study of this group) was our initial such effort, and the findings are posted below. We would love to hear your suggestions for other topics to explore in the future. Click the Contact Us link above and let us know your thoughts.

Starting a Conversation: A Pioneering Survey of Those Who Have Left the Orthodox Community

An exploration of journeys, practices, beliefs, identity, community and relationships – across Chasidic, Yeshivish and Modern Orthodox Segments

June, 2016



While there have been many studies done among the Orthodox, there has been little research among those who had an Orthodox upbringing but who have questioned or left their original community. This survey developed a deeper understanding of the Jewish identity, beliefs, practices and needs of these individuals, who are a fledgling segment of the larger Jewish community.

The survey drew upon an expert advisory group that included leaders of Footsteps and Project Makom, two organizations that provide services to these groups, as well as several academics, with invaluable input of Prof. Steven M. Cohen, Research Professor of Jewish Social Policy at Hebrew Union College, lead researcher on the Jewish Community Study of New York: 2011 and a consultant to the Pew Study of American Jews.

Downloadable Files

- Questionnaire - Survey of Those Who Have Left Orthodoxy - March 2016
- Press Release - Survey of Those Who Have Left Orthodoxy - June 2016
- Summary Report - Survey of Those Who Have Left Orthodoxy - June 2016
- Full Report - Survey of Those Who Have Left Orthodoxy - June 2016
- Summary Report - Modern Orthodox - Survey of Those Who Have Left - July 2016
- Full Report - Modern Orthodox - Survey of Those Who Have Left - July 2016
- Article in The Jewish Journal (L.A.) - The Formerly Orthodox American Jews: The stricter they were, the farther away they run (6/22/16)
- Article in Forward - Ex-Orthodox Feel Pushed from Their Communities - But Still Cherish Being Jewish (6/24/16)
- Article in eJewish Philanthropy - First Large-Scale Survey Explores Motives and Experiences of Formerly Orthodox (6/26/16)
- Article in The Jewish Press - Why Do They Leave? (6/29/16)
- Posting to the Emes Ve-Emunah Blog - Why OTD (7/4/16)
- Posting to the Cross-Currents Blog - My Two Cents on the Great Debate About OTD (7/8/16)
- Interview With The Connecticut Jewish Ledger (7/19/16)
- Posting to the JOFA Blog - Judaism After Orthodoxy - Insights into the OTD Movement (8/11/16)
- Article in The New York Jewish Week - Orthodox 'Dropouts' Still Tethered to Faith (8/16/16)
- Presentation at Young Israel of West Hartford, CT Synagogue (10/22/16)
- Presentation at Kemp Mill Synagogue, Silver Spring, MD (12/10/16)

Survey of Those Who Have Left the Orthodox Community

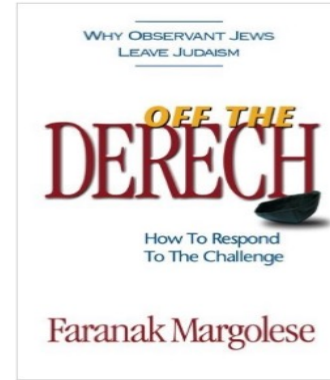
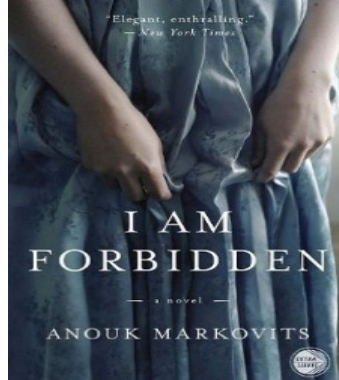
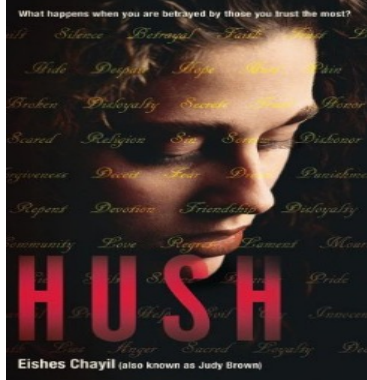
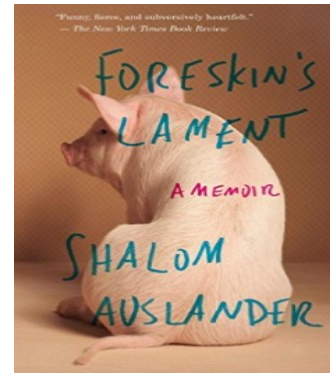
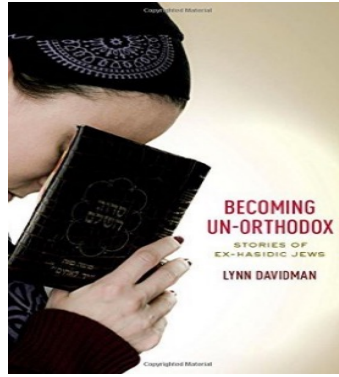
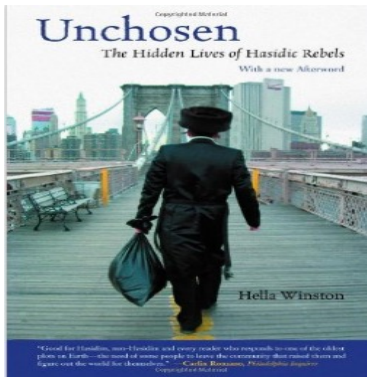
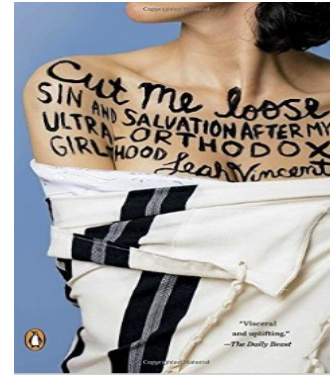
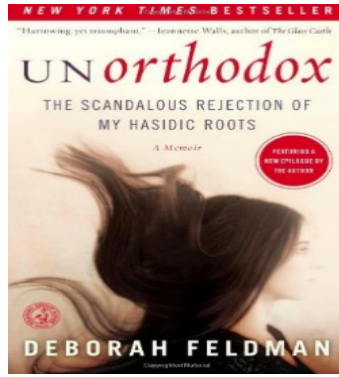
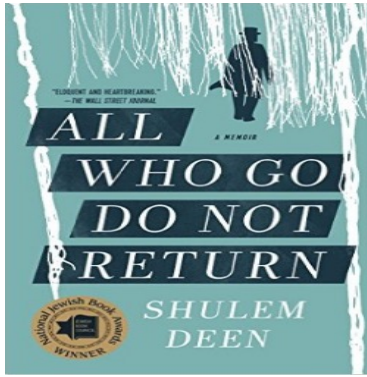


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What We'll Cover Tonight

- The original concept and support for the OTD (Off the Derech) study
- What is the OTD Movement? Why Should We Care? Some halachic insights
- How the survey was conducted and who responded
- Why people left their community: why their beliefs and practices changed
 - *Panel observations and discussion*
- Current Support Needs
- Current Religious Practices and Identification
- Family Relationships, Acceptance & Community Connections
- Voice of the OTD'er – their explanations, reflections and advice

It started with the “OTD Literature”



Survey of Those Who Have Left the Orthodox Community



The Jewish world has long been intrigued by Hasidim leaving the fold

Survey of Those Who Have Left the Orthodox Community



Faigy Mayer
March 26, 2015 near New York, NY · 🌐

Shulem Deen celebrates his ex hasid book launch today and I celebrate my five year OTD Anniversary! #HasidNoMore — 😊 feeling happy.

Like Comment Share

Michael Fishman, Shulem Deen and 92 others

1 share 9 Comments

View 3 more comments

Faigy Mayer Thanks for the love and likes! And comments 😊
March 27, 2015 at 1:07am · Like · 🌐 1

Faigy Mayer Michael Coburn I miss u!
March 27, 2015 at 1:07am · Like · 🌐 1

Reghu Rn Happy Rebirthday!
March 27, 2015 at 1:12am · Like · 🌐 3

Faigy Mayer Thanks Reghu! Can we celebrate it in the next 2-3 weeks lol
March 27, 2015 at 1:15am · Like · 🌐 1

Write a comment... 📷 😊

Study Background

- My “Retirement Project” – Established Nishma Research as a research firm focusing on the Jewish community (Nishma means “we listen”). Mission includes conducting one pro bono study a year – the study of those who have left Orthodoxy was the initial such effort.
- Many memoirs, anecdotes, etc. on people leaving Orthodoxy. But the plural of anecdote is not data. Is there a need for quantitative data?
- Positive reaction to survey concept – Shulem Deen (author), Footsteps, Project Makom, social media, academics (Prof. Steven M. Cohen, Prof. Mark Rosen), etc.
- Decided to fund a study of those who have left Orthodoxy, expanded across denominations: Chasidic, Chabad, Yeshivish (collectively the Haredi); and Modern Orthodox (MO).



What is the OTD Movement? Why Should We Care?

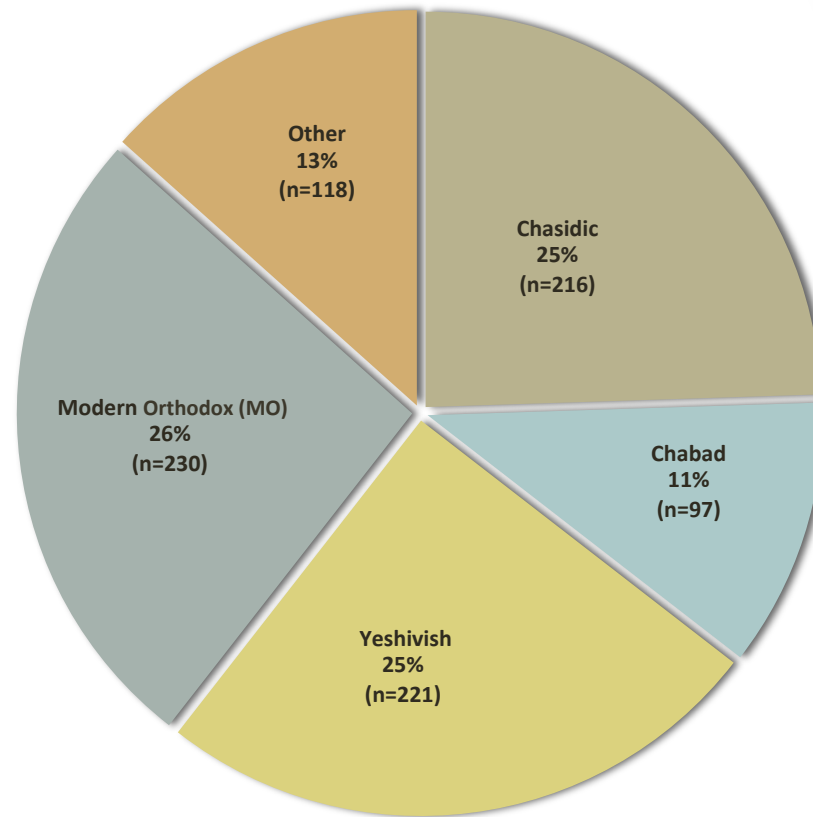
- **Rabbi Fred Hyman of Westville Synagogue (New Haven, CT) wrote:**
OTD means “off the derech” – those who have left the Orthodox community. The derech is the Path, the Torah way of life, a system of observance comprised of a myriad of practices and beliefs defined by thousands of years of Jewish tradition.
- **The Sefas Emes, a brilliant Chasidic scholar of the late 19th century interprets the precept of hashovas aveidah to include people; he notes that among our most precious possessions is our sense of self and identity, our spiritual lives! Sometimes Jews are lost or cast off, and we have a responsibility to bring them back.**
- **What determines whether one is on or off the derech?**
 - **Beliefs – Beliefs are internal and unknown**
 - **Practices – Some are observable, some are not**
 - **Identity / Self-Identity – No one is perfect; we need to resist the urge to categorize and judge**

The challenge is in listening

- We are familiar with the ba'al teshuvah movement, which describes the return of Jews to faith and observance. And while we are not unaware of Orthodox Jews who have chosen a different path, we are less familiar with the OTD experience.
- This survey addresses that gap – our relative unfamiliarity with the OTD experience. The survey is not presented as a panacea, an analysis of what's wrong, or a diagnostic tool to fix people. It is presented as a way to give them a voice. And what we do with that – whether we listen and think about what we can do – is up to us.

How the Survey Was Conducted – How We Reached Respondents

- No census or “mailing list” existed for this group. Therefore, we conducted an opt-in survey via broad outreach.
- Target audience of physical and virtual communities reached by email, announcements, social media groups. Included all members of Footsteps and Project Makom, and several Facebook groups.



Q. Raised as Orthodox?	Percent	Count
Yes - I was raised fully Orthodox	86%	758
Partially - Spent part of my life as Orthodox	14%	127

Q. Still Member of Orthodox Community?	Percent	Count
Fully	<i>Excluded from survey</i>	
Somewhat	45%	398
Not at all	55%	487
Total		885

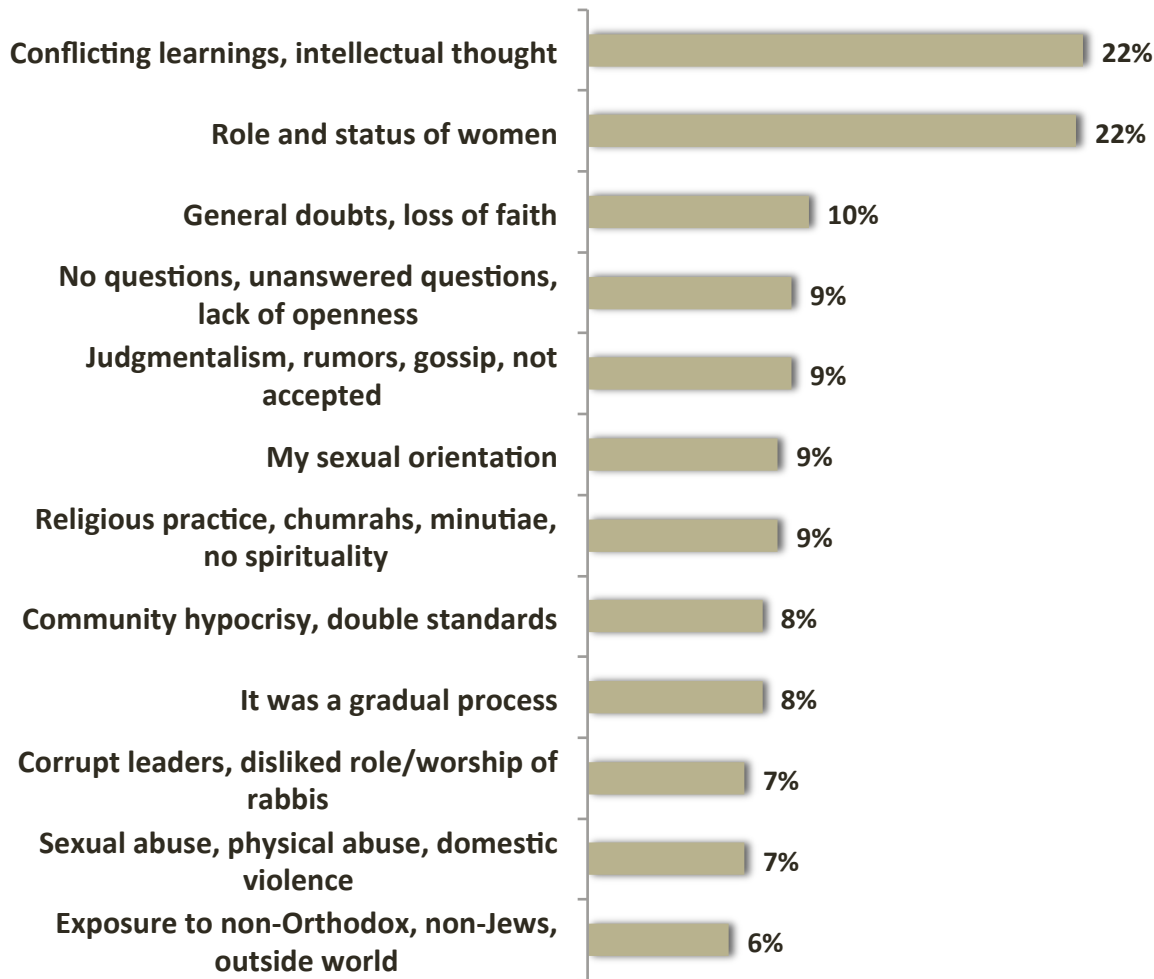
Profile of Survey Respondents

- Gender – close to 50/50.
- Age – Median ranged from 29 among Chasidic to 37 among MO..
- Education – MO 85% college+ and 51% postgraduate degree. Overall 61% college grads.
- Employment – 50% full-time.
- Household Income – MO Median \$101K, overall \$62K.
- Marital Status – 55% married, living with a partner or in a long-term relationship (36% when they left).
- Children – 31% had children when they left their community, with a median of 3 children.
- Family Background – 32% had one or both parents baalei teshuva.
- Time Since Leaving – Overall median 6-7 years ago; among MO 9 years.

Why People Left Their Community: What Caused Beliefs and Practices to Change

- A major objective of this survey was to quantify the reasons why people left their Orthodox community.
- In order to avoid asking leading questions, we posed this as a fully open-ended question: “Please think back to when you started moving away in belief or practice from the Orthodox community in which you were raised. What were the key things that caused your beliefs and practices to change?”
- Taking the many hundred of subjective responses and “quantifying them” was a challenging but eye-opening exercise. We read the full text of the responses and categorized them against a list we developed of approximately 50 reasons that people were giving, some of which were subtle variations of overlapping themes. Many respondents offered multiple reasons in sometimes quite lengthy responses.

Why People Left Their Community – Modern Orthodox



MO	Men	Women	Haredi
22%	27%	18%	27%
22%	7%	37%	9%
10%	13%	7%	11%
9%	11%	7%	5%
9%	4%	11%	5%
9%	6%	11%	4%
9%	10%	7%	8%
8%	3%	13%	11%
8%	7%	9%	3%
7%	7%	7%	7%
7%	4%	10%	6%
6%	1%	11%	5%

- In the 3% to 5% range – Science knowledge, biblical criticism, homophobia / racism, wanted more control over life & creativity, idea of Jewish chosenness / superiority.
- Internet and weak secular education are not key factors (2% each).

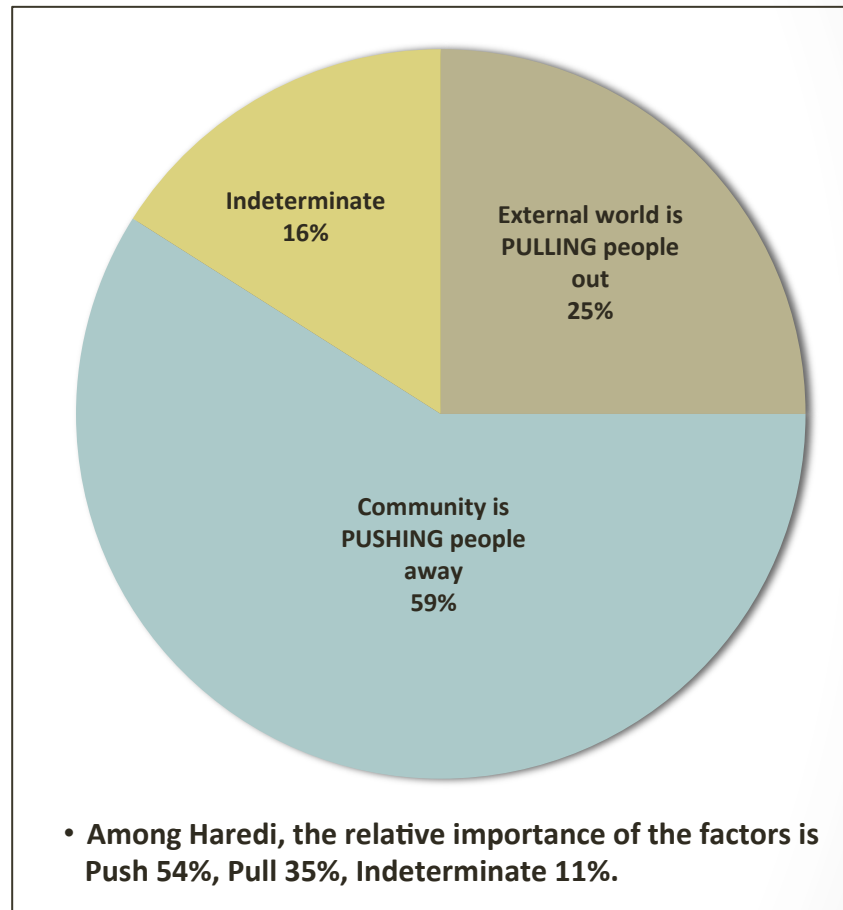
Q. Please think back to when you started moving away in belief or practice from the Orthodox community in which you were raised. What were the key things that caused your beliefs and practices to change? [Open-Ended] (n=554)

Why People Left Their Community – In their own words *(Sample Responses)*

- *Thinking about God and religion for the first time. Facts. I studied more history and philosophy and never got answers.*
- *I had many conflicts between my core values and things in Orthodox Judaism that appear to contradict these values - sexism, racism, homophobia, etc. I also started to question the theological assumptions of Orthodoxy - the Torah being dictated word for word by G-d, the world being 6,000 years old, etc.*
- *There was a recognition that I just didn't believe in the same set of values regarding separation of men/women and place of Israel vis a vis the rest of the nations. I was more liberal than orthodox colleagues. The fact that I was struggling with coming out as gay was not an issue here.*
- *I felt like I had nowhere to grow as a female. I have a heavy text based background and at the time, I would have loved to have become a rabbi but I didn't feel that was an option for me because I didn't want to be controversial. I felt really hurt by how limited my options were. I didn't like being a bystander in services. I remember thinking, I am holy enough to bake the challah but not holy enough to bless it? I know now that there is nuance and have since come back through renewal.*
- *Hypocrisy, racism in the community, sexism in the community, scandals, abuse, holding criminals up as pillars of society because they have money or power.*
- *The Modern Orthodox community's move to the right, some very stupid Rabbinic pronouncement, failure of the community to address women's and LBGT issues.*

Were they Pushed Off the Derech? Or Pulled Off the Derech?

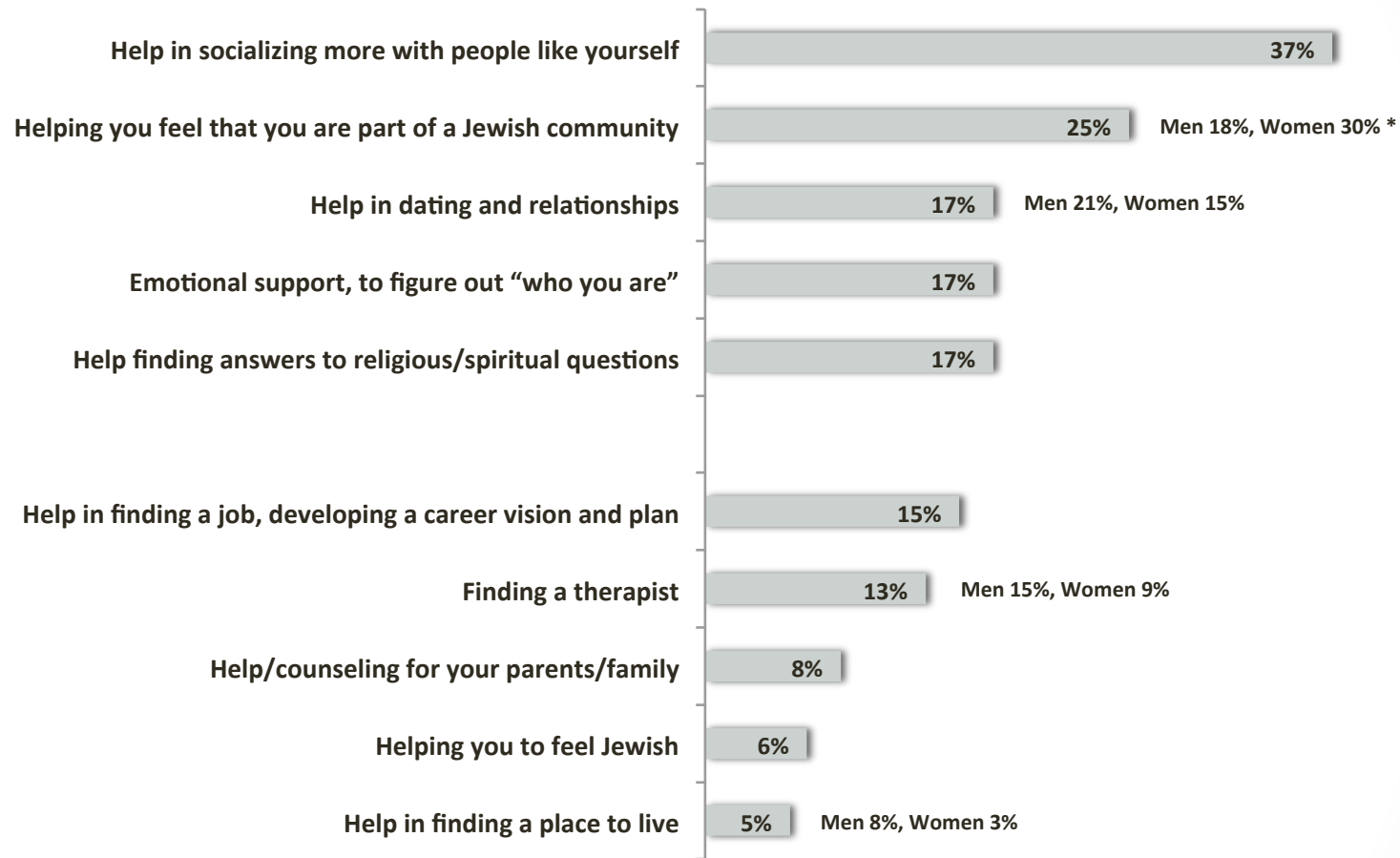
- Reasons were categorized as “push” or “pull” factors.
- More people felt they have been “PUSHED Off the Derech,” than have been “PULLED Off the Derech.”
- This may be good news. We can’t change the world, but we can address problems within our community.
- 26% said they were leading a “double life” (outwardly still part of their community in terms of appearances and visible actions, but internally they no longer viewed themselves that way). Of these, 37% said it is very likely or somewhat likely they will leave the community at some time in the future.



Panel Observations and Discussion

Current Support Needs – Modern Orthodox

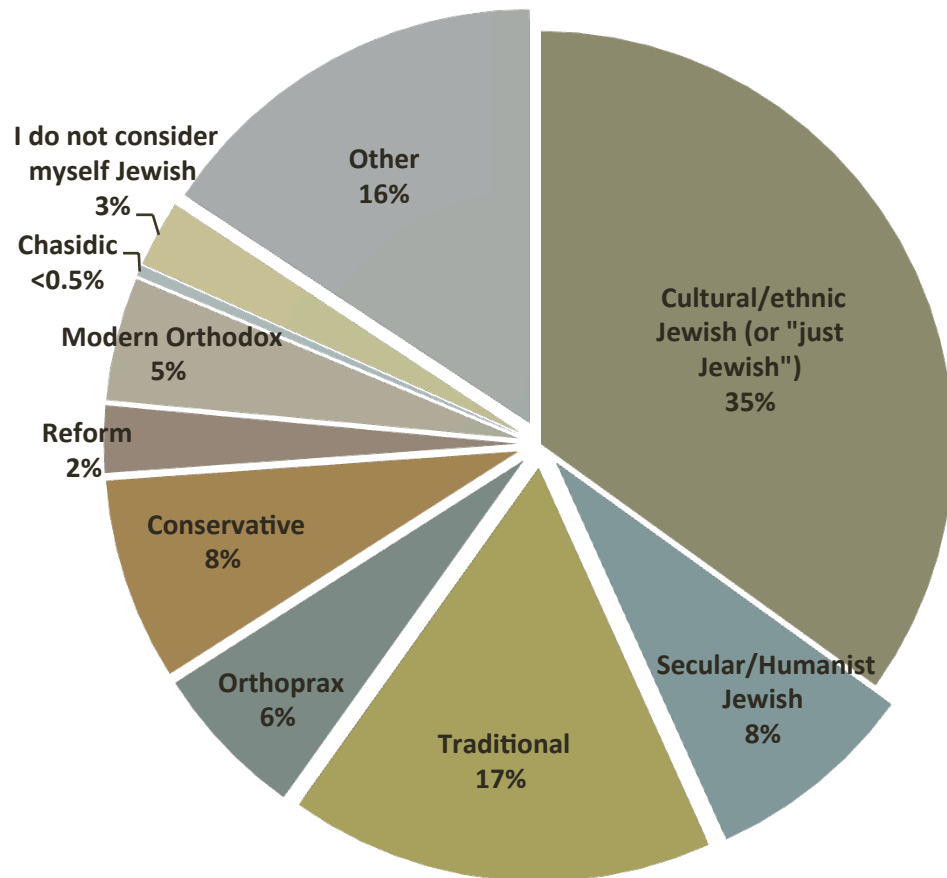
Survey of Those Who Have Left the Orthodox Community



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Q. In the list below, please check the most important needs you may have at this time (up to 5)
(n=206)

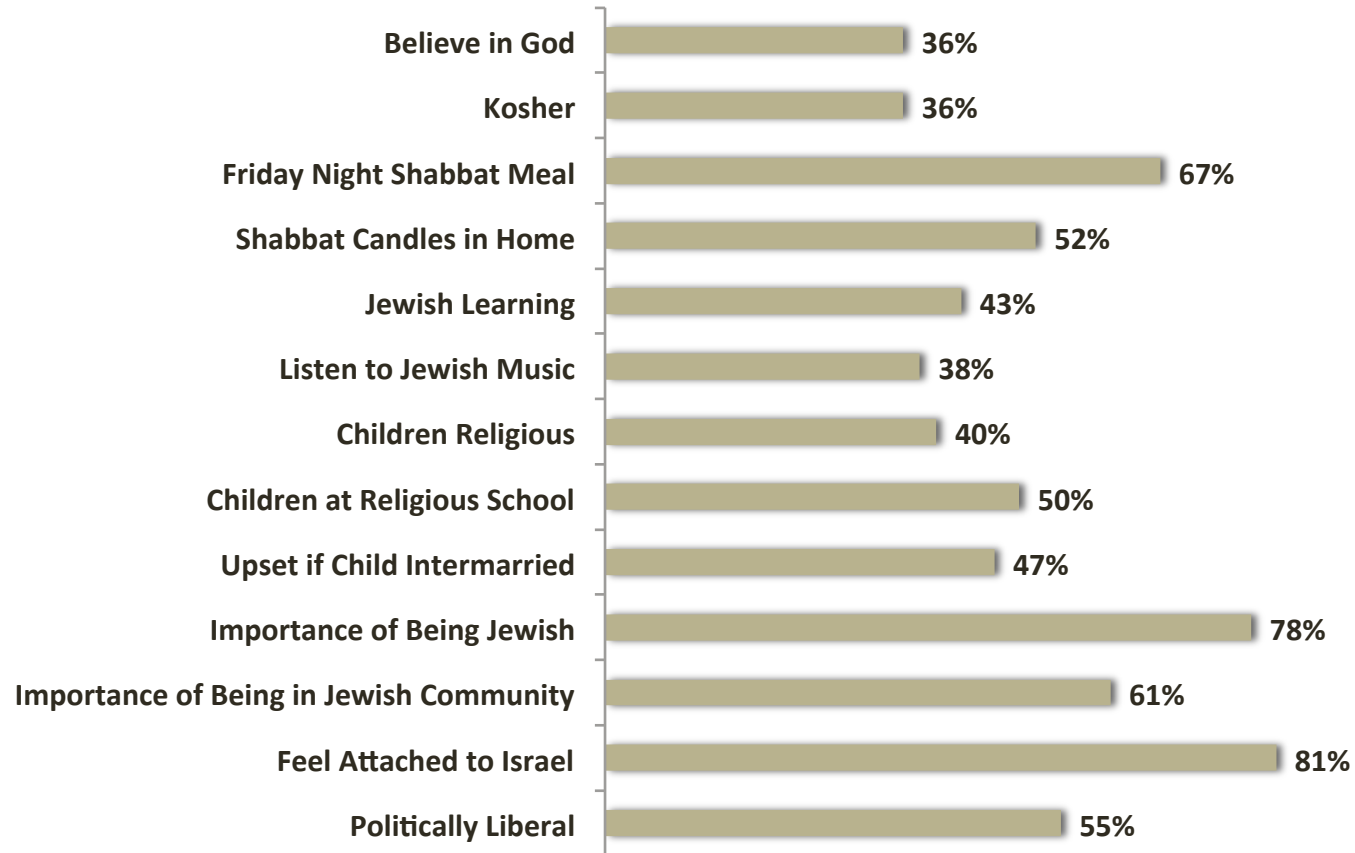
Current Jewish Denominational Self-Identification – Modern Orthodox



- Jewish affiliations were more “self-defined” than fitting the common labels, with 60% saying they were traditional, secular/humanist, cultural/ethnic or “just Jewish.”
- Pew found that 70% of U.S. Jews identify with a denomination (Reform 35%, Conservative 18%, Orthodox 10%, Other Denominations 6%, None 30%), a much higher percentage than among our respondents (21%).
- There were no substantial differences among the Orthodox segments.

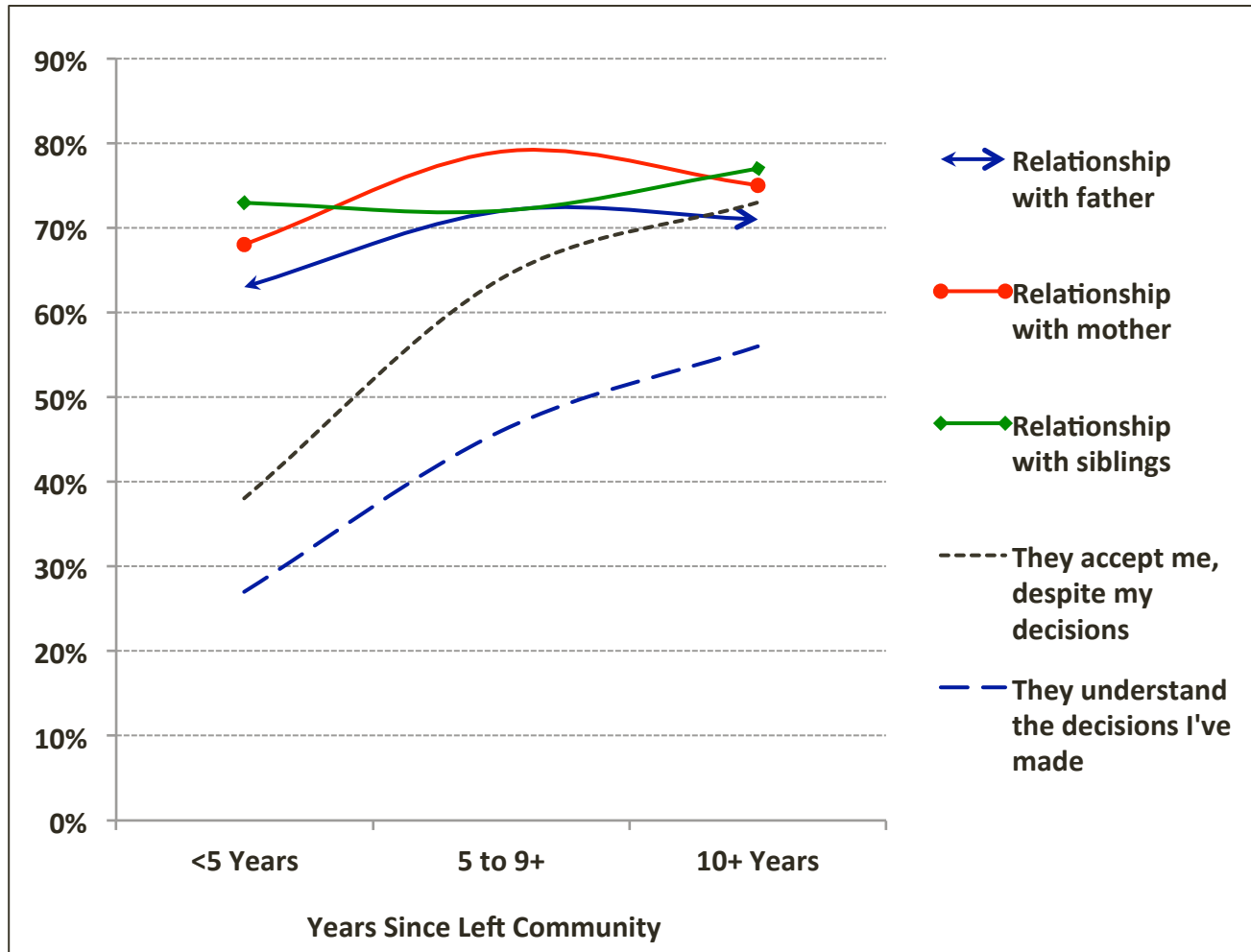
Q. Which of the following best describes how you see your Jewish affiliation at this time? (n=229)

Current Beliefs, Practices & Connections – Modern Orthodox



- Modern Orthodox beliefs and practices tend to be a few percentage points higher than the Haredi.
- There are some similarities, but also notable differences, compared to US Jews in general (Pew Survey 2013 – Belief in God 72%, Kosher 22%, Shabbat Meal 23%).
- Women view being Jewish and part of a Jewish community as more important than do men, by about 10 percentage points.

Family Relationships and Acceptance Over Time – Modern Orthodox



Appendix – Sample of Verbatim Responses

Why People Left Their Community

CONFLICTING LEARNINGS, INTELLECTUAL THOUGHT


- Thinking about God and religion for the first time. Facts. I studied more history and philosophy and never got answers.
- I had many conflicts between my core values and things in Orthodox Judaism that appear to contradict these values - sexism, racism, homophobia, etc. I also started to question the theological assumptions of Orthodoxy - the Torah being dictated word for word by G-d, the world being 6,000 years old, etc.
- Learning Jewish History and the academic study of Bible, studying Jewish philosophy, discussing and debating these things with friends, classmates, and teachers

GENERAL DOUBTS, LOSS OF FAITH

- My liberal social values were not in line with the communities values. There was not enough room for diversity and pluralism. I felt that the community was very insular and judgmental.
- There was a recognition that I just didn't believe in the same set of values regarding separation of men/women and place of Israel vis a vis the rest of the nations. I was more liberal than orthodox colleagues. The fact that I was struggling with coming out as gay was not an issue here.
- As I got older, it just didn't make sense to me. Then I heard a rabbi speak at a 19 the old's funeral & say to the family that the deceased died as a sacrifice for the sins of the Jewish nation. I was already pulling away from Orthodoxy, but that made me break with it completely.

ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN

- I was seven years old and was regularly leading the singing of the Star Spangled Banner and/or the Hatikvah at my yeshiva's assemblies. I told my mother that I wanted to lead אננים זמירות and אין כאלוהינו at shul on Shabbos. She was shocked and told me in no uncertain terms that girls don't do that. When I asked "why not?" I was told the same answer as I was given to most of my Jewish-related questions: "because G!d said so!" Being a fairly wild child, I started "testing" some of G!d's rules and when lightning didn't strike, I continued to make my own rules and left the community as soon as I could.
- 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. I loathe how Judaism keeps women in the dark ages, in particular in orthodox communities.
- I felt like I had nowhere to grow as a female. I have a heavy text based background and at the time, I would have loved to have become a rabbi but I didn't feel that was an option for me because I didn't want to be controversial. I felt really hurt by how limited my options were. I didn't like being a bystander in services. I remember thinking, I am holy enough to bake the challah but not holy enough to bless it? I know now that there is nuance and have since come back through renewal.

Continued 

Why People Left Their Community *(Continued)*

COMMUNITY HYPOCRISY, DOUBLE STANDARDS

- Hypocrisy, racism in the community, sexism in the community, scandals, abuse, holding criminals up as pillars of society because they have money or power.
- I saw how much hypocrisy was in the orthodox community. I didn't become orthodox until I was 14 so I knew what life was like in other communities. I saw the tactics they used to control the community through different means. I was also sexually assaulted by someone in the community and shamed and shunned for coming forward. 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
- Hypocrisy exhibited by Jewish people, strict adherence to laws at the expense of good behavior towards others, enforcement of archaic, outdated laws that should have evolved and adapted to modernity.
- When my son was young he was mistreated by his rabbis Rabbis in my community were arrested for money laundering Rabbis in general were constantly sending conflicting messages I did not lose my faith in G-d, just in the religion.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICE, CHUMRASH, MINUTIAE, NO SPIRITUALITY

- The Modern Orthodox community's move to the right, some very stupid Rabbinic pronouncement, failure of the community to address women's and LGBT issues.
- I can go on forever, but initially it was nonkosher food. That 95% of Jews eat it all. Some even consider themselves frum (eat dairy out, eat salads out, etc.) and it's fine so let me try. But when I was eating traif (salad out is TRAIIF) I couldn't distinguish between one TRAIIF and the next. So if I'm eating traif pasta I may as eat a cheeseburger. Not until that point did I realize that it was ALL arbitrary and everyone made their own rules. Made no sense that God would have 100 different rules. What time is shabbos over? Depends who u follow. What hechsher is good? Depends who u ask. Can I do xyz on shabbos, depends. Can u eat this on pesach? Depends...depends...depends... Only after many years of that did it occur to me that there was no god keeping track.
- When I was 15, one of my Modern Orthodox day school teachers told us that Orthodox Jews felt commanded by God to do mitzvot and that Conservative Jews didn't, and I realized that I didn't feel commanded by God, particularly. I did mitzvot for entirely different reasons. And then, once, on a Shabbat when I was 18, I discovered my wallet in my coat pocket, and I thought that the halakhic thing to do would be to try to hide it by the side of the road and come back after Shabbat ended to look for it, but I also knew that there was no way that I was going to do that! I left it in my pocket and took it out when I got home. Then, I was very depressed, and (in the days before "Shabbos lamps"), in college, found myself deciding between turning on my bedside lamp to read for distraction on Friday night/Shabbat, or crying for hours in the dark, and I opted to turn my bedside lamp on and then off.
- • davvening in shuls without natural light • beauty didn't seem to be a religious sensibility • lack of any cultural framework towards developing emotional maturity with women • cats considered muksa on shabbes • this idea that meat was needed for joy on shabbes and yontov.

Continued 

Why People Left Their Community *(Continued)*

CORRUPT LEADERS, DISLIKED ROLE/WORSHIP OF RABBIS

- I was a victim of rabbinic malpractice, and both the community and RCA/bet din not only failed to do anything but sought to silence the shanda. My life was destroyed, my family was destroyed. To this day I can receive private sympathy from major leaders, but no vehicle such as the archdiocese Ministry of Reconciliation exists, much less to correct matters. We are, indeed, children of a lesser God.
- The corrupt and self serving rabbis and a general loss of a belief in god. There can be no living god in this world that would allow these rabbis to hold sway so tightly over Jewish lives.

JUDGMENTALISM, RUMORS, GOSSIP, NOT ACCEPTED

- I was in basis Yaakov but my mom wore hats and sometimes pants at the gym and people were afraid to let their kids eat at our house and asked if I was going to have an Aliya at my bat mitzvah! The super frum not accepting that there is more than one way to be shomer mitzvah.

SEXUAL ABUSE, PHYSICAL ABUSE, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- After many years of abuse from my husband, he turned on my son. I went to my rebbetzin for advice and she told me to keep shalom bayis and do all these things to make my husband happier. I tried again, and failed. I talked to the rev. He said the same. My husband tried to kill me and the police got involved. I question everything now.

NO QUESTIONS, UNANSWERED QUESTIONS, LACK OF OPENNESS

- Anger at god over the holocaust after a visit to Poland.
- Felt resentful that one could not question anything and, having been raised in a black and white world, found it easy to reject the whole notion of religion rather than just slipping a little. Ex; the belief that eating 'non-treif' food in a treif restaurant is as bad as having a bacon cheeseburger...so why not have the bacon cheeseburger? I have had questions for years. After trying for a very long time to reconcile them I finally came to the conclusion that it's all man made.
- I think it started for me when my uncle died. While I had lost my father and grandparents as a child, my uncle passed when I was in early high school. I prayed and prayed for him to get better and he didn't. While that in itself isn't the reason I walked away, it opened up a new world of disbelief in a higher power for me. There were no suitable answers, to my mind, about the larger questions of life: why do bad things happen to good people, why doesn't God respond to prayer, how do we know that our God is the right one when there are hundreds (thousands?) of different gods out there, why do we base our personal beliefs on the religious choices of our parents and not our own ideas, and the list goes on. After the experience of putting genuine faith into something that seemingly offered no return on that investment, I began to question everything.

Continued 

Why People Left Their Community *(Continued)*

EXPOSURE TO NON-ORTHODOX, NON-JEWS, OUTSIDE WORLD

- When I started working in the secular world and didn't work with any Jews and realized they all had morals etc. even without being jewish.

GRADUAL

- I always enjoyed the holidays and traditions, but ultimately I never really had true belief/faith. I can clearly recall faking davening for so many years and wondering when it will mean something to me. There was no moment, no loss of faith, no incident. All the same I could never be myself and continue to lie about it to this day. It is a heavy burden.

HOMOPHOBIA, RACISM, SEXISM

- Sexism. Racism (including anti-Arab racism). Homophobia. The way that rich people control the community and judge the poor. Bullying. Being Orthodox seemed so divorced from being a good person, which to me means replacing kashrus with vegetarianism and religion with solidarity and activism.

OTHER

- I never believed, and didn't follow halacha in private, but remained part of orthodox community because I loved the social part of orthodoxy (eg holidays, shabbat dinners, etc). However, As I remained single, and my friends were all getting married and I was living on my own, I started to slowly stop attending Orthodox institutions and started practicing less and less as time went on. 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.
Male Brooklyn Mid-40's 10+ Years
- Apathy for basic rules like Kashrut. In addition, I began to see fundamental flaws with the Jewish theology. Most importantly however, I take great issue in the way that orthodoxy deifies the scholars and commentators. Three days ago, I heard an orthodox man claim that "Rashi never once said anything in his life that turned out to be incorrect." Male Washington State 18 3-4 Years Parents BT
- The realization of how much *better* the world could have been with slightly different mitzvot. It did not line up with how I conceptualized, or was taught to conceptualize, God. God still makes some sort of sense, therefore Judaism is flawed.

“Many people don’t well understand those who have left, or may leave, their Orthodox community of origin. What do you want to tell people about this group?”

- *We're not all abused or mentally ill, and we're not all looking to live a life of hefkerus. A lot of us feel fulfilled without Judaism. I feel much more fulfilled in life now more than ever. In terms of the mental illness and abuse thing: there are, yet, many abuse victims and people with mental illness in the OTD community... if the Jewish community was a safe haven for people with those issues, they would not have left. It's on the Jewish community to change that. (MO Male)*

-
- *The problem is not in us, the problem is in the orthodox community. Yes many people are happy and stay in the community. So why did we leave? Orthodox Judaism allows a very narrow set of variety, if you happen to fall within the confines then your life can be nearly perfect. However if you fall outside, life is pure hell and the only logical thing to do is to leave in order to find a community where being who you are is okay. I love Judaism and appreciate many aspects of Orthodoxy; if they would accept for who I am (gay) I would come back in an instant. (Chabad Female)*
 - *I was abused emotionally and physically, all in the name of religion, I'm still hurting, and my life is pretty messed up because of this. All I want is to have my own life, and make my decisions how I wanna live. (Chasidic Male)*
 - *Both my parents are Baal Teshuvah. They had a right to make their decisions. I have a right to make mine. People need to be true to themselves and live authentic lives. (Chabad Male)*
 - *There must be a separation of halacha and customs - if you prevent clever motivated women from pursuing university studies and careers and other such attitudes that have little to do with halacha, there is a high chance ... they will choose to leave the community. (Yeshivish Female)*

“Looking back at your experiences, what if anything would you have done differently?”

- *I would have established myself in a modern orthodox community with a shul I could enjoy, a rabbi I respect and a feeling of spirituality. (MO Female)*
- *Might have looked for more support in finding a happy medium rather than just running in the complete opposite direction. There is a part of me that still wishes I was a part of the orthodox community just a less judgmental one. (MO Female)*

- *I would left the community more than a decade ago. (Chasidic Female)*
- *College when I was younger. It was revolutionary at the time, and I was afraid of the effect it would have on shidduchim and on my relationship with my parents. (Chasidic Male)*
- *Being clearer with my family where I was changing would have given us more time and gotten us on the path faster towards reconciling our differences and accepting each other. (Chasidic Male)*
- *I would have left the Hasidic community before getting married and having a family. (Chabad Transgender)*
- *Left at a much younger age, and pursued an advanced education. (Chabad Male)*
- *I would have left earlier. I was too scared and didn't know what to do if I left. Instead, I lived a double life learning in yeshiva all day and sneaking out to Wendy's at night. I also would do more to find people with similar situation to my own. (Yeshivish Male)*

“In conclusion, what advice would you give to others who are considering leaving their Orthodox community, for a more modern lifestyle?”

- *Follow your star. Judaism, from atheist to hardcore haredi, is a DIY proposition. (MO Male)*
- *Judaism doesn't have to be an all or nothing. I recently went to an OTD bbq ... and was horrified that non kosher meat and pig products were being served. There's a big difference between choosing not to be a part of that life and completely disrespecting those who chose to remain. For me it was eye opening as it highlighted the great differences between those who leave from a place of intellectual/logical reasoning versus those from an emotional place or due a bad experience that harbor bad will towards others. (MO Female)*

- *Make sure you have legitimate intelligent reasons for leaving, and have a plan. Leaving will require sacrifice, of family, friends, and financial stability. If you have kids you may lose them. It may be isolating until you find your crowd, but there are resources to help. (Chasidic Female)*
- *Think it over twice and three times and four times before jumping. The change may be worse than the previous condition. (Chabad Male)*
- *Take it slow. Don't burn bridges. Stay positive. It gets better. Be respectful. Don't bash people on social media. Have some class. (Chabad Female)*
- *Being part of a community is comfortable, and it's difficult to lose that. I don't think there is any easy path, but the world is a fascinating place when rules are not preventing you from exploring it. (Yeshivish Female)*



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