



eJewish Philanthropy

The high cost of traditional Jewish life

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The high cost of living a traditionally observant Jewish life in the U.S. is at the center of a [new study](#) from Nishma Research, an independent research firm.

Surveying more than 1,300 people who identified as Modern Orthodox or Haredi, the study focused on purchases that could be identified as “Orthodox spending”: synagogue and organizational memberships, kosher food and Jewish camps and trips to and from them. Also, real estate in Orthodox communities is generally more expensive, according to the report.

Even with high median household incomes (\$188,000 for Modern Orthodox families and \$136,000 for Haredi families), fewer than half see their household as financially strong and fewer than half are comfortable that they will have enough money to retire, the study found. Orthodox families may be spending \$5,000 more a year on food than non-Orthodox households, the survey concluded, and median costs for children’s education in K-12 Jewish schools was \$31,000 (even with financial assistance) and between \$4,000-\$6,000 for synagogue dues.

“However, it appears that cost does not present an ‘existential threat’ to many in their religious lives as people – while struggling – are drawing strength from their beliefs, practices, families and communities,” Nishma Research President Mark Trencher noted in the report, “For example, when we asked what I would characterize as a ‘bottom line’ question of ‘Orthodoxy costs more; is it worth it?’, fewer than 10% ‘voted no.’ The vast majority saw great benefit in their Orthodoxy, although we recognize that many had mixed feelings about costs, many were very upset, and anger did come through. So, while they are mostly coping, the extent of the pain shouldn’t be ignored.”