

Emes Ve-Emunah

A Forum for Orthodox Jewish thought on Halacha, Hashkafa, and the issues of our time.

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How Many Types of Jews Are There?



Images from the [Yated](#)

Rabbi Avrohom Gordimer has an op-ed in the [Yated](#) about a new Nishma Research study that gathered statistics about the beliefs and practices of various Orthodox Jewish subgroups. The following is a pertinent excerpt

The new Nishma Research study reflects the input of Jews, principally throughout the US, who self-identify as Orthodox. 32% of respondents identify as Modern Orthodox (split into 32% "Liberal MO," 42% "Centrist MO," and 26% "Stringent MO"

categories); 26% of respondents identify as Yeshivish (16.4% "Traditional Yeshivish" and 9.6% "Modern Yeshivish"); 36% of respondents identify as Chasidish (23.6% "Traditional Non-Chabad Chasidish," 5.2% as "Modern Non-Chabad Chasidish," 5.3% as "Traditional Chabad/Lubavitch," and 1.9% as "Modern Chabad/Lubavitch"). It is important to note that the survey was issued to targeted audiences via email; hence, those members of the Chareidi community who do not have email were not included in the study. 82% of survey respondents live in the United States, 23% of these US respondents reside in New York City (10% in Brooklyn, 7% in Manhattan and 4% in Queens), 16% reside in New Jersey, and the remainder reside elsewhere, mainly in sizeable Orthodox communities. (The remaining 18% of respondents reside primarily in Eretz Yisroel, Great Britain and Canada.)

Liberal MO; Centrist MO; Stringent MO; Traditional Yeshivish; Modern Yeshivish; Traditional Non-Chabad Chasidish; Modern Non-Chabad Chasidish; Traditional Chabad/Lubavitch; Modern Chabad/Lubavitch.

Wow! Are there really that many subgroups of observant Jews? I guess there are. But how different are they all from each other? In some cases very... in other cases not so much.

How I wish it weren't so. If I had my 'druthers - I'd do away with all these labels. To paraphrase the late John Lennon's famous song – Imagine there are no Charedim... No MO too.... Imagine all the people... living in the world as one...

Ah... but life doesn't work that way. There is a reason for all these labels There are serious differences even between observant Jews. Different values. Different priorities. Different agendas . Some of which clash and degenerate into violence and hatred of one another. And frankly I can't stand it. I had always believed that what unites observant Jewry is far greater than what divides us. But I have been proven wrong. So many times. That is kind of what is playing out now in Israel. And things only seem to be getting worse.

This is not to diminish the problems discussed by Rabbi Gordimer. They are very real. But so too are the divisions among us.

I consider myself a Centrist which I define as being on the right side of Modern Orthodoxy. But that is not entirely correct. My father was raised very Chasidic but he was very much an adherent of TIDE. My religious education was mostly Yeshiva oriented. My elementary school

education was Charedi. My first 2 years of high school were spent in a Charedi Yeshiva. But the next ten years after that were in a Centrist Yeshiva. The vast majority of my influences there were Charedi. But, my primary influence was Rav Ahaon Soloveichik – who is difficult to categorize.

On the other hand a significant influence on me was Dr. Eliezer Berkovitz who was about as far left as an Orthodox Jew can go and still be called Orthodox. I think he would have been very comfortable being called Open Orthodox (OO). (In fact many considered him to be an Apikores - starting with Telshe Rosh HaYeshiva, R' Mordechai Gifter). Although I did not agree with his Hashkafa, I appreciated his perspective and, more importantly I learned a lot about philosophical thought from him.

So am I OO? MO Yeshivish? Centrist MO? Centrist Charedi? MO stringent? Modern Yeshivish
Modern Non-Chabad Chasidish?

See where I am going? The fact is that I am all of those – and none of those. There is a lot of overlap in who I am. I call myself a Centrist MO for the sake of simplicity and convenience. But I'm a lot more complicated than that. I believe that is true of most observant Jews.

Which leads me to ask whether the categories listed in the Nishma Research actually exist as independent entities? Especially when the differences are only slight. Is there really that much of a difference between Stringent MO and Centrist MO? Were these categories actually defined to the subjects of the survey before they were questioned about their beliefs and practices?

Don't know. Just asking. But if there are that many categories, maybe all this categorizing has gone too far?
