

The Middot “Report Card”: How We See Our Community and How We See Ourselves Across 19 Middot “*Bein Adam L’chavero*”

September 8, 2024



This is Nishma Research’s 17th broad Orthodox community survey since 2016.
All reports are free, available and downloadable at <http://nishmaresearch.com>

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Introduction, Methodology & Thanks

Past Nishma Research surveys have presented data on Orthodox Jews' beliefs, practices, and attitudes, mainly (but not wholly) in the theological/religious realm. An important aspect that has not to date been adequately explored is that of middot – מידות (or middos, we transliterate into English using Modern Hebrew pronunciation throughout this survey and report).

Middot is a Hebrew term that literally means “measures” or “character traits.” In Jewish ethics and philosophy, it refers to virtues, attributes, or traits that a person should cultivate to live a moral and righteous life. The study and practice of good middot is central to Jewish personal growth.

This survey is not intended to be a demographic profile, but rather a timely (as we approach the *Yamim Noraim*) resource. There has been some fragmentation in recent years within Orthodoxy, and so Nishma Research sponsors and presents these findings in the hope that people can refocus their efforts on interpersonal middot.

The Middot We Explore in this Survey

Middot tend to be divided into those that are *bein adam l'makom* (between individuals and Hashem) and those *bein adam l'chavero* (people dealing with each other). Our initial list as we developed the survey questionnaire included middot in both categories. But the list was extremely long and so we decided to focus on those *bein adam l'chavero* ... how we interact with and treat each other. Our list was still fairly long and included the following:

- *Ahavat Yisrael* – Extending kindness to the broader Jewish community
- *Anavah* – Acting with humility
- *Chesed* – Doing acts of kindness
- *Dan L'kaf Zechut* – Judging favorably, giving benefit of the doubt
- *Derech Eretz* – Being respectful and behaving decently
- *Emes* – Being truthful
- *Hachnasat Orchim* – Showing hospitality to guests
- *Hakarot Hatov* – Expressing gratitude, thankfulness
- *Kavod Hatzibbur* – Being respectful of the community/congregation
- *Kavod Ha'briyot* – Honoring all of Hashem's creations (humans)
- *Kibbud Av v'Em* – Honoring and caring for one's parents

- *Malbin Pnei Chavero* – Care not to embarrass others publicly
- *Sameach b'Chelko* – Being satisfied with what one has, not envious
- *Savlanut* – Being patient, tolerant
- *Sever Panim Yafot* – Having a smiling, pleasant face, welcoming (e.g., in shul, community)
- *Shemirat Halashon* – Refraining from lashon harah, guarding one's speech
- *Tzedakah* – Being charitable
- *Tzniut* – Being modest and discreet in dress and behavior
- *Yosher* – Being honest with others, including in business

This survey asked respondents – among a few other questions – to rate their community's performance and their own, and to consider areas where they want to grow.

Sample Methodology

The survey was distributed to the Nishma Research List (past survey participants); and both the Rabbinical Council of America and the International Rabbinic Fellowship informed their member rabbis, many of whom forwarded the survey link to their shul members.

The survey received 1,004 responses. The responses were relatively consistent across Orthodoxy and this report presents the data for all of Orthodoxy. Where there are notable differences, we present selected findings by respondents' Orthodox group, gender and age.

Thanks to Those Who Provided Advice to this Project

Rabbi Prof. Michael Broyde, Michael Feldstein, Prof. Emerita Sylvia Barak Fishman, Rabbi Avrohom Gordimer, Rabbi Steven J. Gotlib, Joseph Kaplan, Ilana Kelman, and Rabbi Dr. Dov S. Zakheim.

We wish you all a year of growth, peace, health, and happiness.

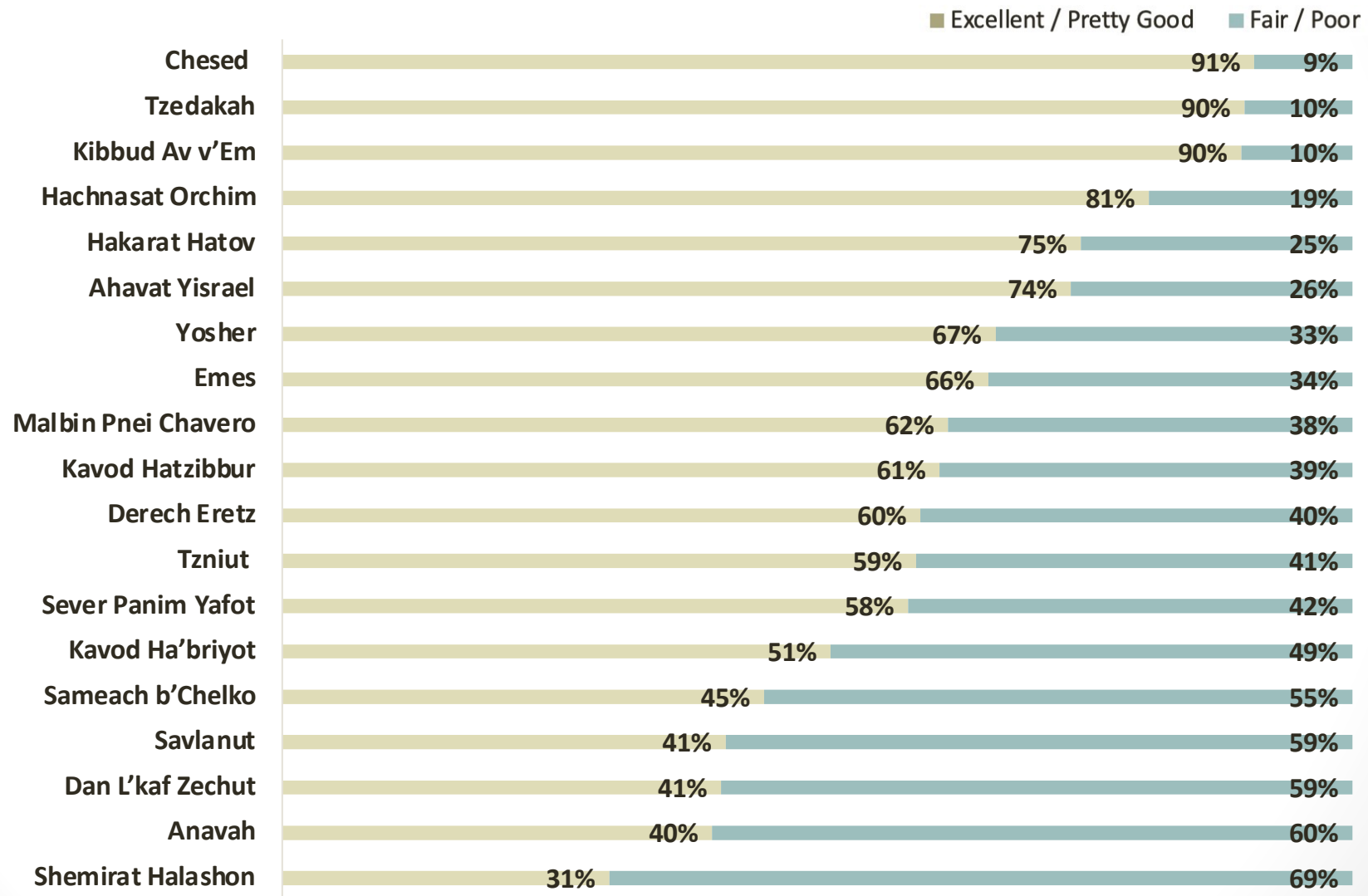
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September 8, 2024 – 5 Elul, 5784

Summary of Key Findings – Below are a few key findings and just a few sample verbatim responses. We recommend closer reading of the verbatim responses (pages 9-10, 14-15, 17-19) to get a fuller flavor of people’s thoughts on the issues raised.

- Orthodox Jews see *chesed*, *tzedakah* and *kibbud av v'em* as the top areas of community strength, when it comes to *middot bein adam l'chavero*. (The *middot* are all defined in English, see page 3.) The community clearly provides an effective support system for those in need.
- The greatest needs for community improvement are seen in the areas of *shemirat halashon* (the poorest rating by a wide margin, with 69% rating this as fair or poor), *anavah*, people needing to be *dan l'kaf zechit*, having *savlanut* and being *sameach b'chelko*. So, gossip, judgmentalism, patience, and dissatisfaction with one’s life (status, material goods) and envy are where work is needed.
 - “*Lashon hara is rampant and there is a lot of stereotyping based on what shul, school people attend. that bothers me a lot.*”
 - “*We have certain things done right - there is a large number of G'machs - there is Tomchei Shabbos - we really need to work on being able to dialogue respectfully with those who hold opposing viewpoints. We are extremely polarized and lack Achdus on a deeper level.*”
- About 60% agree that our Jewish schools and religious leaders are doing a good job teaching and emphasizing *middot* ... but few (only about 10%) fully agree, while the vast majority said they “tend to agree.” So the sentiment is that our schools and religious leaders should be doing more.
 - “*It would be great if schools would put more of an emphasis on really teaching middos and making meaningful incentives for kids. It would be nice if shul Rabbis would also put more of an emphasis on this among their congregants and communities.*”
- Reflecting on their own *middot*, people rate *shemirat halashon* as their main personal area needing work, especially *lashon hara*. Some respondents want to be more proactive in stopping harmful conversations or avoid participating in them, with some focus on learning the *halachot* of speech.
 - “*I want to work on speaking up against my friends speaking lashon harah. I generally just ignore the conversation or try to subtly change the subject. But I wish I would bring attention to the lashon harah and tell them to stop.*”
 - “*being more honest in business dealings, being overall nicer, forthcoming with compliments and nice, kind words with people. Everyone can use a kind word and a smile and something we all need to work on.*”
- *Dan l'kaf zechit* and *savlanut* – Respondents see a need to stop being judgmental or harshly critical of others, with a focus on empathy and understanding differing perspectives, e.g., with family, colleagues, community members, and in everyday life. Several indicated they want to improve their behavior at home, particularly in being kinder and more patient with close family members. Strategies include mindfulness, *mussar* learning, and focusing on gratitude.
 - “*I want to work on being less judgmental and more dan lekav zechut. Sometimes, I have a tendency to make assumptions despite not really knowing what's going on in the other person's life.*”

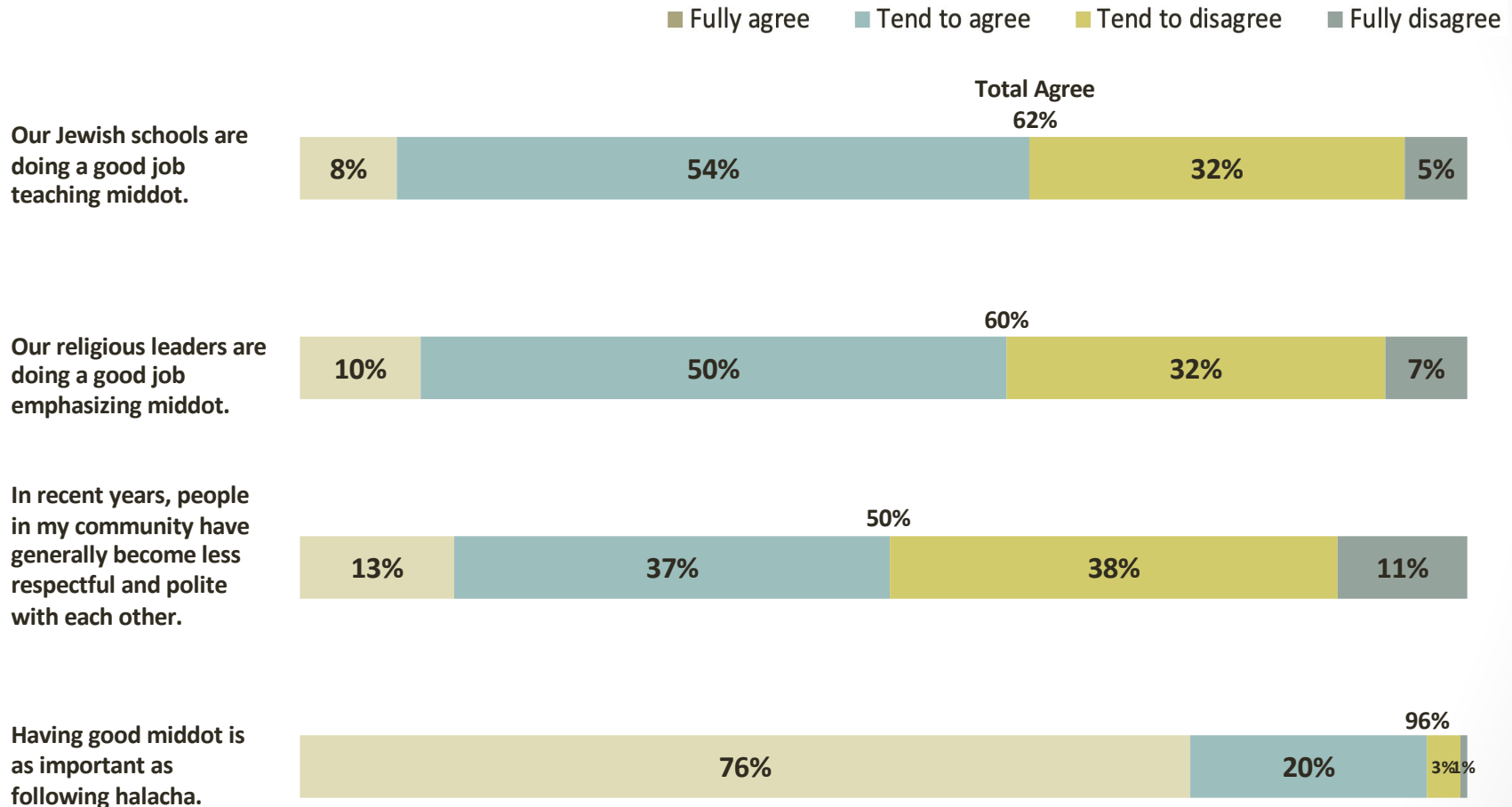
What "grade" would you give your community on the job people do, in general, in these areas? – *Chesed, tzedakah* and *kibbud av v'em* are the top areas of strength.

The areas where people see the greatest need for improvement are *shemirat halashon* (the poorest rating by a wide margin), *anavah*, people being *dan l'kaf zechit*, *savlanut* and being *sameach b'chelko*.



Based on an average of 782 respondents, which excludes an average of 4% who responded "don't know."

How good a job are we doing in teaching and emphasizing middot? – While 96% agree that having good middot is as important as following halacha, fewer (about 60%) agree that our Jewish schools and religious leaders are doing a good job teaching and emphasizing middot, with the overwhelming majority of these respondents falling in the “tend to agree” category.

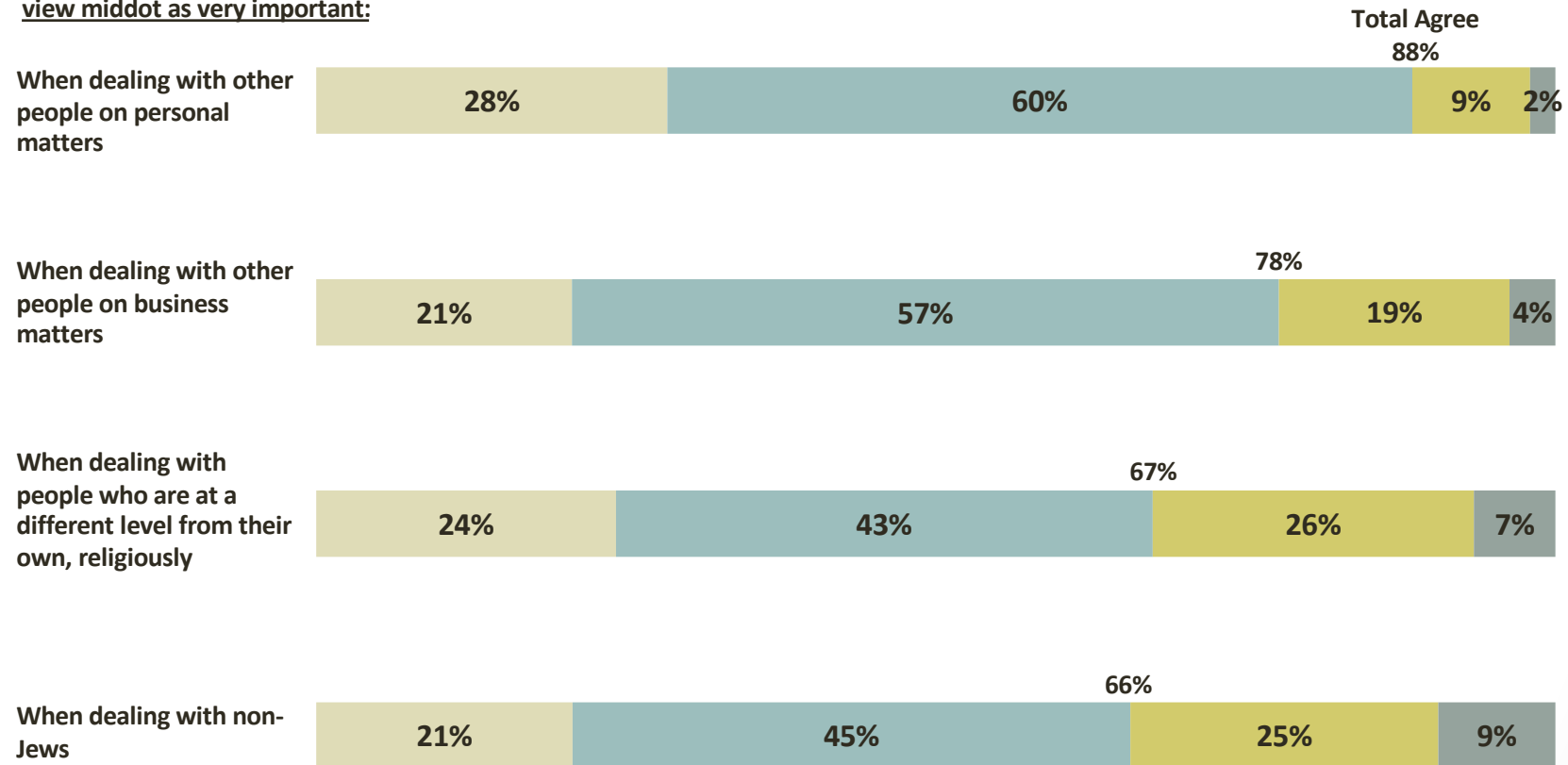


Based on an average of 818 respondents, which excludes an average of 6% who responded “don’t know.”

Do our middot vary, depending on whom we are interacting with? – Generally, middot are seen as very important regardless of whom one is dealing with, although they are seen as a bit more important when dealing with other people on personal matters.

Overall, people in my community
view middot as very important:

■ Fully agree ■ Tend to agree ■ Tend to disagree ■ Fully disagree



Based on an average of 707 respondents, and excludes an average of 9% who responded "don't know."

Additional Thoughts on Community Middot: Summary of Verbatim Responses –

The next two pages present a randomized sample of the 333 verbatim responses received to the question: “Is there anything you would like to add on how your community is doing in its middot, such as where the community is doing well, where improvement is needed, etc.?” Below is a summary* of key themes.

The following encapsulates the complexity of community life, where strengths like generosity and kindness coexist with challenges like materialism, cliquishness, and political tension. It highlights the ongoing work needed to create a community that truly embodies the full spectrum of Jewish values, especially around personal character and interpersonal relationships.

1. Community Strengths:

- Strong sense of *chesed* (kindness), particularly in helping those in need (financial, emotional, or physical).
- A welcoming atmosphere in certain spaces, such as the warm greetings exchanged on Shabbos mornings.
- Strong emphasis on charitable work and hospitality, with several organizations dedicated to assisting others.
- Many people in the community actively work on self-growth, particularly around middot.
- Positive role models from rabbis and community leaders, promoting high standards of behavior.

2. Areas for Improvement:

- An overemphasis on ritual and religious stringency (e.g., *bein adam l'Makom* or relationship with God) at the expense of interpersonal relationships (*bein adam l'chaveiro*).
- Political differences leading to judgmental behavior and a lack of tolerance, particularly toward people with different views.
- Materialism and a focus on external appearances, which some feel detracts from deeper values of middot.
- A tendency to be more polite to strangers than to family members, and issues around respect for authority, older people, and non-Jews.
- Concerns over how schools teach middot and the divide between different schools that leads to cliquishness among children.
- A feeling that the community could be more welcoming to newcomers and more attentive to minorities and those with invisible disabilities

3. Cultural and Societal Challenges:

- Disrespect or intolerance toward people who are different, whether in terms of religious observance, political beliefs, or ethnic background.
- A feeling that the community has become somewhat insular and judgmental.
- Some members feel marginalized due to the larger size of the community, which can feel impersonal.
- Concerns about abuse prevention, business ethics, and a general lack of openness to constructive criticism within the community.

4. Suggestions for Growth:

- Greater focus on practical applications of middot in daily life.
- More balance in teaching children about *bein adam l'chaveiro* alongside religious obligations.
- Addressing the rise of materialism and working on promoting humility and *tznius*.
- Improved efforts to welcome and integrate new families or immigrants into the community.
- More attention to teaching respect and responsibility toward the larger Jewish and non-Jewish communities.
- Encouraging leadership to model better middot and engage in difficult conversations about ethical issues, both in Israel and the broader world.

* Hakarat hatov 21st century style ... We thank (and are impressed by) GPT for assisting us in reading, analyzing and summarizing 333 responses.

Additional Thoughts on Community Middot: Sample of Verbatim Responses* (Page 1 of 2)

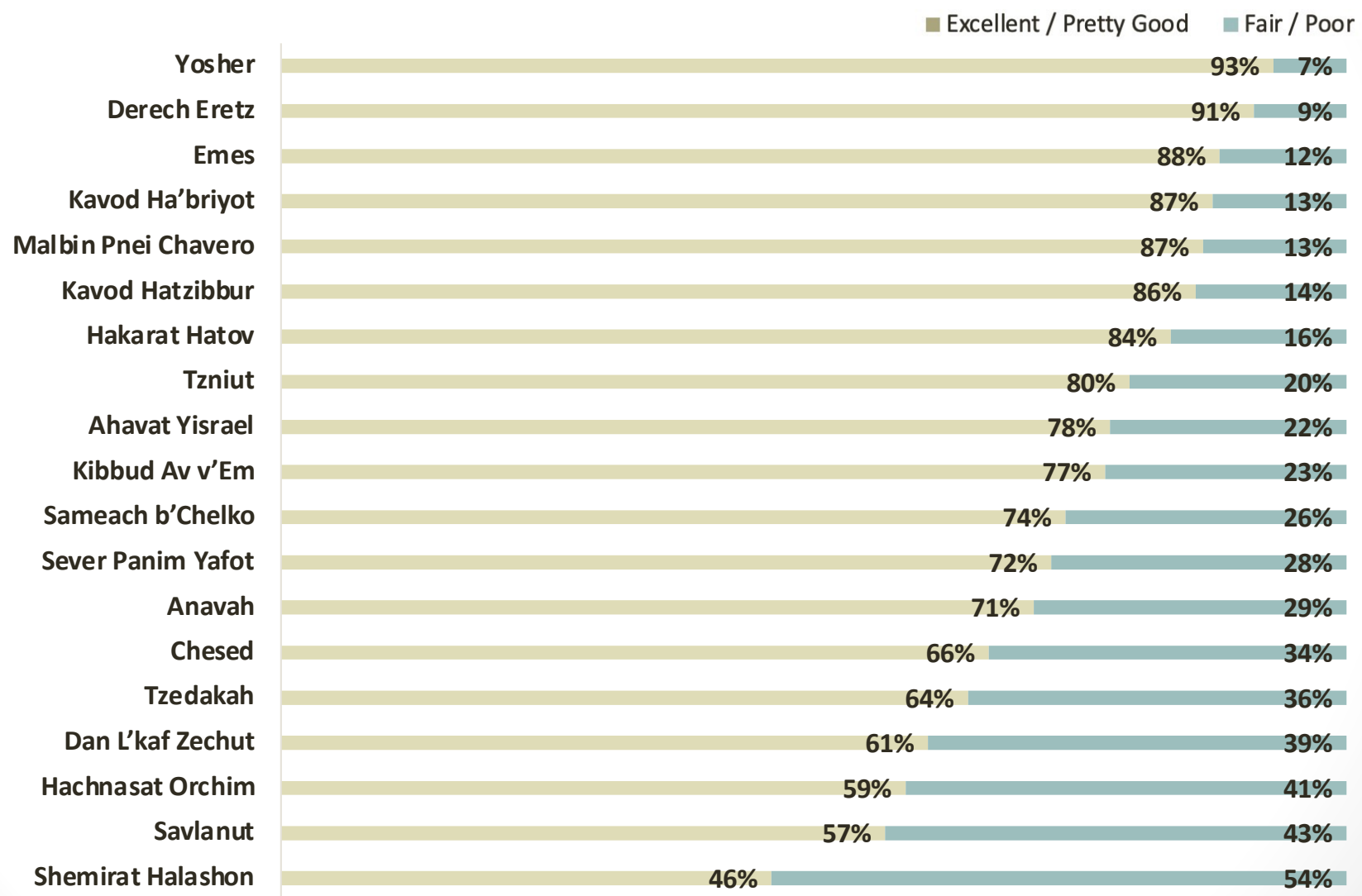
- *Our community continues to move to the right. I sense that sometimes people lose the forest amongst the trees. They are so focused on the latest "chumrah" that they forget the big picture of Jewish tradition and what it means.*
- *I feel very embraced by my wonderful shul every Shabbos morning, when everyone stops to greet each other with a friendly "good Shabbos", even if we don't know each other.*
- *Whenever someone in the community is in need financially, mentally, physically etc. there are many community members that go above and beyond to help them.*
- *People can sometimes be too aggressive in their attacks on each other that, but are otherwise quite dignified*
- *I think there's a lot of wonderful, sweet, people in my community; and at the same time a general lack of respect for authority of any kind, for other frum communities, and for gentiles*
- *Improvement in welcoming new immigrants especially inviting for Shabbat*
- *elementary schools put too much emphasis on bein adam l'makom vs. bein adam l'chaveiro*
- *We live in Rehovot, a model community with an incredibly integrated community with Jews from all over the world. I do a lot of volunteer work and the folks I work with are very grateful.*
- *My community in Israel is a Chareidi American one and views middot and interpersonal relationships as very important. It is a growth oriented community and as such people take growth in middot as well as other areas seriously.*
- *It's not a one-size-fits all. In my community, for example, there are three elementary schools that are all hashkafically similar, and you can identify which school the children attend based on their middos.*
- *people tend be nicer to strangers than their own personal families often. work on family peace and respect for own Rav*
- *Attitudes towards minorities, particularly African Americans and Palestinians*
- *The smallest of children run around like wild behamous and are given a pass in midos since they're not Gil Hinuch*
- *Generally our community is outstanding in terms of communal responsibility for people who need help of any kind, hospitable, generous, friendly in shul, etc. as modeled by the rabbi who is a true paragon of middot. They tend to be honest in business and in personal dealings. Almost universally my community links these middot to their religious commitments. WHY DIDN'T YOU ASK IF THEY WERE LINKED??? But they are not saints. Many are really good people but impatient with less outstanding people--unless they need help, in which case they help them. Most are judgmental and willing to gossip.*
- *The place that midot break down in my community is over political differences. I am in the minority, and am confronted aggressively for my views by people from the majority. From my viewpoint, not only is this wrong, the fact that the majority support individuals running for office who so clearly violate minimal standards of decency and ethics to me is indication that this majority in my own Modern Orthodox community does not place genuine value on the midot our tradition exhorts us to cultivate.*
- *This is an interesting survey. I find it ironic, however, that in the interest of the survey it seems we're being asked questions that can lead to lashon horah about our schools and communities...*
- *More practical applications of middot*
- *If we consider talking in shul and general behavior in shul part of Kavod HaTzibur, I would say our community is not doing well and has been deteriorating in this regard in the last decade.*
- *I see a modern Orthodox community that can serve as a model for other Orthodox streams in terms of most major middot. An exception is materialism, where I think we still have work to do.*
- *Improvements needed on socioeconomic status and invisible disabilities (learning disabilities ADHD high functioning autism)*
- *Our community is very diverse (meaning within the Orthodox spectrum) some have lots of trouble respecting others not like them, some are quite good at it. Rabbis are either part of the solution or in other cases, part of the problem. How various members of the community deal with and/or show respect to "outsiders", Jewish or not, largely depends on which Orthodox group they are part of, as this seems to be a major difference in orientation and perspective on how to view and deal with others, including how one speaks about them, and issues of honesty as well.*

* Verbatim responses throughout this report are shown "as is" ... no edits or corrections for spelling or grammar. This is "the voice of the kehilla."

Additional Thoughts on Community Middot: Sample of Verbatim Responses (Page 2 of 2)

- *There are many opportunities to volunteer, to call and offer help for Holocaust survivors, the disabled. More can be done*
- *There has to be a huge community effort to teach kids of all ages to be VERY respectful when in public regarding riding bikes, scooter, etc in a safe and careful manner for their own well being PLUS what it shows the public about us as a nation*
- *Judaism is a total package. It is more than personal middot. Must speak about issues that may strike a nerve in others - like what Israel should do to those Nazis in Gaza. No beating around the bush. One without the other could be a waste a time in the long run.*
- *I reported that my community was only fair when it came to hakarat ha-tov. I believe that wastefulness is an indication that one does not have proper gratitude for those things that Hashem has given them and is antithetical to the ideal of hakarat ha-tov. Our community produces so much waste from our kiddushes that I can't see us as having this middah. So much styrofoam and plastic waste! We take the world that God created for is for granted.*
- *There isn't enough consideration given to the more vulnerable in our community.*
- *I have recently been told by people in the community that they have never experienced any kind of social exclusion or significant criticism for having different views on big issues, yet I have experienced exactly that, particularly from one of the people who made that claim. The community is a hybrid of Conservative, Orthodox, and adjacent sectors. I think there is a discrepancy regarding which middot and their appropriate applications are emphasized in different parts of the community.*
- *Have lived here over 25 years, I find the community not very welcoming and friendly.*
- *Our shul's congregants are mostly baalei teshuva, who are keenly aware of the importance of middot and strive to grow and do the rrrght thing.*
- *Our shul is very Zionistic which is wonderful. But people take their political stance into the shul which should not be done and which causes divisions. It's a very judgmental group - except when it comes to other religions or ethnic groups*
- *More emphasis needed on dealing with non-religious jews. Viewing them as part of the community, too.*
- *It all comes back to which community. Are these questions about the Larger Orthodox Community or my tiny synagogue community?*
- *The community excels at Chesed to the greater whole- no other community has Chaveirim, Hatzolah, gemachs...I thk there cud be more awareness for smaller scale chasadim- more inclusive to individuals who don't fit the box, whether it's invites for meals or even reaching out to call pple & chk in on how they're doing.*
- *Walking the walk, not just talking the talk*
- *Improvement needed in business ethics*
- *We get the message to Daven more We need to hear more about Chesed opportunities*
- *My community is doing very well in hachnasos orchim and feeding the poor sick and needy. People here are very giving and give lots of tzedaka, more than the regular. My community is very aware and willing to help out a person or family in need and we have many organizations that many contribute to with money, food, physical help, emotional or social help, both for the people of our own community and the Jewish community at large.*
- *I think this question is difficult to answer as there is a range of how individual members of the community are doing with their middot; however, I can say that whenever we have guest scholars to the community they always highlight how warm and welcoming our community is. At the same time, I have heard that the hospitality committee sometimes struggles to find meals for both visitors and for specific members of the community who often seeking shabbat meals.*
- *Throughout various aspects of middot our community is lacking. Very rare to have a shiur in my shul on any topic of middot and the head Rabbi does not stress certain topics that are important with regard to middot*
- *Chesed, especially with the Israel war and gemachim are good. Tznius of how people conduct themselves and show their wealth is poor. There is a definite lack of a feeling of a kehila and kehila responsibility for the community and continuity of the community like in education and the financing of education*
- *it's very individual. every person is born with his own mix of middot and it only changes for the good by a person working hard on himself. it is not something that is taught in school and then presto he has changed for the better. so I think your focus misses the reality*

What “grade” would you give yourself in these areas? – As with the community assessment, people rate *shemirat halashon* as their main personal area needing work. Interestingly, community middot assessments do not correlate strongly with personal middot assessments (see next page); also, personal assessments (average 75% excellent / pretty good) are significantly better than the community assessments (average 60% excellent / pretty good).



Based on an average of 720 respondents, which excludes an average of 2% who responded “don’t know.”

Community Middot vs. Our Own Middot – As we live in communities comprised of many different types of individuals, it is not surprising that we seem to be systemically rating the middot of our community as different (often worse) than our own middot. In some cases, we may feel that others are “doing more” than us, and that may spur us to improve. In other cases, there may be a minority (perhaps more “visible”) whose behaviors tarnish our view of the community, and the challenge may be to do the right thing, regardless of what others do. This is perhaps an aspirational view, but ultimately we each need to take ownership of our middot and working together we can hope to influence those around us as well.

	% Rating Excellent / Pretty Good	
	How We Assess Our Community	How We Assess Ourselves
Ahavat Yisrael	74%	78%
Anavah	40%	71%
Chesed	91%	66%
Dan L'kaf Zechut	41%	61%
Derech Eretz	60%	91%
Emes	66%	88%
Hachnasat Orchim	81%	59%
Hakarat Hatov	75%	84%
Kavod Ha'briyot	51%	87%
Kavod Hatzibbur	61%	86%
Kibbud Av v'Em	90%	77%
Malbin Pnei Chavero	62%	87%
Sameach b'Chelko	45%	74%
Savlanut	41%	57%
Sever Panim Yafot	58%	72%
Shemirat Halashon	31%	46%
Tzedakah	90%	64%
Tzniut	59%	80%
Yosher	67%	93%
Ahavat Yisrael	74%	78%

Personal Middot That People Want to Work On: Summary of Verbatim Responses – The next two pages present a randomized sample of the 290 verbatim responses received to the question: “Are there areas relating to middot that you want to work on? Which ones? And what approaches would you take?” Below is a summary of some of the key themes.

- **Speech** – A frequent concern was improving awareness of speech, especially gossip (*Shmiras Halashon* and *Lashon Hara*). Some respondents want to be more proactive in stopping harmful conversations or avoid participating in them. Specific focus on learning the *halachot* of speech and actively trying to reduce harmful conversations.
- **Judging Others Favorably, Patience and Tolerance** – Some mentioned the need to stop being judgmental or harshly critical of others, with a focus on empathy and understanding differing perspectives. Many respondents expressed a desire to improve patience, both with difficult people (family, colleagues, and community members) and in everyday life. Several indicated they want to improve their behavior at home, particularly in being kinder and more patient with close family members (children, spouse). Strategies include mindfulness, *mussar* learning, and focusing on gratitude.
- **Tzedakah** – Several mentioned the challenge of being charitable when financial means are limited, particularly with obligations like taxes and tuition.
- **Gratitude** – People mentioned keeping gratitude journals as a way to improve their appreciation for what they have.
- **Anger Management** – Some expressed the desire to remove anger from their lives and find strategies to manage their emotions better.
- **Hachnasat Orchim** – There were responses about wanting to improve hospitality, though some found it difficult due to personal or external circumstances like COVID-19.
- **Humility** – Working on humility was a theme, particularly around speech and avoiding pride.

Personal Middot That People Want to Work On: Sample of Verbatim Responses (Page 1 of 2)

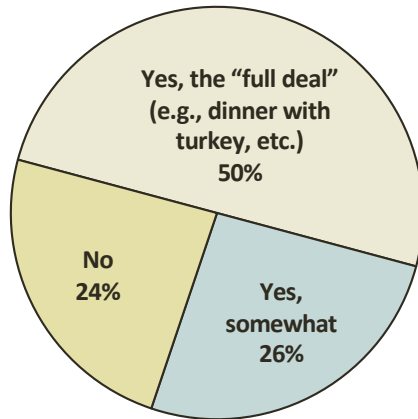
- *Not embarrassing others*
- *Savlanut and not being envious of others though they don't even know that*
- *Yes but I would work on one at the time.*
- *Loshan Hora is very easy to get caught up in. Even hearing it. Trying to remove myself from people who propagate it.*
- *We are all facing a challenge in maintaining a sense of ahavat yisrael at a time when some parts of the Jewish world (ie, the extreme right in Israel and those tolerant of it in the US) are behaving ways that are counter to Jewish values. How do we condemn those tendencies in an honest and compelling way without becoming outsiders?*
- *sever panim yafot tzedakah*
- *Being more hospitable - having more Shabbat guests. Probably should be giving more tzedakah. Be more patient with my family.*
- *Being more tolerant of others and being able to see the good in others*
- *Being happier. Sever panim yafot*
- *Like my answers already: judging others favorably and letting go of envy. With Hashem's help, look for reasons to judge then kindly. More gratitude to Hashem when I'm envious of someone else*
- *Patience Jealousy Anger*
- *Yes. Being truthful and kind. Not being depressed and an asshole.*
- *Just wanted to say that you should put an N/A option with the question about one's parents, for those of us who have no parents. There are ALWAYS middot that can be improved! Always trying to find ways to do that (and I look to my son who's the paragon of shmirat ha-lashon)*
- *At this point in my life I don't set long term goals. I need to work on myself in all areas and just try to be aware when I do something wrong or negligent and try not to repeat the transgression.*
- *I've been working at expressing sarcasm less frequently.*
- *Right now i'm trying to take care of myself and my community in this tragedy and I'm not thinking in terms of middot or personal improvement in general, just getting through the day.*
- *I think I have a lot of room for improvement. Trying to internalize the wisdom and lessons of Mussar and try to put myself in others' shoes.*
- *Feeling respectful to other observant branches of Judaism eg. Hasidim.*
- *Doing more chesed. Look for opportunities to do so.*
- *Being less envious and less focused on things that don't concern me*
- *Greeting pple with a warm welcome. Using kind words to close family & friends- not being critical. Being more careful w shmiras halashon.*
- *All of the areas in your survey require constant work -Less Musar without focus and more halachos especially as applied to every day life is needed*
- *I find that it's easy to find fault with the shul or school and bad mouth them quickly but I need to remember everyone is trying their best*
- *Savlanut and Rachmanut*
- *Always want to improve. Want to be less judgmental and more patient.*
- *I learn Mussar daily. That is something that is integral as the Mishna Berura writes in the beginning of Orach Chaim. I want to work on being Sovel other's differences and being less self-centered.*
- *Not at the moment - other priorities in ruchniyus and gashmiyus in the short term, and middos development after that.*
- *I am trying to refrain from people who I know speak loshon horah and trying not to be jealous what someone else has*
- *I have always needed to be better about Dan lekaf Zechut. Getting better....*
- *Definitely wish I did more chesed rather than just giving tzedakah. Would like to be more welcoming, inclusive of others. Always need to work on judging others favorable and reducing lashon hara.*
- *Not sure. I am trying to be more patient and I am working on tznus, especially now that I have a Frum daughter in law, while still being true to myself. But refraining from talking about others is a hard nut to crack!*
- *Patience Being welcoming Being humble*
- *I would like to put more in the pushed and am taking steps to make this happen.*
- *Too broad. I do have a therapist to the extent that overlaps (some). I would like more time and energy for a regular mussar seder.*
- *Watch my dress and speech being careful to project a good image of myself and family . Trying to be less judgemental of others. Guard my thoughts and tongue*

Personal Middot That People Want to Work On: Sample of Verbatim Responses (Page 2 of 2)

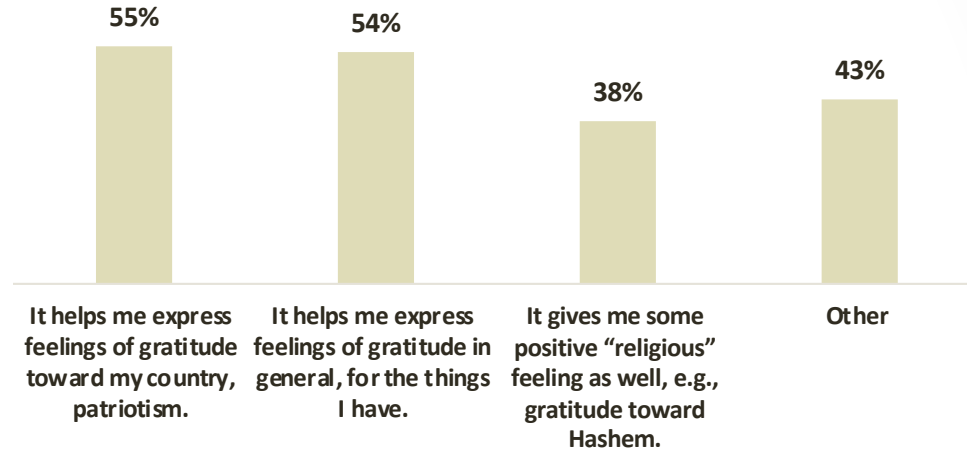
- *I could be better about hospitality, giving people the benefit of the doubt, doing more volunteering*
- *I strive to do more chesed, but it is difficult with all other demands on my time (work, family, daf yomi, recreation, ...)*
- *Increased charity. Trying to be more hospitable in shul*
- *I need to be nicer to my kids, no doubt. Spend more time with them, be more positive, not just bossing them around.*
- *Simcha More chesed*
- *Patience*
- *I am most interested in working on patience and tolerance as they pertain to my immediate family. I am taking the self-assessment and learning mussar seforim approach. Looking toward accepting what is out of my control.*
- *I would like to work on my patience*
- *More patience with my children.*
- *I feel like a good self reflection would help me brush up on my midos in general*
- *As one gets to the "other side of life" approaching 70, I find that I have turned to just trying to improve myself in my learning, my empathy, and my trying to understand or at least accept why Hashem wanted me here at this time and place. Peer pressure and the lack of proper mentors and role models make it almost impossible to influence a positive change in many younger or more affluent adult men and woman. They are influenced by Jewish media and marketing that stress the importance of acquiring the best in Jewish life. This mimics the indulgences of the surrounding secular culture around them while minimizing the guilt and anxiety from fulfilling their own desires and wants rather than trying to become a better Jew with better middot and concerns for their fellow man.*
- *All. Middos are like muscles. If you don't work on them constantly they wither away.*
- *I'm working on being more patient and not losing my temper and also I burn out from socializing and can come off unfriendly*
- *Kibud Av Va'Em is my weak point. I try to be respectful as much as I can but it is a constant work.*
- *Yes! Thankfulness, being charitable, and a smiling face are areas that I've made a point to work on, by focused and consistent reminders, and I feel that I've improved. Hospitality to guests is an area I know I need to work on, and I realize that it will require consistent focus, especially more careful planning during the week, to be sure that I have sufficient time to prepare and still be an attentive and alert hostess.*
- *Everyone has kiddos that they need to work on. I need to learn more Chassidus and work on being more patient and refined*
- *Knowing how to deal with people who irritate me.*
- *Help community more. When several life issues are settled. In the process of moving*
- *Thinking positively of others (ahavas yisroel), and hospitality.*
- *I hope to be even better at not participating in loshon hara. I know I can call my Shul Rav if I have a question about what I can say or not say in business or community matters.*
- *More welcome to new people*
- *Be more charitable in thinking about others*
- *I don't want to work on anything I am pretty happy with who I am and what I Have*
- *Dan L'Kaf Z'chut*
- *I try to work on everything, since they are all related. But most importantly, I need to work on my humility.*
- *Anavah*
- *I want to work on being less judgmental and more dan lekav zechut. Sometimes, I have a tendency to make assumptions despite not really knowing what's going on in the other person's life.*
- *Anger, need to spend more time focusing specifically on it*
- *I want to host more and help out more in the community in a way that will be helpful.*
- *Simchat Chaim - just generally being happy with things. I think I let me challenges get me down. The work is slow and hard, but it involves trusting in Hashem and being grateful for what I have. I struggle with being jealous of what others have, even if I don't want the exact things. I want the ease and freedom from worry they seem to have.*

The Thanksgiving Holiday – Three-fourths of respondents celebrate Thanksgiving, at least to some extent, and their main reason is “family time.” Among the minority who do not celebrate it, the main reason given is that it is not a Jewish holiday.

Do you celebrate in any way the secular Thanksgiving holiday?



Why do you celebrate Thanksgiving? (Asked of those who celebrate)



In their verbatim responses, the most common reasons given for celebrating Thanksgiving are:

- **Family Time** – The most frequent reason is as an opportunity to get together with family, especially non-observant or secular relatives. Many note that it is a convenient time to gather because of the day off from work and the lack of religious restrictions.
- **Family Tradition** – Several respondents mention that it is a family tradition passed down from parents or grandparents.
- **Gratitude and Patriotism** – Some highlight it as a chance to express gratitude, whether towards family or towards the U.S. for providing refuge and opportunities. Some cite it as aligning with *hakarot hatov*.

The most common reasons given for not celebrating Thanksgiving are:

- **Not a Jewish holiday / Chukas HaGoyim** – Avoiding non-Jewish customs; also, some associate it with Christian or pagan roots.
- **Thankfulness is Daily** – Many express that *hakarot hatov* is to be expressed every day, rather than on one specific day like Thanksgiving.
- **Practical Reasons** – Proximity to Shabbat and its resulting difficulty; and some say we already have enough holidays in Judaism.

“Do you celebrate “ is based on 661 respondents’ “Why do you celebrate is based on 501 respondents (with multiple responses)

Final Thoughts on Middot – Changes Needed in the Community; What We Do Well; Where We Need Improvement – A random sample of the responses (Page 1 of 3)

This final open-ended question garnered lengthy, varied responses. Rather than attempting to “tally” the ideas raised, we include a larger sample of the responses, and we recommend that these be reviewed as a “qualitative addendum” of sorts to the statistical data presented in this report.

- *The Orthodox and MO communities should be more tolerant of Jews who are Reform, Conservative, etc. They often laugh at Jews with whom they disagree.*
- *Don't be a phoney. Don't pull your tails over your head, don't go unshaven during sefirah and the three weeks, don't shake your fist at G-d while davening, don't hang your tzitzis out. Don't do any of these things if you can't behave in shule.*
- *the rabbis are disconnected with real jews in the community. the challenges they believe we have, either post oct 7, or with israel, or with middos in general, is bc they cant see past their own kippas.*
- *Not a very good questionnaire. It's ostensible performance based and that kind of assessment has been shown many times to be flawed.*
- *the shul - which is the community I think of - should not let politics mar the relationships between people. We get so focused on party affiliation - which should not matter to anyone about anything. We should be all having the attitude of 'live and let live' and 'agree to disagree' without rancor or being judgmental.*
- *[The following is edited, due to potentially identifiable information in describing a community incident]: It is very difficult to accept that frum yidden would protect very dangerous individuals in order to save their own careers and family names, rather than doing the ethical and just thing. Boruch Hashem, my son is fully recovered and his emunah stronger than ever. Personally, my own emunah in Hashem has remained intact as well, but sadly my view of middos of Jewish leaders, both rabbonim and in particular, secular elected officials, is now quite jaded.*
- *We should pick a different middah to work on, study it as a community, and find ways to implement our learning.*
- *Less emphasis on Gemara and Halacha from the pulpit and more Mussar and middos*
- *We need to do a much better job about non Jewish behavior in shul . This includes the existence of kiddush clubs and Purim/Chanukah parties that ZERO activity regarding the torah values of such get togethers. These activities along with super bowl parties that are advertised in so called Jewish publications are pure gluttony and are NOT Torah behavior. Same applies to the crazy Pesach vacations to locations with related ads that are emphasizing nothing regarding holiness*
- *In general, I think the Orthodox community (particularly the more stringent ones) could do better interacting with other Jews. We need to be more tolerant of each other.*
- *I think there needs to be more school programs and community initiatives focused on improving middos - both with regard to relationships within our community, and with regard to other frum communities*
- *We help men do men's mitzvot and support men in being observant but we don't always do the same for women nor do we always treat women's roles with respect or assume that women are trying to keep the mitzvot/know what they are doing as much as men. When we tell women that they aren't as good/important we also tell our daughters that to be good Jews they need to be more like men and do men's mitzvot. When we put a lot of resources into learning and nothing into supporting women in dressing tzniut that sends a message. Or into davening with a minyan and nothing into supporting women post partum so they can rest. Or stand for a Rav but don't offer our seat to a pregnant woman. Or build a shul when the mikva is very far. Etc etc etc*
- *Yes there are issues with attitude problems. I would same more in the teens and how they act towards other adults esp those who they do not have a relationship with.*
- *I think we have certain things done right - there is a large number of G'machs in our community - there is Tomchei Shabbos - we really need to work on being able to dialogue respectfully with those who hold opposing viewpoints. We are extremely polarized and lack Achdus on a deeper level.*
- *Our chief rabbi should delegate more decisions. He should be more trusting. He should let others give divrei Torah.*

Based on 262 respondents.

Final Thoughts on Middot – Changes Needed in the Community; What We Do Well; Where We Need Improvement – A random sample of the responses (Page 2 of 3)

- *I think poor middot should not be tolerated in our schools and shuls. Kids not respecting teachers turn into adults talking when the Rabbi is speaking in shul. Peer pressure on the adults is one way we can shape our community's behavior. While many Jewish communities have become more insular, this has resulted in many children (and even some adults) not knowing how to behave appropriately in public settings where there are not only Orthodox people present. What may be considered normal within our own spaces, for example kids running around playing, may not be appropriate in a different setting, such as at a museum on a chol hamoed trip. Schools and parents need teach kids how to interact with the world around them, since they are likely going to need to as they grow older and eventually in adulthood.*
- *There is a magazine that came out recently called The Spring Hill Times. Their raison d'etre is to spread positivity. Their "news" stories are all positive. I think that if all Jews would read The Spring Hill Times every week, it would lead to their being more positive, and this would lead to better middos. I think that people should try to refrain from reading/listening to any news that contains loshon hora. When people listen to/read loshon hora/negative news, it leads to negative feelings and less Ahavas Yisrael/good middos. I also think that people should try to avoid "labelling" as much as possible/practical. By labelling, I am referring to the idea of placing people in boxes (modern, Yeshivish, etc.) too easily & for no reason. Yes, it is necessary at times, but we shouldn't do it when it's not necessary, and we shouldn't categorize and make assumptions about people too easily.*
- *Under the category of honesty, being able to be honest about the history of the United States and of the State of Israel instead of feeling like positive-spin only is somehow essential to our survival. The sheer terror the greater (US) Jewish community seems to feel in the face of examining wrongs and committing towards a better future is at odds with our Torah values and with our children's reality. (And at odds with my close experiences in Israel where many more frum Jews seem to be much more vocal and comfortable with honest examination)*
- *I always had questions about why in the Torah communities, it seems that there is a lack of Derech Eretz, while in the more modern communities, the Derech Eretz seems to be stronger. If Torah changes a person, I would think that Torah communities would be doing better in this area.*
- *1. doing well at having the belief that middos are important 2, doing poorly when those middos come into conflict with something that we want - either social status or direction of Shul or school*
- *The disdain and contempt in which yeshivish kids speak about general non-Jews is concerning. How can that not slowly carry over to their interactions with them?*
- *My Jewish community is very small so I have minimal interaction with them except during services. But we barely get a minyon even in Shabbos so there are few Jews to interact with.*
- *Regardless of any unfortunate circumstances, convicted felons SHOULD be embraced, allowed back into the community, and given a second chance. However, they SHOULD NOT be given shlishi, celebrity status, speaking opportunities, and the great privilege of speaking to our children. It sends a message that crimes committed are no big deal. I will generalize here. I think that loshon hora and embarrassing others are bigger problems in the more 'Modern' elements of my community and that derech eretz--especially aggressive driving habits--is a bigger problem in the more 'Frum' or 'Yeshivish' parts of my community. I wish the two could learn from one another.*
- *Again, how will you know that the people taking this survey CONNECT their various middot to their religiosity? Isn't that an important goal of this study, to find out whether Orthodox Jews believe that middot are central to their religiosity?*
- *Problems are too numerous here. A huge difficulty exists with people never responding to emails and never answering phones.*
- *It would be great if schools would put more of an emphasis on really teaching middos and making meaningful incentives for kids (not just junking them up with treats for every little thing they do). It would be nice if shul Rabbis would also put more of an emphasis on this among their congregants and communities.*
- *The day schools teaching middot to children is failing miserably. I'm not sure if it's the families or the schools really but it's unfortunate that the more right leaning the school is, the more behavioral issues I have seen with the students. In the local day school the kids horrendously nasty and the leadership is afraid to expel students. Nasty kids become nasty adults. I fear for our future*

Final Thoughts on Middot – Changes Needed in the Community; What We Do Well; Where We Need Improvement – A random sample of the responses (Page 3 of 3)

- *I think rebbeim, morahs, teachers and rabbonim are doing a fine job discussing these matters but society as a whole has to be willing to change, one individual at a time, especially with being envious and living within one's means and being able to "fargin" others*
- *Teens do not have a baseline for what is "normal," because they are seeing edited and curated versions of reality all the time. Not only is this causing major anxiety and self doubt in people of all ages, it is also making the ideals of humility and generosity, patience, and kindness seem quaint and provincial at best. We can definitely do better!*
- *B"H our community has grown. One result of this is that children are not taught that just because someone doesn't look like them they are not religious. They have become very insular. This is an area where both schools and parents should work on.*
- *Eliminate all denominational labels. They only serve to divide and sow disdain. Denominations cause Sinat Hinam.*
- *There is a lot of chesed happening, with knowledge and without. Meal trains for illness and new births, car rides for those lacking transportation, gemachim, etc. All these are wonderful but I see an extreme lack of kavod and derech erez among the children and next generation that leads me to believe that the schools are not teaching or emphasizing middot enough.*
- *As said earlier, emphasis on middot coming from the home is essential. If the community worked as a whole from top to bottom to be more inclusive and sensitive to those not cookie cutter bec of family circumstances, abilities, schools attended, religious observance, it would be a more spiritual and authentic environment. Singles, elderly and families w people with disabilities or religious differences have so much to offer the "in the box" people about their resilience, life experience and spirituality. They are committed to Judaism and Gd in ways "in the box" people cannot imagine and can learn from. They need to be given a voice and opportunity to become a more central part of the community. They should be asked to speak in shul, be on a committee, a board, etc. not only seen as pitiful and in need of a Shabbat meal.*
- *I'm glad you're doing this survey, because I think it's important for us as a community to focus more on middos. We have areas of strength and weakness, but a greater emphasis on this topic overall is crucial.*
- *October 7th was like an arrow to the heart yet there is some gold lining to the devastation- the Jewish people have come together like never before. We embrace each other and put differences aside. Loving all Jews has never felt so tangible before. It's a beautiful midda and one that I hope will grow and spread.*
- *Interactions with non-jews, they shouldnt be viewed as second rate. If that is someone's belief, still should treat them with respect if they havent done anything wrong. Business dealings - the askanim/nursing home owners scamming poor and helpless people and the government. Yes, their wealth funds community efforts but at the expense of others.*
- *I think we as a community try hard, but we have a lot of hypocrisy. I'm sure it exists within individuals, but I'm more concerned about structural elements. We tell people to be happy with what you have, but require them to pay for high cost must haves like chosson and kallah gifts, shadchanim payments, minimal celebration expectations, the 'in' clothes or sheitels, camps, etc. We are not balancing our values and the ways we live. We are allowing marketing and consumerism to force us into the idea of what is correct, while at the same time revering tzadikim whose lives we do not want to emulate (in terms of materialism). What should someone do if they can't afford tuition? Not settle for something they can afford like public school or a 'lesser' school - the community will not accept it. There are many examples of this throughout our lives. Separately - there are the forgotten populations - widows, those looking for a spouse longer than average, divorces, the socially awkward. We need to do more to support these segments. It is not enough to show good middos to those we are comfortable with.*
- *Of the 50 sermons per year, how many challenge the kehillah to become better Jewish men and women, to be less ostentatious, to be modest in displaying wealth. Why is there a positive correlation between the speed of davening and the more centrist or left leaning a congregation. God and the good middot He demands seems to become less important the more "modern" one becomes as a Jew. The speed of davening is a direct indication of that. The State of Israel is not a replacement for God and His demands on the individual Jewish man or woman.*
- *I think the Jewish community stands out in its focus on middos and self-improvement. We are constantly looking for ways to improve ourselves.*

Survey Respondent Demographics & Differences Among Groups – Median

Group Within Orthodoxy	
Modern / Centrist Orthodox	62%
Haredi (Chasidish, Yeshivish)	31%
Undefined	7%
Identification Within Modern Orthodoxy	
Liberal / Centrist / Right-Machmir	33% / 44% / 23%
Gender	
Male / Female	54% / 46%
Age	
18 to 29	8%
30 to 44	26%
45 to 59	27%
60 to 74	29%
75 or older	10%
Marital Status	
Married	82%
Single, Never Married	9%
Divorced, Separated, Widowed	9%
Location	
U.S.A. / Israel / Other	90% / 8% / 2%
In U.S.A. – NJ 33%, NY 29%, MD-DC-VA 8%, MA 7%, CT 3%, FI 3%, IL 3%, PA 3%, CA 2%, OH 2%, MI 2%, Other 5%.	

- By an average of about 5%, Haredi rate their schools, leaders and community as doing a better job on middot than the Modern Orthodox. It is unknown whether there are differences, or perhaps MO's willingness to be more critical.
- A similar pattern appears within Modern Orthodoxy, with those on the right/machmir of MO rating their community's middot as better than those on the left or center of MO.
- Men and women rate their own and the community's middot equally for 15 of the 19 middot, while women rate middot as being significantly better for *chesed*, *tzedakah*, *hachnasat orchim*, and *hakarat hatov*.
- Those age 60+ rate their community's middot about 5% worse than those younger; but they rate their own middot as about 5% better than do those under age 60.
- Marrieds' and Unmarrieds' responses are generally similar

Survey Questionnaire (Page 1 of 3)

The Nishma Research 2024/5785 Middot Survey

WELCOME TO THE MIDDOT SURVEY

As we approach the *Yamim Noraim* – the High Holidays – we want to explore how good a job we are doing on various middot (ethical character traits), involving interactions with others (“*bein adam l’chavero*”).

This brief (8-10 minutes) confidential survey is open to all individuals aged 18 and older. Only some questions require a response (indicated by *), but we hope you will respond as fully as possible. At the end of the survey, you will be able to enter a drawing to win one of four \$25 Gift Cards.

Nishma Research, an independent Orthodox research firm, is conducting this survey as part of our mission to enhance Jewish religious and communal life. The survey report will be shared with community rabbis and individuals before Rosh Hashanah. [You might even hear your rabbi talk about it in shul.] If you have any questions, email Mark Trencher at mark@nishmaresearch.com.

[Note: Middot is also spelled as Middos We will use the “Ivrit spelling” (e.g., middot) throughout this survey.]

JEWISH IDENTIFICATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

*Q1. Which of the following categories best describes how you identify Jewishly?

- Modern / Centrist Orthodox
- Yeshivish, Litvish, Agudah
- Chasidish, not including Chabad-Lubavitch
- Chabad-Lubavitch –
- Other Orthodox, traditional, halachic – Describe (optional) Text Box
- Not Orthodox
- Not Jewish

[If Not Orthodox or Not Jewish, terminate with message: “Thank you for your interest, but this survey aims to gather information only from those who identify as Jewish Orthodox and Jewish. You may close this web browser window or tab to exit the survey.]

Q2. Where do you see yourself within the range of Modern/Centrist Orthodoxy?

- "To the left" ... liberal Modern Orthodox
- "In the center" ... centrist Modern Orthodox
- "To the right" ... More stringent (machmir) centrist Orthodox

*Q3. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Would rather not say

*Q4. What is your age?

- 18 to 29
- 30 to 44
- 45 to 59
- 60 to 74
- 75 or older
- Would rather not say

Q5. What is your marital/relationship status?

- Married
- Single, never married
- Divorced
- Separated
- Widowed
- Living with a partner or in an exclusive relationship

*Q6. Where do you live?

- United States
- Israel
- Canada
- Great Britain
- Other – Please enter _____

[Ask if Live in United States]

Q6a. What are the first three digits of your zip code? ___ ___ ___

Survey Questionnaire (Page 2 of 3)

*Q7. Do you agree with the following statements?

- Our Jewish schools are doing a good job teaching middot.
- Our religious leaders are doing a good job emphasizing middot.
- In recent years, people in my community have generally become less respectful and polite with each other.
- Having good middot is as important as following halacha.

Response Options:

- Fully agree
- Tend to agree
- Tend to disagree
- Fully disagree
- Don't know

*Q8. What "grade" would you give your community on the job people do, in general, in these areas? [List is split into two questions, due to length]

- Ahavat Yisrael – Extending kindness to the broader Jewish community
- Anavah – Acting with humility
- Chesed – Doing acts of kindness
- Dan L'kaf Zechut – Judging favorably, giving benefit of the doubt
- Derech Eretz – Being respectful and behaving decently
- Emes – Being truthful
- Hachnasat Orchim – Showing hospitality to guests
- Hakarat Hatov – Expressing gratitude, thankfulness
- Kavod Hatzibbur – Being respectful of the community/congregation
- Kavod Ha'briyot – Honoring all of Hashem's creations (humans)
- Kibbud Av v'Em – Honoring and caring for one's parents
- Malbin Pnei Chavero – Being careful not to embarrass others publicly
- Sameach b'Chelko – Being satisfied with what one has, not envious
- Savlanut – Being patient, tolerant
- Sever Panim Yafot – Having a smiling, pleasant face, welcoming (e.g., in shul, community)
- Shemirat Halashon – Refraining from lashon harah, guarding one's speech
- Tzedakah – Being charitable
- Tzniut – Being modest and discreet in dress and behavior
- Yosher – Being honest with others, including in business

Response Options:

- Excellent (A)
- Pretty good (B)
- Fair (C)
- Poor (D)
- Don't know

*Q9. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Overall, people in my community view middot as very important ...

- ... when dealing with other people on personal matters.
- ... when dealing with other people on business matters.
- ... when dealing with people who are at a different level from their own, religiously.
- ... when dealing with non-Jews.

Response Options:

- Fully agree
- Tend to agree
- Tend to disagree
- Fully disagree
- Don't know

Q10. Is there anything you would like to add on how your community is doing in its middot, such as where the community is doing well, where improvement is needed, etc.? [Open-Ended]

Q11. What "grade" would you give yourself in these areas?

[Same items and response options as Q8]

Q12. Are there areas relating to middot that you want to work on? Which ones? And what approaches would you take? [Open-Ended]

Q13. Do you celebrate in any way the secular Thanksgiving holiday?

- Yes, the "full deal" (e.g., dinner with turkey, etc.)
- Yes, somewhat
- No – Can you briefly explain why: _____

[Ask if yes]

Q14. Why do you celebrate Thanksgiving? Please check all that apply.

- It helps me express feelings of gratitude toward my country, patriotism.
- It helps me express feelings of gratitude in general, for the things I have.
- It gives me some positive "religious" feeling as well, e.g., gratitude toward Hashem.
- Other – Please describe: _____

Survey Questionnaire *(Page 3 of 3)*

Q15. Finally: Feel free to share any additional thoughts you may have relating to middot, such as:

- Any changes in how the community should think about and emphasize middot;
- Where you think we are doing well;
- Where you think we need improvement;
- Anything else you would like to add.

Just a reminder All of the verbatim responses will be read and shared with the community, including rabbis and other leaders, so this is your chance to be heard. Also, as noted previously, for confidentiality please do not identify yourself by name, the name of your shul, or any individuals.

Thank you very much for sharing your thoughts.

- Check here if you would you like to be entered into the raffle for a chance to win one of four \$25 Gift Cards.
- Check here if you would like to get email invitations to future research on Jewish topics, which we conduct from time to time.
- Check here if you would you like to get a free report of the survey results.

[If any items checked]

Please let us know your email address, so that we can contact you as appropriate. Your email will be totally confidential and will not be attached to your survey responses. Thank you! _____



<http://nishmaresearch.com>



Nishma Research and other Jewish communal studies are discussed at the Orthonomics podcast.