

# Nishma Research The Journeys and Experiences of Baalei Teshuvah

November 4, 2019



*Sponsored by  
the Micah  
Foundation*

# Table of Contents

Contents	Page(s)
Preface, Method Statement, Introduction	3-5
Summary of Key Findings	6-8
Incidence of Baalei Teshuvah	9
Baalei Teshuvah Compared to Frum From Birth	10
Why and How Baalei Teshuvah Became Orthodox	11-14
The Challenges of Becoming Baalei Teshuvah	15
The Continuing Journey; Holding on to the Past	16-17
Comfort in Orthodoxy; Acceptance; Societal Challenges	18-20
How Baalei Teshuvah See Themselves; How They Change; How They See the Future	21-23
What Baalei Teshuvah Want the Rest of Us to Know About Them	24
How Charedi Baalei Teshuvah Differ From Modern Orthodox	25
A Comparative Profile of Converts	26
Demographics – US Modern Orthodox Baalei Teshuvah Respondents	27
Appendix I – Sample Verbatim Responses to Open-Ended Questions	28-36
Appendix II – Survey Questionnaire	37-44
The Study Advisory Group	45
About Nishma Research	46

# Preface

## Our Goal

Nishma conducts independent research in the Jewish community. Our goal is to ask the questions that are on the minds of the community – including difficult questions that had not previously received attention – irrespective of preconceptions or agenda, and without judgment. While there has been a fair amount of research in the community, the types of broad, issues-oriented communal studies that Nishma does are quite new. We view the fact that researchers are starting to provide and share information, in support of thoughtful discussion, to be a positive development.

## Research Objective

Nishma's 2017 survey of American Modern Orthodoxy showed a complex and diverse portrait: a community with many strengths, concerns, a strong sense of cohesiveness, but also fragmentation around certain views and issues. The findings (<http://nishmaresearch.com/social-research.html>) were presented at approximately two dozen shuls and feedback suggested areas for further research, including: (1) A deeper understanding of the journeys and experiences of baalei teshuvah; and (2) The future of Modern Orthodoxy and how it can continue to thrive in, and confront the challenges of, secular society.

This report presents findings relating to the first topic and a concurrently released report presents findings relating to the second topic.

## Thank You

- To the study advisory group (see page 45) for their input and support, and to other Jewish communal rabbis and lay leaders who provided survey suggestions.
- To the Rabbinical Council of America, for notifying and encouraging the support of their approximately 1,000 member rabbis; and to all the shul rabbis who expressed enthusiasm for this survey, and who helped us to reach thousands in the Orthodox community.
- To the community members who took the time to share their thoughts. We hope you enjoy reading this report and reflecting on the findings.

## Sponsorship

This study is sponsored by a grant from the Micah Foundation. The foundation is directed by members of the Orthodox community, with the mission of promoting and enhancing Jewish religious life.

## Disclaimer

Nishma Research is solely responsible for conducting this research, the questions asked, the analysis, and reporting. The advisory group participated in developing the survey questions and advised on the analysis. Rabbis and shuls throughout the US helped by informing their members of the survey, but were not involved in the analysis or reporting of this independent effort.

Mark L. Trencher  
West Hartford, Connecticut  
[mark@nishmaresearch.com](mailto:mark@nishmaresearch.com)  
<http://nishmaresearch.com>  
November 4, 2019

# Method Statement

Seeking to reach the broad community of Modern Orthodox (MO) Jews, the study contacted synagogues, reaching their rabbis and members via communication through the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA). As shul affiliation is virtually universal among the Orthodox, we see this as an effective way to reach the community. We received 2,629 responses, of whom 1,817 self-identified (survey research about Jewish communities in all their variety, like survey research in general, relies on self-identification) as Modern Orthodox residing in the US, and the findings presented in this report are primarily based on these respondents. Some had self-identified as charedi<sup>1</sup>, Conservative and other non-Modern Orthodox, even though they are members of shuls whose rabbis are RCA members.

Among the respondents were 888 whom we classified as baalei teshuvah (having become Orthodox at bar/bat mitzvah age or later), and who responded to several dozen questions aimed specifically at them and their experiences. This report presents the findings for the 744 U.S.-based baalei teshuvah among this group, who currently identify as Modern Orthodox.

The extent to which these samples are representative of the overall populations from which they derive is not knowable, as no demographic profile of the community exists. Such profiles exist for larger denominations of American Jewry (via community, Federation, and Pew<sup>2</sup> studies), but Orthodoxy – and particularly the Modern Orthodox and baalei teshuvah – are quite small segments, and this small size has implications for researchers. For example, Pew made over 71,000 phone calls to reach Jewish households, of which only 134 were synagogue-attending Modern Orthodox Jews.)

Reaching and obtaining adequate samples from among small segments is challenging, and that is why we chose the route of reaching the community through the RCA synagogue rabbis.

Based on comparisons with the Pew sample, our MO respondents overall appear roughly equivalent with respect to regional distribution, median age, liberal/conservative political balance, and the percentage that are baalei teshuvah. Our sample appears to report somewhat higher levels of education and income. This survey asked respondents to identify where they fall within the spectrum of Modern Orthodoxy (left/center/right), but a baseline measure has never been developed for the entire MO population. A community demographic profile including this measure and others would be useful for stratified sampling and weighting<sup>3</sup> and one Orthodox communal organization has expressed interest in creating such a resource for future surveys.

We follow the guidance of AAPOR<sup>4</sup> (American Association for Public Opinion Research) that opt-in surveys are not ideal but may be the best approach, lacking other options.

As is true for all surveys, sample respondents should be viewed with appropriate understanding and caution. The researchers and study advisors are not coming to this research totally ignorant of the population at hand, and existing knowledge may be reflected in some of the commentary. Appropriate statistical tests are applied in comparing respondent segments<sup>5</sup>.

We hope this research will further communal dialogue.

<sup>1</sup> Respondent verbatim comments are italicized in this report. Non-English words (e.g., charedi, baalei teshuvah, etc.) are not italicized.

<sup>2</sup> See Pew Research “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” <https://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>

<sup>3</sup> For a basic explanation of stratified sample weighting methodology, see for example: <http://www.applied-survey-methods.com/weight.html>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.aapor.org/AAPOR\\_Main/media/MainSiteFiles/AAPOROnlinePanelsTFReportFinalRevised1.pdf](https://www.aapor.org/AAPOR_Main/media/MainSiteFiles/AAPOROnlinePanelsTFReportFinalRevised1.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> In surveys of this type, statistical analysis is more germane in comparing respondent sub-groups. For example, we compare men vs. women, older vs. younger, those living in large cities to those in smaller communities, etc. Overall margins of error are less or not meaningful in a web (opt in) survey (see <https://www.aapor.org/Education-Resources/Election-Polling-Resources/Margin-of-Sampling-Error-Credibility-Interval.aspx>). However, as some readers ask, the figures  $\pm 2\%$  and  $\pm 4\%$  for the Modern Orthodox and Baal Teshuvah reports, respectively. The number of responses to each question (denoted as “n”) is shown in a footnote accompanying the question text.

## Introduction

One of the more surprising findings in The Nishma Research 2017 Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews was the percentage of baalei teshuvah. One-third (33%) of respondents indicated that they had started to identify as Orthodox at age 18 or older, and 42% started to identify as Orthodox at age 11 or older.

In 2018-2019, as the results of that survey were presented and discussed at approximately two dozen shuls, a question very often asked was, “what about baalei teshuvah?”

- Why did they move to Orthodoxy?
- What were the key influencers of their decisions?
- Have they continued to shift within Orthodoxy?
- What challenges did they face, and continue to face?
- How comfortable are they now in the Orthodox community?
- Do they feel accepted?
- What do they want the FFB (“frum from birth”) to know about them?
- Etc.

This survey generated 888 responses from people who identified as baalei teshuvah, which we define as people who began to identify as being an “Orthodox observant Jew” at or after bar/bat mitzvah age. Of these, 744 are Modern Orthodox in the United States, and most of the data in this report is based on those respondents. This

was done because we do not know the percentages of baalei teshuvah that fall into the Modern Orthodox vs. the charedi segments. Among our US-based baalei teshuvah respondents, 92% are Modern Orthodox and 8% are charedi. Based upon our observations of the community, we believe the proportion of all baalei teshuvah that are currently charedi may well be higher than 8% and, rather than somewhat arbitrarily assigning sampling weights to reflect the representation and impact of the charedi in our data, this report is based on those currently identifying as Modern Orthodox, with comparative and summary data presented for the charedi baalei teshuvah presented.

A byproduct of our focus should be noted: because baalei teshuvah often continue to evolve religiously (as, admittedly, do others in the Orthodox community), many who were at one time Modern Orthodox may currently identify as charedi ... or as non-Orthodox. So we are essentially looking at a snapshot in time, i.e., those who today identify as Modern Orthodox. When we look at statistics such as their left/center/right orientation, we need to remember that some who have moved to the right no longer identify as Modern Orthodox. This is, of course, true for all respondents (FFB as well as BT), but the impact of the likely greater religious flux among BTs is unknown.

## Summary of Key Findings *(Page 1 of 3)*

### Introduction – Incidence of Baalei Teshuvah and Some Comparisons to Those “Frum From Birth”

- 42% of today’s Modern Orthodox community is comprised of baalei teshuvah. The median age at which they started to identify as Orthodox is 23.5, and more than half have been Orthodox for 20+ years. This report explores baalei teshuvah who currently identify as Modern Orthodox.
- Before exploring baalei teshuvah in depth, some comparisons to the “Frum From Birth” (FFB) are notable. Baalei teshuvah tend to be more liberal, have more “observance diversity” in their households, and their Orthodoxy is a slightly less important part of who they are overall.

### Why and How Baalei Teshuvah Became Orthodox

- Nearly half (49%) of baalei teshuvah had previously been Conservative or Orthoprax, followed by the non-denominational – traditional, cultural, ethnic Jewish, or “just Jewish” (23%).
- The top reasons baalei teshuvah give for why they became Orthodox are intellectual attraction or curiosity (53%), seeing Orthodoxy as more authentically Jewish (52%) and more truthful (35%), and connection to Jewish roots and heritage (36%).
- Among those who cited kiruv (outreach) as an influence, Chabad Lubavitch (42%) and “a rabbi or other mentor/ personality” (38%) are most often cited. However, while kiruv is effective in influencing people to become Orthodox, only 22% rate their “follow-up” as excellent.
- Some factors influence men and women differently. Men are more often drawn by kiruv and intellectual attraction; women by spirituality and the community.

## Summary of Key Findings *(Page 2 of 3)*

### The Challenges of Becoming Baalei Teshuvah

- By a very wide margin, the top challenge baalei teshuvah faced in becoming Orthodox was in their relationships with their parents and family (37%).
- These relationships were far more challenging than learning and knowing what to do as an Orthodox observant person (cited by 16%), social aspects and friends (13%), and kashrut (12%).

### The Continuing Journey

- Baalei teshuvah's levels of religiosity continue to change. Half say they continued to become more observant over time, as they have learned more and as they gradually moved toward greater observance. But one in four says they have become less observant and gradually more lenient.
- The vast majority of baalei teshuvah (83%) say that they have "held onto" things from their pre-Orthodox life, which are not commonly found in the Orthodox world, most often citing left-of-center political views (20%) and socially liberal views (12%).

### Comfort and Acceptance

- Between half and two-thirds of baalei teshuvah are fully or mostly comfortable with davening (65%), Jewish learning (53%), and day-to-day Orthodox living (65%). However, their comfort levels are significantly lower than those of FFBs for all of these aspects of Orthodox life.
- About three-fourths of all Orthodox Jews see their community as very accepting of baalei teshuvah. Interestingly, there is even a bit stronger agreement (that the community as accepting) among baalei teshuvah than among FFBs.

## Summary of Key Findings *(Page 3 of 3)*

### How Baalei Teshuvah Interact With Secular Society

- When confronted with a conflict with secular society, baalei teshuvah tend to have more compromising/flexible attitudes than do FFBs. Part of this is the compromises they make in dealing with their non-Orthodox family. Additionally, baalei teshuvah are less sensitive to the incursion of secular views and values (both positive and negative) into Orthodoxy.

### How Baalei Teshuvah See Themselves, How They Change and How They See the Future

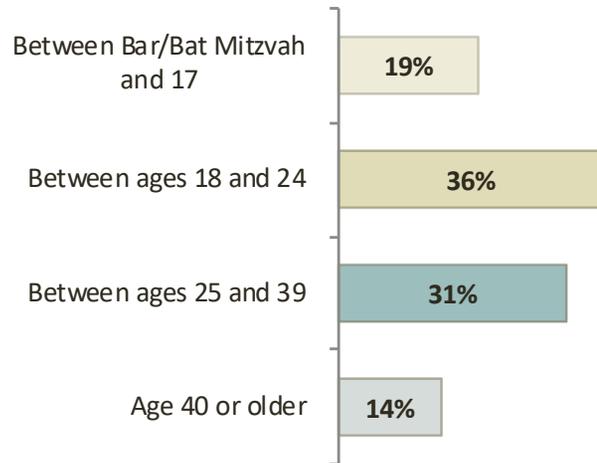
- While about half of baalei teshuvah think of themselves as “just a member of the Orthodox community” and do not really view themselves as different, the other half are conscious of “still being a baal teshuvah.”
- It seems to take baalei teshuvah 10+ years to acclimate to Orthodoxy, but practices and comfort continue to change beyond that period, gradually becoming more similar to those of FFBs.
- Baalei teshuvah are notably more optimistic than FFBs about the future of Modern Orthodoxy. However, their religious hopes for their children skew a bit more to the left, and they are substantially more likely to consider public school education.

### What Baalei Teshuvah Want the Rest of Us to Know About Them

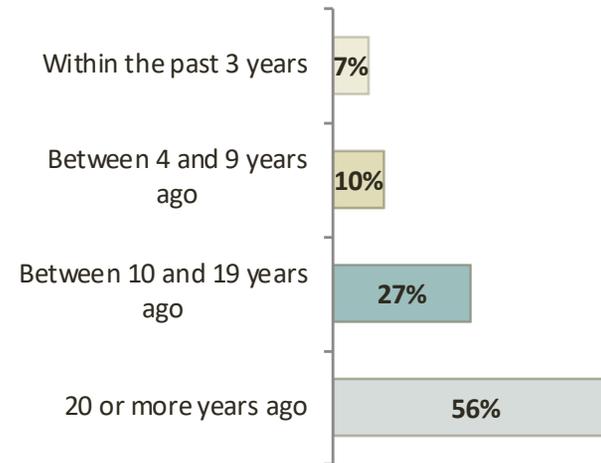
- Through this survey, baalei teshuvah provided much thoughtful feedback to the larger community, covering a wide range of issues. Their main messages dealt with encouragement of acceptance and sensitivity.

**42% of today’s Modern Orthodox community is comprised of baalei teshuvah. The median age at which they started to identify as Orthodox is 23.5, and more than half have been Orthodox for 20+ years. This report explores those who are baalei teshuvah and currently identify as Modern Orthodox.**

**Age At Which Baalei Teshuvah Began to Identify as Observant Orthodox**



**How Many Years Ago Became Baalei Teshuvah**



\* Our definition of baalei teshuvah is broad and based on the age at which people became observant. It became clear from the responses that people who became Orthodox may or may not view themselves today as still being “baalei teshuvah,” and this is one aspect of their journey that we explore in this study.

Q. At what stage in your life did you begin to identify yourself as being an observant Orthodox Jew? n = 744.

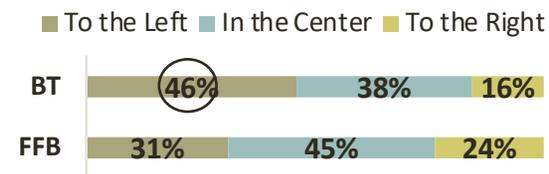
Q. (Asked of baalei teshuvah) How many years ago did you begin to identify yourself as an observant Orthodox Jew? ... Within the past 3 years; Between 4 and 9 years ago; Between 10 and 19 years ago; 20 or more years ago. n =805.

Before exploring the baalei teshuvah (BT's) in depth, some comparisons to those “From Birth” (FFB) are notable. Baalei teshuvah tend to be more liberal, have more “observance diversity” in their households, and their Orthodoxy is a slightly less important part of who they are overall than it is among FFB.

Being an Orthodox / Observant Jew is an Important Part of My Life (% that agree fully)



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



Is Your Spouse a Baal Teshuvah?



Spouse More or Less Religious Than You?



Q. Do you agree with the following statement? Being an Orthodox / Observant Jew is an important part of my life. Response Scale: Agree Fully; Agree Somewhat; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Disagree Somewhat; Disagree Fully; Don't Know. n = 644 BT; 912 FFB.

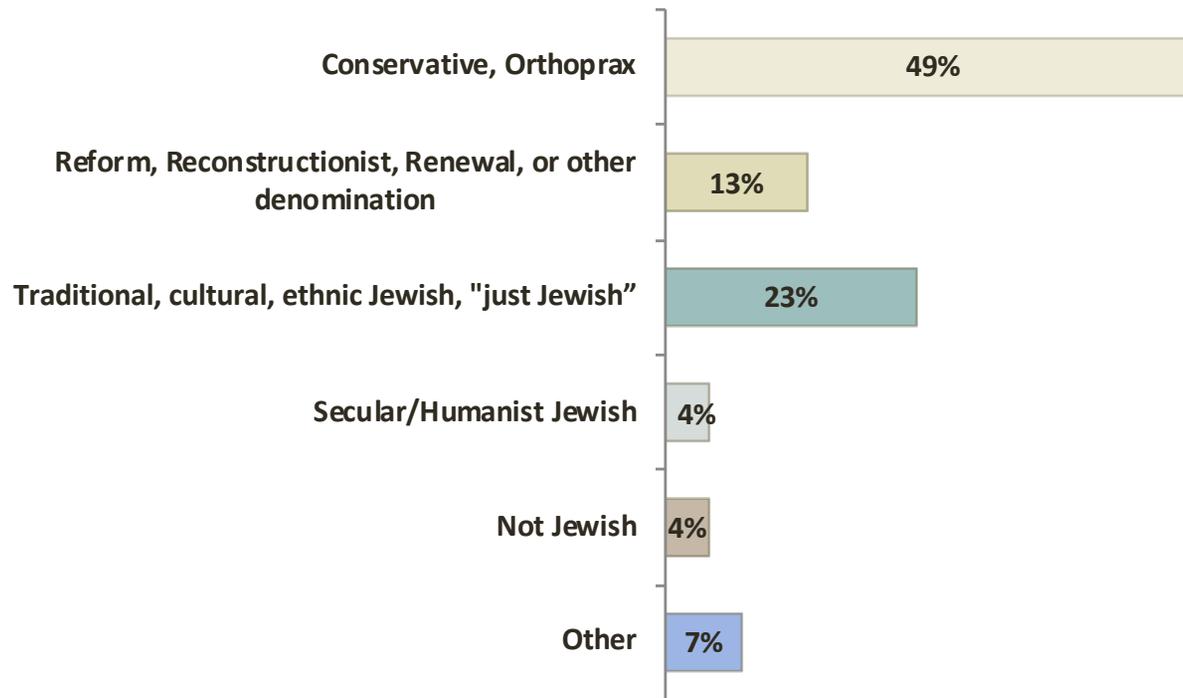
Q. (Asked of those who identified as “Modern Orthodox or Centrist Orthodox”) Where do you see yourself within the range of Modern/Centrist Orthodoxy? ... “To the left” ... Liberal Modern Orthodox; “In the center” ... Centrist Modern Orthodox; “To the right” ... More stringent (machmir) Centrist Orthodox. n = 733 BT; 1,038 FFB.

Q. (Asked of baalei teshuvah and married) Is your spouse also a baal teshuvah? Yes, my spouse is a baal teshuvah (or a convert); No. n = 349 BT.

Q. (Asked of married) Would you say that your spouse is: At about the same level of religious observance as you are; More religious (observant) than you are; Less religious (observant) than you are; Don't Know. n = 517 BT; 720 FFB.

Nearly half (49%) of baalei teshuvah had previously been Conservative or Orthoprax\*, followed by the non-denominational – traditional, cultural, ethnic Jewish, or "just Jewish" (23%). Interestingly, separate research has shown that those who leave Modern Orthodoxy end up in a similar place: 71% subsequently identify as cultural, ethnic, "just Jewish," Conservative or Orthoprax.\*\*

Baal Teshuvah Religious Orientation Before Becoming Orthodox

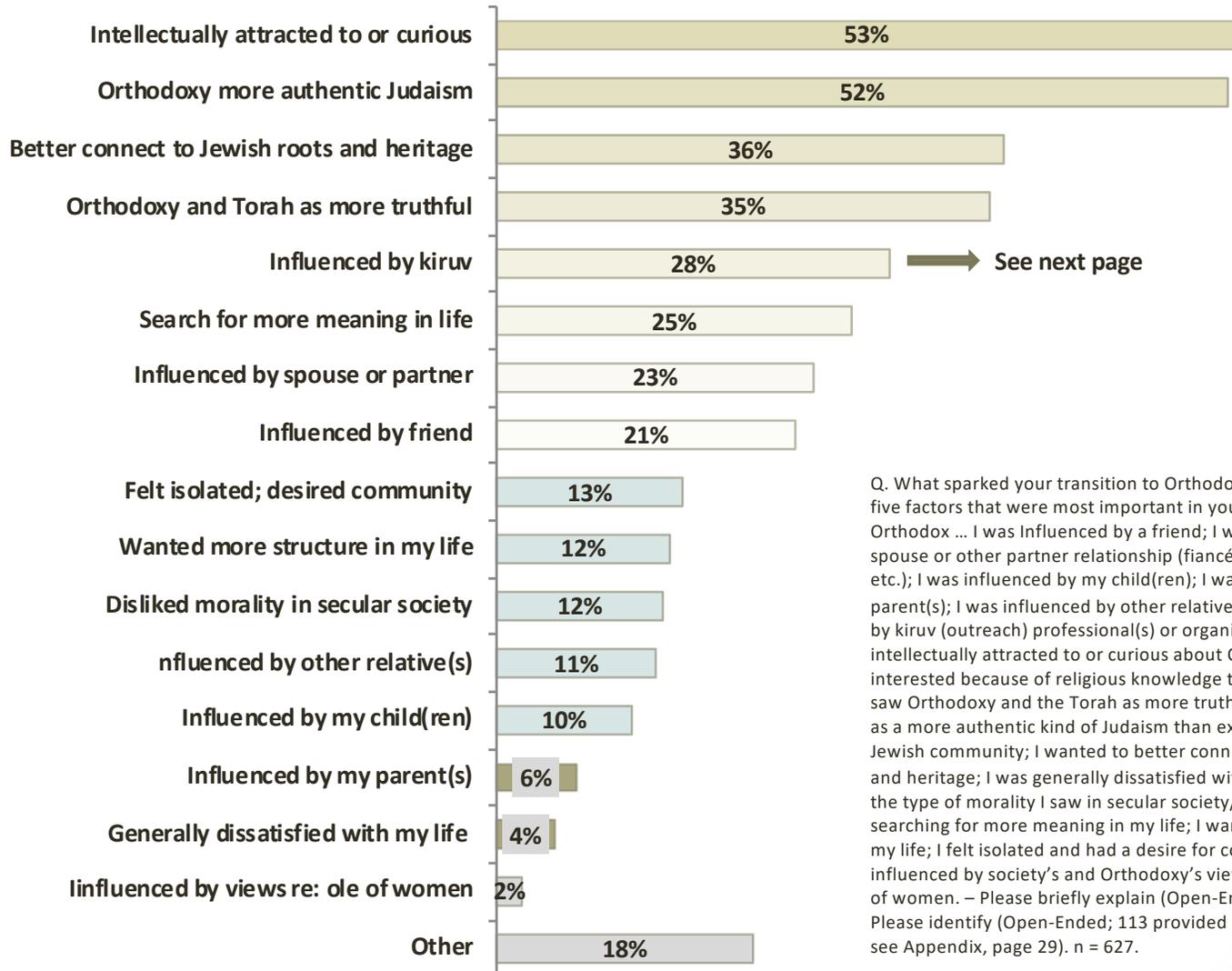


\* Orthoprax is a term used to describe those who lack belief (agnostic or atheistic) but do practice some rituals.

\*\* See <http://nishmaresearch.com/social-research.html> > Report - Modern Orthodox - Survey of Those Who Have Left Orthodoxy - July 2016 (Page 40)

Q. (Asked of Baalei Teshuvah) You indicated that you became Orthodox at or after Bar/Bat Mitzvah age. Which of the following best describes how you viewed yourself Jewishly before becoming Orthodox? ... Conservative or Orthoprax; Reform, Reconstructionist, Renewal, or other denomination; Traditional, cultural, ethnic Jewish (or "just Jewish"); Secular/Humanist Jewish; Not Jewish; Other – Please describe (Open-Ended; 40 provided verbatim responses). n = 630.

The top reasons baalei teshuvah give for why they became Orthodox are intellectual attraction or curiosity (53%), seeing Orthodoxy as more authentically Jewish than what the individual had previously experienced in their Jewish community (52%) and more truthful (35%), and connection to Jewish roots and heritage (36%).

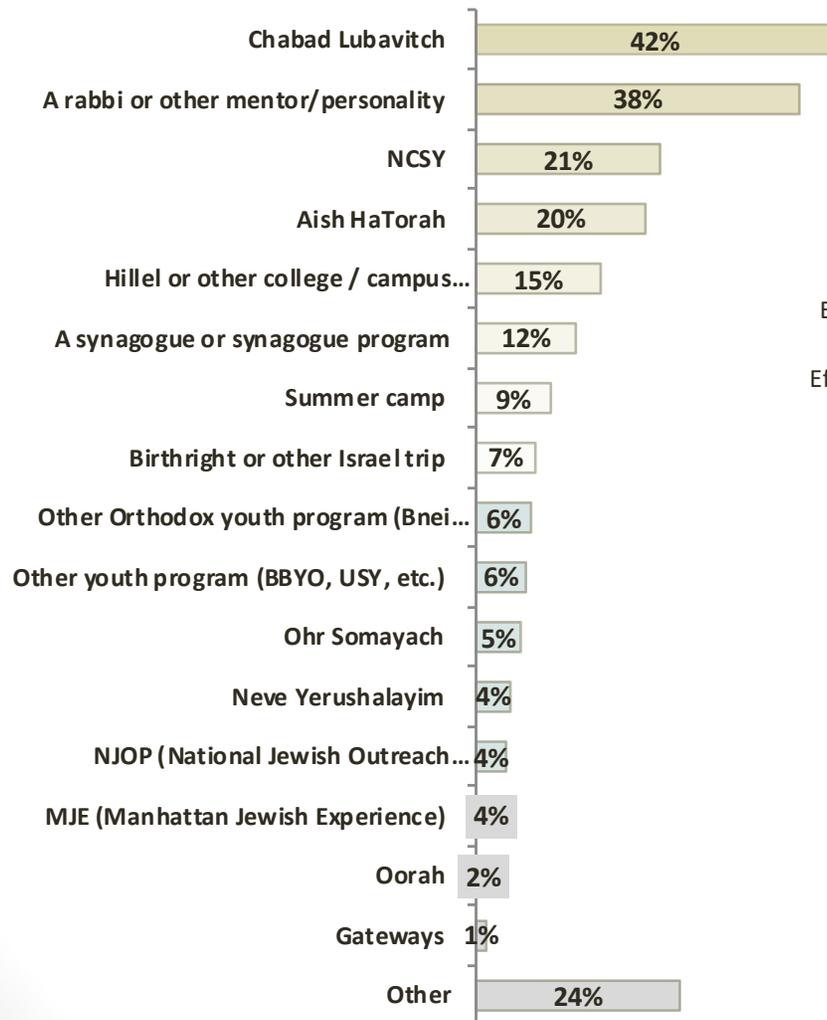


➔ See next page

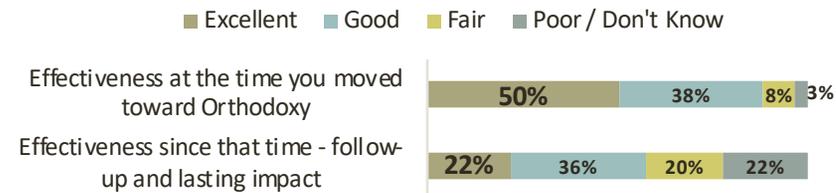
Q. What sparked your transition to Orthodoxy? Please check up to five factors that were most important in your decision to become Orthodox ... I was Influenced by a friend; I was influenced by my spouse or other partner relationship (fiancé, boyfriend, girlfriend, etc.); I was influenced by my child(ren); I was influenced by my parent(s); I was influenced by other relative(s); I was Influenced by kiruv (outreach) professional(s) or organization(s); I was intellectually attracted to or curious about Orthodoxy; or interested because of religious knowledge that I had acquired; I saw Orthodoxy and the Torah as more truthful; I saw Orthodoxy as a more authentic kind of Judaism than existed in my prior Jewish community; I wanted to better connect to my Jewish roots and heritage; I was generally dissatisfied with my life; I disliked the type of morality I saw in secular society/culture; I was searching for more meaning in my life; I wanted more structure in my life; I felt isolated and had a desire for community; I was influenced by society's and Orthodoxy's views relating to the role of women. – Please briefly explain (Open-Ended; n = 8; Other – Please identify (Open-Ended; 113 provided verbatim responses ... see Appendix, page 29). n = 627.

**Among those who cited kiruv (outreach) as an influence, Chabad Lubavitch (42%) and “a rabbi or other mentor/ personality” (38%) are most often cited. However, while kiruv is effective in influencing people to become Orthodox, only 22% rate their “follow-up” as excellent.**

### Most Influential Kiruv



### Effectiveness of Kiruv – Initially and Follow-Up



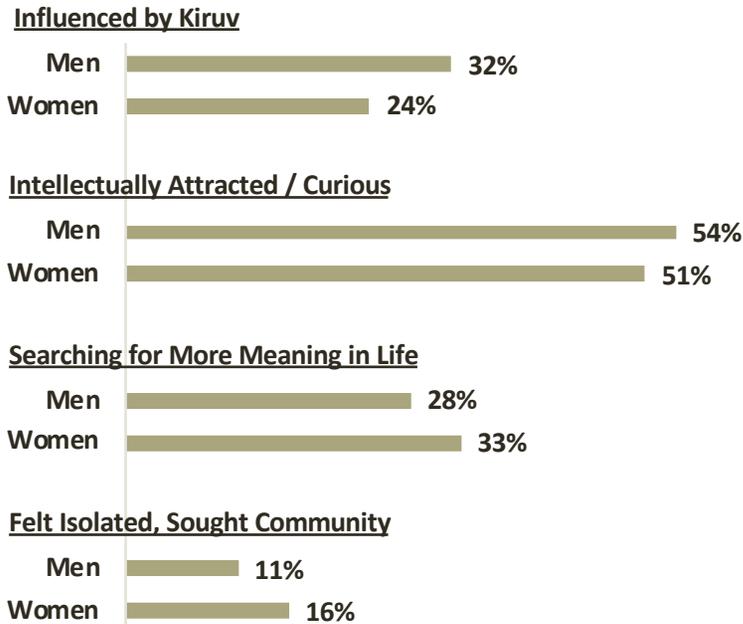
(Asked of those who responded “I was Influenced by kiruv ...” in the preceding question).:

Q. Which kiruv (outreach) professional(s) or organization(s) influenced you to become Orthodox? Please check up to three ... NCSY; Other Orthodox youth program (Bnei Akiva, etc.); Other youth program (BBYO, USY, etc.); Chabad Lubavitch; Hillel or other college / campus program (excluding Chabad); Neve Yerushalayim; Aish HaTorah; Ohr Somayach; Oorah; NJOP (National Jewish Outreach Program); MJE (Manhattan Jewish Experience); JWRP (Jewish Women’s Renaissance Project – Momentum); Gateways; A synagogue or synagogue program – Please identify (Open-Ended; 17 provided verbatim responses); Birthright or other Israel trip; Summer camp; A rabbi or other mentor/personality; Other – Please identify (Open-Ended; 41 provided verbatim responses.) See verbatim responses in Appendix, page 31). n = 173.

Q. Thinking of the kiruv approaches that influenced you, how would you rate them overall in terms of their ... Effectiveness at the time you moved toward Orthodoxy; Effectiveness since that time, i.e., their follow-up and lasting impact. Response Scale: Excellent; Good; Fair; Poor; Don’t Know.. (Poor and Don’t Know were combined).n = 173.

**Some factors influence men and women differently. Men are more often drawn by kiruv and intellectual attraction; women by spirituality and the community. In the 2016 Nishma study of people who left Orthodoxy, analogous patterns were seen in reasons why people left Orthodoxy: men more often for intellectual reasons, women more often because their sense of community was lost.**

**Factors With Differences in Impact (Men vs. Women) in Baalei Teshuvah Becoming Orthodox**



See question text on page 12. n = 311 males, 314 females.

**By a very wide margin, the top challenge baalei teshuvah faced in becoming Orthodox was in their relationships with their parents and family (37%). These relationships were far more challenging than learning and knowing what to do as an Orthodox observant person (cited by 16%), dealing with social aspects and friends (13%), and kashrut (12%).**

**What were the main challenges you faced at the time you moved toward Orthodoxy?**

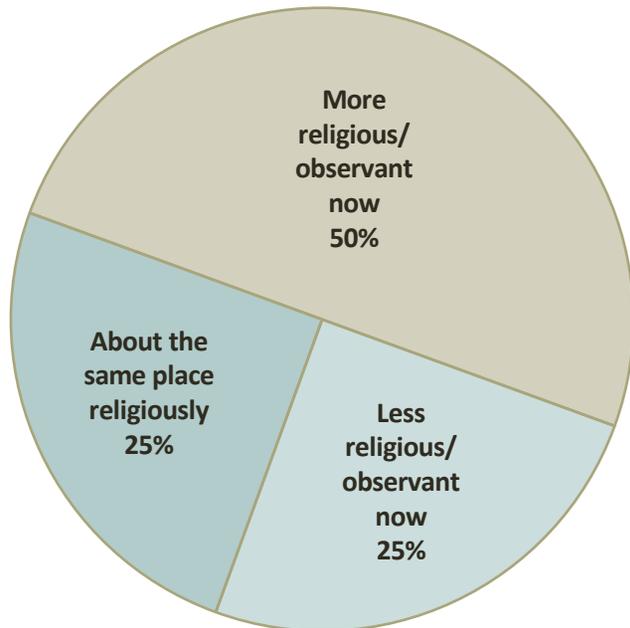
Area	Sample Verbatim Comments (See additional verbatim responses in the Appendix, page 32)
<b>Relationship with parents and family (37%)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>My biggest challenges were from my parents when my observance conflicted with family activities (i.e. Shabbat, kashrut).</i></li> <li>• <i>Trying to not freak out my family.</i></li> <li>• <i>I had to work really hard to maintain a good relationship with (my mom). That's not covered in kiruv.</i></li> <li>• <i>My parents were vehemently opposed to my choice.</i></li> <li>• <i>Maintaining relationships with friends/family who didn't understand my exploration/changing lifestyle.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Learning and Knowing What to Do (16%)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Not knowing anything. Davening, learning, Hebrew.</i></li> <li>• <i>Huge knowledge gap between me and people who grew up frum</i></li> <li>• <i>Deciding where to "stop" ... what was halacha and what were chumrot</i></li> </ul>
<b>Social Aspects, Friends (13%)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Giving up certain weekend activities with friends.</i></li> <li>• <i>Not participating in weekend activities with secular / non-Jewish friends.</i></li> <li>• <i>Had to stop hanging out with friends and colleagues on Friday nights and had to change life habits of eating non kosher foods out.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Kashrut (12%)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Had to change life habits of eating non kosher foods out</i></li> <li>• <i>I missed non-kosher food, incorporating it into my professional life (still have trouble with this), not being able to eat my parents' food.</i></li> <li>• <i>Orthodox people being jerks about my (perfectly kosher) kitchen.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Ideological Differences and Changing Views (10%)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Disagreements with the status of women.</i></li> <li>• <i>Telling me I couldn't be a Democrat. Crazy anti-abortion views. Witnessing racism.</i></li> <li>• <i>Balancing new sexual morals with the prevailing culture of my secular school.</i></li> <li>• <i>Accusations of not being feminist enough for old friends.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Shabbat, Chagim and Work (5%)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Changing work schedule to be home before Shabbat.</i></li> <li>• <i>Taking off days from work for yom tov.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Community and Acceptance (3%)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Truly not welcoming community and judgmental.</i></li> <li>• <i>Finding an accepting synagogue/community ... They can be very insular.</i></li> </ul>

**Relationships with family are the greatest challenge faced by BTs, substantially ahead of the next biggest challenge: learning to be Orthodox**

Q. (Asked of Baalei Teshuvah) What were the main challenges you faced at the time you moved toward Orthodoxy? (Open-Ended). n = 497 verbatim responses

**Baalei teshuvah’s levels of religiosity continue to change. Half say they continued to become more observant over time, as they have learned more and as they gradually moved toward greater observance. But one in four says they have become less observant and gradually more lenient, sometimes saying that youthful enthusiasm had waned.**

**Baalei Teshuva’s “Early Orthodoxy” (10+ Years Ago) compare to Current Religious Level**



- Respondents offer many overlapping, related, and nuanced reasons and evidence of how they have become more or less observant.
- Those who have become more religious/observant say it is most often due to:
  - More learning, becoming more knowledgeable (52%)
  - General move toward observance, many examples cited (48%)
  - Continued growth, maturation, and a gradual process, (24%)
  - More/better davening (17%)
  - Also cited: deeper thought, becoming more comfortable, the impact of having children, and the impact of their community
- Those who have become less religious/observant say it is most often due to:
  - Gradual flexibility, leniency, a more relaxed attitude, waning enthusiasm of those who became BT at a young age (45%)
  - Community disconnection, rejection, divorce (20%)
  - Awareness that a range of observance exists within Orthodoxy (10%)

Q. (Asked of those who became baalei teshuvah 10+ years ago) You indicated that you became Orthodox 10+ years ago. Think about your “early Orthodoxy” (3 or so years after you became Orthodox) and compare it to where you are today. Which of the following is most accurate? ... I am at about the same place religiously now as I was at that time; I am more religious/observant now than I was at that time. – Can you briefly explain? (Open-Ended; 178 provided verbatim responses); I am less religious/observant now than I was at that time. – Can you briefly explain? (Open-Ended; 89 provided verbatim responses). n = 505. See sample verbatim responses in the Appendix, page 34.

**The vast majority of baalei teshuvah (83%) say that they have “held onto” things from their pre-Orthodox life, which are not commonly found in the Orthodox world, most often citing left-of-center political views (20%) and socially liberal views (12%).**

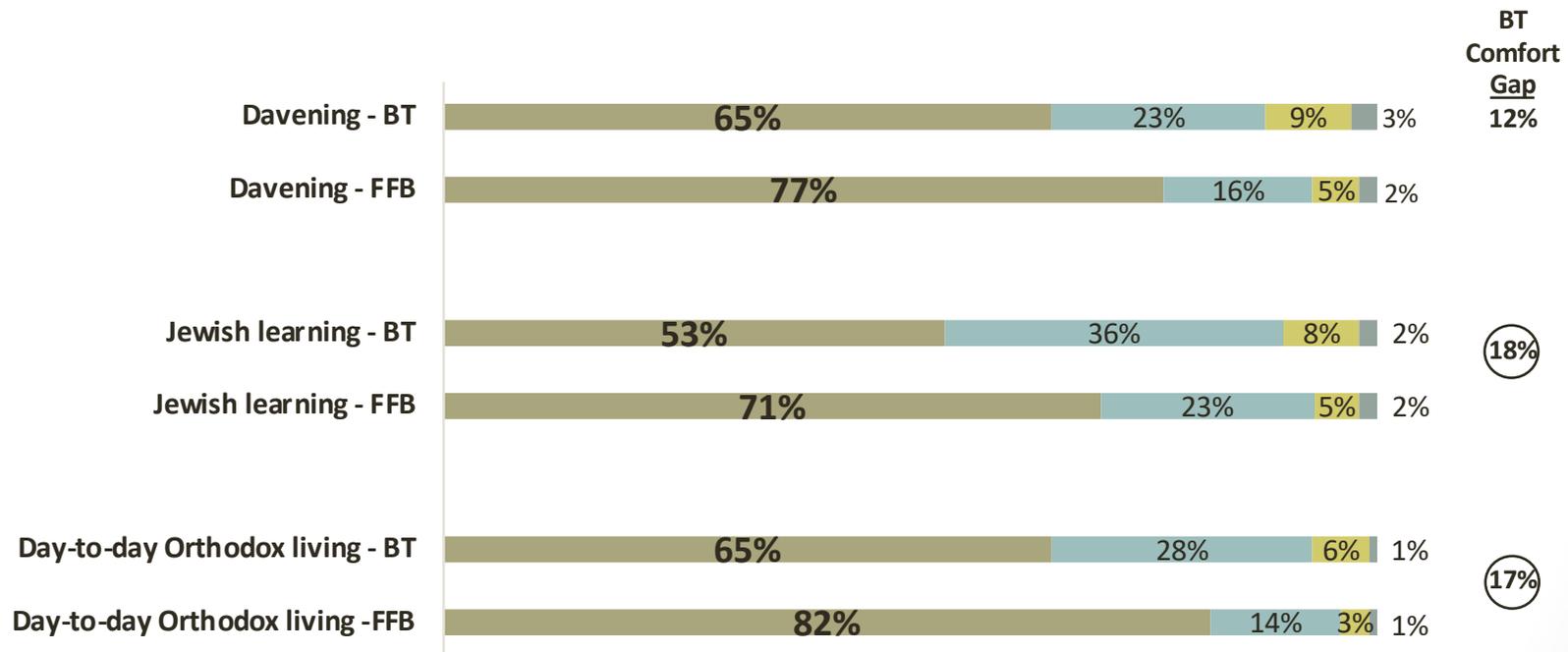
**Are there things you have “held onto” from your pre-Orthodox life?**

Response	Sample Verbatim Comments (See additional verbatim responses in the Appendix, page 33)
<b>Politically Liberal (16%) / Democrat (4%)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Predominantly liberal social views (that) are also sometimes unpopular in my orthodox community.</li> <li>• Very liberally politically, including on social issues. I am very critical of Israeli policy in many areas.</li> <li>• I'm probably more liberal and egalitarian for having been raised non-Orthodox.</li> <li>• I haven't changed my political views (affiliate as a Democrat).</li> </ul>
<b>Generally Socially Liberal Views (12%)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am more accepting of liberal views concerning equality of women; LGBTQ people; minorities and immigrants.</li> <li>• Socially more liberal ... e.g., I accept same-sex couples as married.</li> <li>• Active in social action, respect for non-Orthodox and non-Jewish communities.</li> </ul>
<b>Secular Music (10%)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I continue to enjoy secular music (both live and recorded) regardless of whether the vocalist(s) is/are female.</li> <li>• Some cultural things like music that I find no one else listening to ... I have Baalei Teshuvah friends who share similar tastes.</li> </ul>
<b>Secular Knowledge, Culture, Art (8%)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for science and evidence based practices, critical thinking.</li> <li>• I tried limiting myself to only "Jewish media" ... and realized that it just wasn't "authentically me."</li> </ul>
<b>Friendships (5%)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I maintain close connections to family and friends throughout the spectrum of Jewish belief and observance.</li> <li>• Strong relationships with non-Jewish friends and neighbors. ... many of my Orthodox friends do not actively value this.</li> </ul>
<b>Feminism, Women's Issues (4%)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality of women, the way I dress and sing.</li> <li>• I am pro-choice. I believe in women's rights in a way people around me are definitely uncomfortable with.</li> </ul>
<b>Attitude of Acceptance (3%)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of all kinds of people including LGBTQ, non-orthodox Jews and people of different faiths.</li> <li>• Acceptance of people at their level of observance where they are today.</li> </ul>

Q. (Asked of Baalei Teshuvah) Are there things you have “held onto” from your pre-Orthodox life, i.e., things of value to you personally, which are not commonly found in the Orthodox world? These could include views – religious, social, political, etc. – beliefs, practices, objects, etc. (Open-Ended). n = 452 verbatim responses (includes 77 – 17% – who responded “No” or “None.”).

**Between half and two-thirds of baalei teshuvah are fully or mostly comfortable with davening (65%), Jewish learning (53%), and day-to-day Orthodox living (65%). However, their comfort levels are significantly lower than those of FFBs for all of these aspects of Orthodox life.**

■ Fully or Mostly Comfortable ■ Somewhat Comfortable ■ Somewhat Uncomfortable ■ Fully or Mostly Uncomfortable

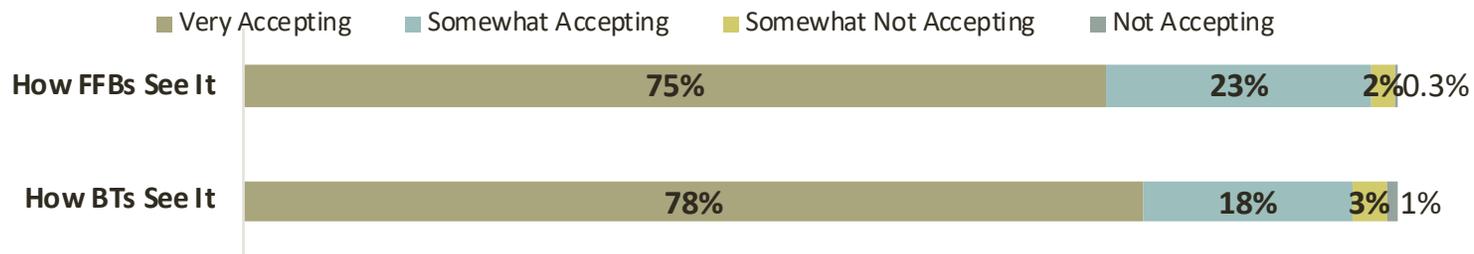


Q. How religiously comfortable are you with ... Davening; Jewish learning; Day-to-day Orthodox living? Response Scale: Fully or Mostly Comfortable; Somewhat Comfortable; Somewhat Uncomfortable; Fully or Mostly Uncomfortable. n = 702 BT; 992 FFB.

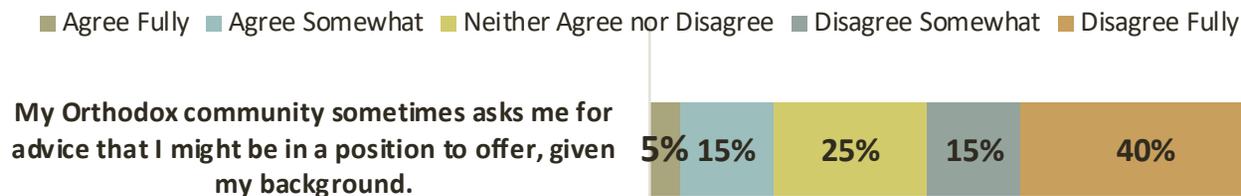
**About three-fourths of all Orthodox Jews see their community as very accepting of baalei teshuvah. Interestingly, there is even a bit stronger agreement (that the community as accepting) among baalei teshuvah than among FFBs.**

- Baalei teshuvah are not often sought for advice they might be in a position to give, given their BT background.
- 31% of BTs have moved to another community for religious reasons (compared to 16% of FFBs). In addition to seeking a community with more services aimed at the Orthodox, another factor driving their move may have been greater perceived acceptance in the destination community.

### Community Acceptance of Baalei Teshuvah



### Baalei Teshuvah Sought for Advice



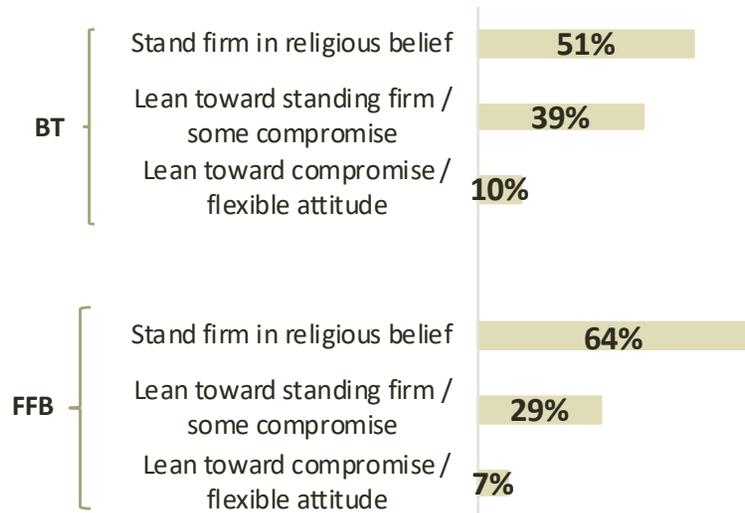
Q. How do you rate your Orthodox community in terms of its acceptance of baalei teshuvah in general? ... Very accepting; Somewhat accepting; Somewhat not accepting; Not accepting; Don't Know. n = 684 BT; 973 FFB (excludes 2% who responded Don't Know).

Q. (Asked of Baalei Teshuvah) Do you agree with the following statement?: As a baal teshuvah, my Orthodox community sometimes asks me for advice that I might be in a position to offer, given my background. Response Scale: Agree Fully; Agree Somewhat; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Disagree Somewhat; Disagree Fully; Don't Know. n = 558.

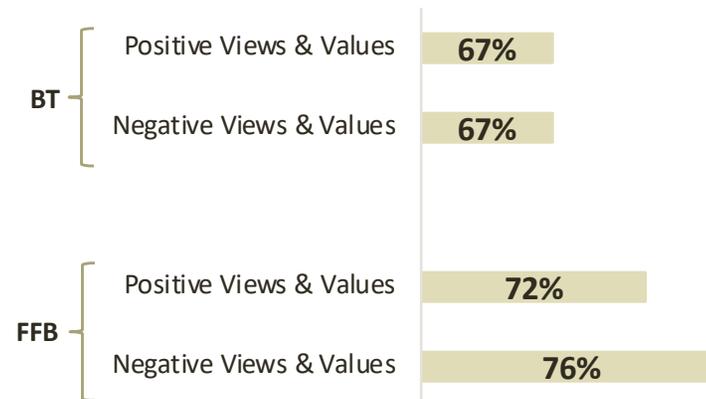
Q. Have you ever moved from one community to another for "religious reasons"? n = 629 BT; 887 FFB.

**When confronted with a conflict with secular society, baalei teshuvah tend to have more compromising/flexible attitudes than do FFBs. Part of this is the compromises they make in dealing with their non-Orthodox family. Additionally, baalei teshuvah are less sensitive to the incursion of secular views and values (both positive and negative) into Orthodoxy.**

### How Conflicts With Secular Society Are Resolved



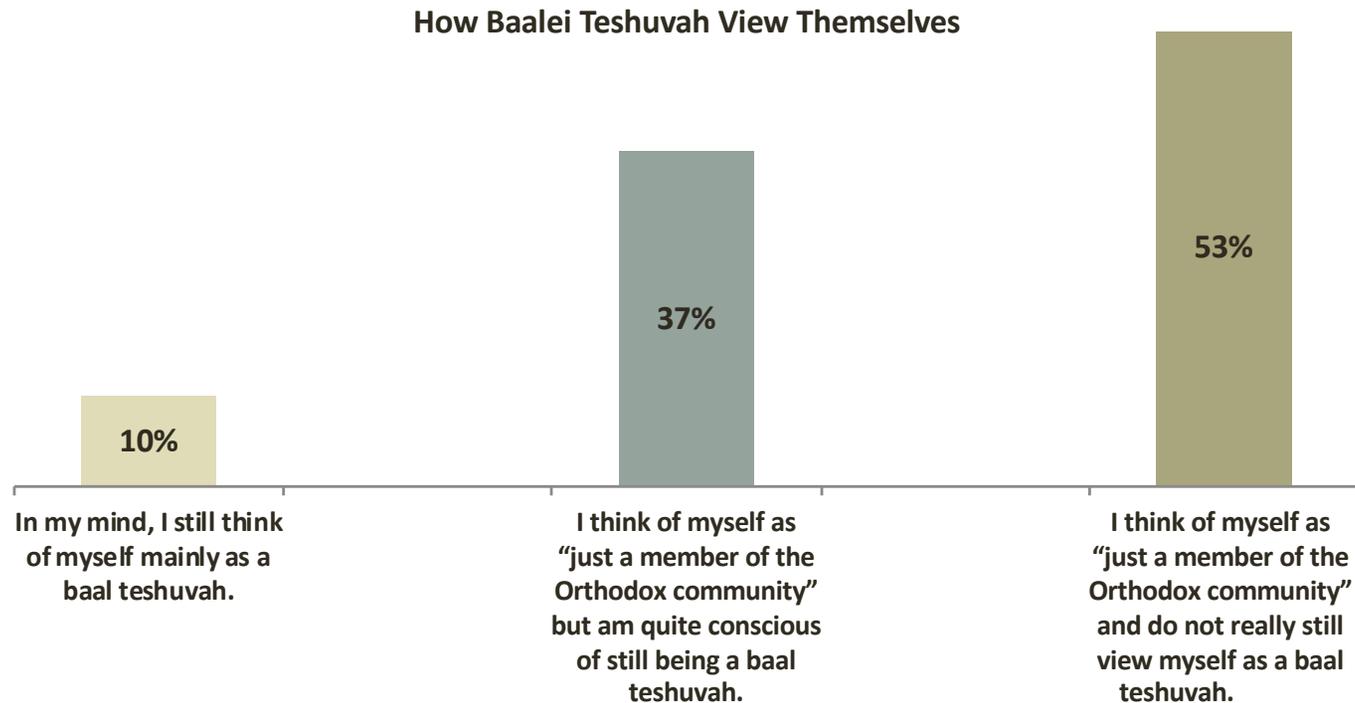
### Agree That Secular Views and Values Are Entering Their Orthodox Community



Q. Do you ever experience conflict between your Orthodoxy and your participation in society? If so, how do you generally resolve it? ... I have not experienced any such conflict.; I have experienced such conflict but stand firm in my religious practice.; I lean toward standing firm in my religious practice, but I sometimes need to compromise.; I have a flexible attitude toward compromising. n = 708 BT; 1,002 FFB.

Q. Do you agree with the following statements? ... Some positive views and values (in my opinion) of broader secular society are making their way into my Orthodox community.; Some negative views and values (in my opinion) of broader secular society are making their way into my Orthodox community. Response Scale: Agree Fully; Agree Somewhat; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Disagree Somewhat; Disagree Fully; Don't Know. n = 644 BT; 907 FFB (excludes 4% who responded "Don't Know").

**While about half of baalei teshuvah think of themselves as “just a member of the Orthodox community” and do not really view themselves as different, the other half are conscious of “still being a baal teshuvah.”**



Q. (Asked of Baalei Teshuva) You indicated that you became Orthodox at or after Bar/Bat Mitzvah age. How do you view yourself at this time? ... In my mind, I still think of myself mainly as a baal teshuvah; I think of myself as “just a member of the Orthodox community” but am quite conscious of still being a baal teshuvah; I think of myself as “just a member of the Orthodox community” and do not really still view myself as a baal teshuvah. n = 519.

Q. (Asked of those who responded options 2 or 3 to the preceding question) Was there a particular point in time (an event, milestone, accomplishment, etc.) when you felt that you had “arrived” in Orthodoxy (i.e., you no longer thought of yourself mainly as a baal teshuvah)? (Open-Ended) n = 343. See sample verbatim responses in the Appendix, page 30.

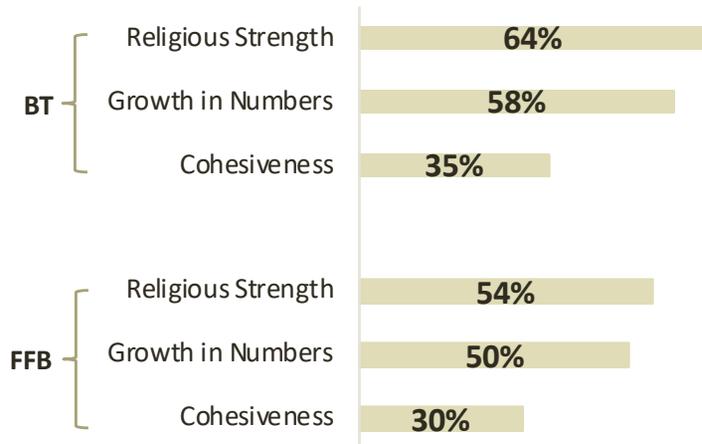
**It seems to take baalei teshuvah 10+ years to acclimate to Orthodoxy, but their practice and comfort continue to change beyond that period, gradually becoming more similar to those of FFBs.**

Baalei Teshuvah by years since they became Orthodox	Past 9 Years	10-19 Years	20+ Years
Number of Respondents	126	200	414
Being an Orthodox / observant Jew is an important part of my life (% agree fully)	74%	85%	84%
Modern Orthodoxy is spiritually inspiring:			
• % Agree Fully	30%	27%	23%
• % Agree Fully or Somewhat	72%	70%	68%
Say they are pretty much a “full-time (24/7) Orthodox Jew”	38%	37%	52%
% fully/mostly comfortable with day-to-day Orthodox Life	44%	62%	73%
Their community is very accepting of baalei teshuvah (% strongly agree)	63%	79%	79%
Where they see themselves within Modern Orthodoxy:			
• Left	61%	53%	39%
• Center	25%	34%	43%
• Right	14%	13%	18%
I think of myself as “just a member of the Orthodox community” and do not really still view myself as a baal teshuvah. (% agreeing)	29%	44%	62%
Optimistic about Modern Orthodoxy’s future:			
• religious strength	68%	58%	60%
• growth	61%	55%	55%
• cohesiveness	34%	32%	36%
Median Age	32	41	60
% Married / Among marrieds, average number of children	58% / 0.9	76% / 2.0	84% / 2.9

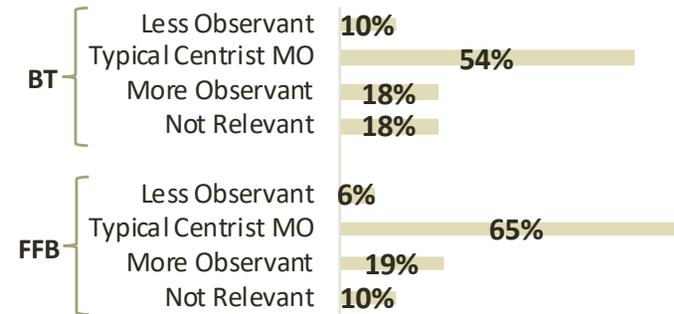
Q. (Asked of baalei teshuvah) How many years ago did you begin to identify yourself as an observant Orthodox Jew? ... Within the past 3 years; Between 4 and 9 years ago; Between 10 and 19 years ago; 20 or more years ago. n =805. Those <3 years and 4-9 years are combined in the above table, due to small sample size.

**Baalei teshuvah are notably more optimistic than FFBs about the future of Modern Orthodoxy. However, their religious hopes for their children skew a bit more to the left, and they are substantially more likely to consider public school education.**

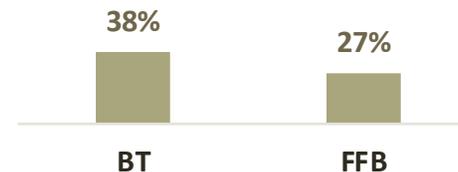
**Future Seen for Modern Orthodoxy**  
(% Optimistic)



**Religious Preferences for Their Children**



**Might Consider Public School**  
(% Agree Fully or Somewhat)



Q. (Asked of those who identified as “Modern Orthodox or Centrist Orthodox” and have one or more children in grades K-8) How religious, in general, do you want your children to be? ... I prefer that they be typical Centrist Modern Orthodox Jews; I prefer that they be more observant than the typical Centrist Modern Orthodox Jew, e.g., right-leaning Modern Orthodox, or *Charedi*.; I prefer that they be less observant than the typical Centrist Modern Orthodox Jew, e.g., left-leaning Orthodox, traditional, secular, etc.; Don’t Know; This is not so critical or relevant to me – Please explain (Open-Ended). n = 466 BT; 628 FFB (Excludes 4% who responded “Don’t Know”).

Q. What future do you foresee for Modern Orthodoxy over the next few decades, in areas of ... Religious strength; Growth in numbers; Cohesiveness, togetherness. Response Scale: I am very optimistic; I am somewhat optimistic; Neither optimistic nor pessimistic; I am somewhat pessimistic; I am very pessimistic; Don’t Know. n = 636 BT; 900 FFB (excludes 3% who responded “Don’t Know”).

Q. Do you agree that: ... Eventually, sending my child(ren) to a public school might be an option to consider. Response Scale: Agree Fully; Agree Somewhat; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Disagree Somewhat; Disagree Fully; Don’t Know. n = 168 BT; 236 FFB (excludes 1% who responded “Don’t Know”).

## Baalei teshuvah provide thoughtful feedback to the larger community, covering a wide range of issues. These touch most often on aspects of acceptance and sensitivity.

• A sample of the verbatim responses is presented below; additional responses are contained in the Appendix, page 35.

- *My biggest challenges have been social. So much is institutionalized and I don't have the day school, the gap year to talk about. I would like people to be more socially inclusive of those who did not grow up in their circles.*
- *My problems are usually that my family does something not halachic and I want to understand how to get along with them and stay a loving daughter while remaining consistent with halacha. I would love resources about that ... someone I could talk to who would understand.*
- *Every BT comes from a different Jewish background and it's hard to know what we do or don't know how to do. Avoid assuming we don't know something and explaining it to us because this can be condescending. Rather focus your energy on being kind and approachable when we want to ask questions.*
- *I do not consider myself one, and I do not like the term. I don't think my community looks at people or thinks about them in that way either.*
- *Help them through life cycle events from childbirth to shiva because they will often have little or no or very conflicted support from family.*
- *That just because we became observant does not mean we view Orthodoxy as perfect or the secular world as terrible. There are good and bad in both and both can learn from each other.*
- *They may be the only one in their family that is orthodox. They may need more shabbat and holiday invites than a frum from birth family. They might need more help with yeshiva/summer camp tuition for their kids, since their families may not be interested in helping out.*
- *I keep a kosher household but some people won't accept eating at my house.*
- *Translate all foreign words in divrei torah. Post what page we're on in shul. Don't assume everyone knows.*
- *Baalei teshuvah are seeking authentic spirituality and practice. Some FFBs seem to have less interest in that. Let's all aim for a high standard!*
- *Not all baalei teshuvah want to openly label themselves. Keep this in mind next time someone seems like they're doing something incorrectly or doesn't seem to know what's going on - they might be a baal teshuvah but be too self-conscious about it to let you know.*
- *So much of Orthodoxy assumes certain cultural norms that have nothing to do with the religion itself. It's almost as though Orthodox Jews speak a separate, coded language (and I don't mean Hebrew or Yiddish). Understanding and being able to frame things in ways an outsider could understand is incredibly important.*

Q. (Asked of Baalei Teshuvah) As a baal teshuvah, what advice would you give to your Orthodox community in terms of what they need to better understand and appreciate about baalei teshuvah? (Open-Ended) n = 359.

**Charedi Baalei Teshuvah differs from Modern Orthodox BTs in a number of ways. They more often became Orthodox because they sought authentic Judaism and saw the Torah as truthful, and were influenced more by kiruv. They are more religiously observant and more comfortable with Orthodoxy, but they more often still view themselves as BTs.**

Top Reasons Given for Becoming Orthodox (Ranked by high-to-low for Modern Orthodox)	MO	Charedi
Intellectually attracted or curious	53%	55%
Orthodoxy more authentic kind of Judaism	52%	62%
Connect to my Jewish roots and heritage	36%	40%
Orthodoxy and the Torah as more truthful	35%	57%
Influenced by kiruv	28%	52%
Searching for more meaning in my life	25%	33%
Influenced by spouse or partner	23%	9%
Influenced by friend	21%	16%
Felt isolated, desire for community	13%	9%
Wanted more structure in my life	12%	9%
Disliked morality in secular society/culture	12%	14%
Influenced by other relatives	11%	5%

	MO	Charedi
I am a “Full-time (24/7) Orthodox Jew.”	45%	84%
I am “just a member of the Orthodox community” not view myself as a BT	53%	36%
Experienced conflict (between Orthodoxy and society), stand firm in religious practice	47%	61%
Fully or mostly comfortable with day-to-day Orthodox living	65%	89%
Smartphone on Shabbat (often, sometimes)	10%	0%
Community is very accepting of BTs	76%	73%
Kiruv that influenced you to become Orthodox	Chabad 42% NCSY 21%	Chabad 50% NCSY 23%
Spouse is a baal teshuvah	49%	66%
Spouse less observant than they are	21%	11%
Sending children to public school might be an option (agree fully or somewhat)	37%	6%
I am very concerned about people leaving Orthodoxy and becoming non-frum.	26%	38%

Question text is drawn from various questions throughout the survey; see questionnaire. n = 744 Modern Orthodox baalei teshuvah; 65 charedi baalei teshuvah.

**A number of respondents who are converts called attention to their particular experiences. Based on a small sample, we see that they find Orthodoxy inspiring, although they are less comfortable day-to-day and less often “24/7 Orthodox.”**

U.S. Modern Orthodox Converts vs. Non-Converts	Converts	Not Convert or BT
Number of Respondents	56	1,044
% Male / Female	29% / 71%	53% / 47%
Median Age at Which Converted	23	–
Being an Orthodox / observant Jew is an important part of my life (% agree fully)	76%	87%
Modern Orthodoxy is spiritually inspiring:		
• % Agree Fully	30%	24%
• % Agree Fully or Somewhat	68%	67%
Pretty much a “full-time (24/7) Orthodox Jew”	45%	64%
% Fully or mostly comfortable with day-to-day Orthodox Life	65%	82%
Their community is very accepting of baalei teshuvah (% strongly agree)	79%	73%
Where they see themselves within Modern Orthodoxy:		
• Left	48%	30%
• Center	38%	45%
• Right	14%	25%
Optimistic about Modern Orthodoxy’s future:		
• Religious strength	58%	53%
• Growth	54%	48%
• Cohesiveness	30%	29%
Median Age	42	46
% Married / Among marrieds, average number of children	64% / 1.6	78% / 2.3
<b>See page 36: verbatim comments from converts</b>		

Q. Are you and/or either of your parents a convert to Judaism (geirim)? Please check all that apply. ... I am a convert; One or both of my parents is a convert.

Q. As a convert, what advice would you give to your Orthodox community in terms of what they need to better understand and appreciate about converts? (Open-Ended).

**Demographics – Baalei Teshuvah differ from FFBs in a few ways. They are older (median 53 vs. 47 among FFB), have less Jewish education (50% none or Talmud Torah vs. 5% among FFB), and more often live in midsized or smaller communities (33% vs. 23% among FFB).**

Gender	%
Male	49%
Female	51%

Q. What is your gender? (<0.5% responded "Non-Conforming").  
n = 742.

Age	%
18-24	4%
25-34	14%
35-44	18%
45-54	18%
55-64	21%
65-74	19%
75+	6%

Median Age = 53

Q. What is your age?  
n = 584.

Education	%
High school graduate	<1%
Some college, no degree	4%
Two-year Associate's Degree	<1%
Four-year Bachelor's Degree	20%
Some post-grad., professional	11%
Post-grad., professional degree	64%

Q. What is the highest level of schooling you have completed? n = 587.

Formal Jewish Studies	%
None	14%
Talmud Torah	36%
Some Jewish elementary	7%
Jewish elementary graduate	5%
Jewish high school	9%
Jewish post-high school study	29%

Q. What is the highest level of formal Jewish studies you have completed? n = 583.

Marital/Relationship	%
Married	78%
Single	10%
Divorced	6%
Separated	1%
Widowed	2%
Living with partner	3%

What is your current marital/relationship status? n = 605.

No. of Children	%
None	19%
One	9%
Two	25%
Three	28%
Four	14%
Five or More	5%

Do you have any children? If so, how many? n = 605

**31% have child(ren) in grades 1-8**

Are any of your children in grades K to 8 (the just-completed school year)?  
n = 492

Jewish Community Size	%
Large (200K+)	67%
Mid-Size (50K-199K)	12%
Small (<50K)	21%

Q. Thinking of the Jewish community in which you currently reside, would you say it is a ... Large Jewish community of 200,000+ Jews (e.g., New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Boston, Greater DC, Philadelphia.); Mid-size Jewish community of 50,000 to 199,999 Jews (e.g., Atlanta, Miami, San Diego, Cleveland, Denver, etc.); Smaller Jewish community of under 50,000 Jews (e.g., Pittsburgh, Minneapolis, Hartford, Cincinnati, etc.). n = 583.

## Appendix I – Sample Verbatim Responses to Open-Ended Questions

- This study contained many open-ended questions, affording respondents a broad opportunity to share their thoughts in their own words. We recommend the reading of verbatim comments as important to fully understand respondents’ thoughts across the wide range of issues covered in this study.
- The body of this report contains samples of verbatim comments that are representative of and aligned with key themes that emerged. In this appendix, we provide additional and lengthier sample of verbatim responses.\*

\* The verbatim comments provided in this appendix are unedited (spelling, typos, upper case, etc. ... they are shown as received in the survey) and were randomly selected. Responses to each question were sorted using a randomization process and then every n<sup>th</sup> comment is shown. This process was adopted in order to provide a relatively brief but random snapshot of respondents’ comments, i.e., the comments included were not selected with any particular bias. To maximize the value of this appendix, we tend to not include those that are markedly short (e.g., one or two not very informative words). Additionally, any verbatim responses that contains possibly identifying information (e.g., names of individuals, synagogues, locations, etc.) have been edited to retain anonymity.

## Sample Verbatim Responses – What sparked your transition to Orthodoxy? (Responses in addition to items in the checkbox list)

- *when I was growing up i always felt that i would lead a more traditional life when I got married and had children of my own.*
  - *Mechitza in shul made sense to me*
  - *Issues at a public school resulted in my transferring no to a private school, which was a Jewish day school*
  - *I was influenced by participation in Orthodox (not Kiruv) teen programming.*
  - *I was influenced by a frum teacher (not a kiruv professional) who taught at my family's shul's afternoon Hebrew school.*
  - *live in a community where many, like me, are members of both orthodox synagogues and non.*
  - *I went orthodox to piss off my parents. It worked, but I liked it so I stuck with it.*
  - *I converted conservative and then chose to convert orthodox to do what I could for my future children in terms of acceptance across a wide spread of Jewish society. I already kept kosher and Shabbat.*
  - *My first encounter with Orthodox davening was a revelation. It instilled in me a feeling of religious awe I had never experienced before*
  - *Enjoyed community and learning more*
  - *HS school i attended.*
  - *wife was going through Orthodox conversion and Rabbi insisted I join her in the journey and commit to Orthodox lifestyle*
  - *Bnei AKIVA Camp*
  - *Starting to see Hashem's miracles around me in life*
  - *combination of a trip to Israel and resuting stronger Jewish identity, fiollowed by birth of child which fostered belief in G-d, followed by death of parent, which brought me to shul to say kaddish, followed by having children in an orthodox day school*
  - *Saw no future as a shomer Shabbat/kashrut non rabbi in the conservative movement*
  - *I saw the the future rates of intermarriage and of Jews leaving traditional Jewish practices and did not that for my young children.*
  - *We were always orthodox just not always just not shomer shabbos or mitzvot*
  - *I had grown up halfway between Conservative and Orthodox and a lack of a Conservative Shabbat minyan during the summer months of my first year in graduate school led me to join the Orthodox minyan on campus.*
  - *Sleep-away-camp*
  - *My conservative upbringing didn't have a community who was dedicated to Halacha and living fully as a Jew*
  - *Influenced by teachers in my pluralistic Jewish day school.*
  - *As I explained elsewhere, when we moved the C synagogue was moribund and the family of my older son's school friends belonged to the MO shul.*
  - *Went to Seminary, was eye opening*
  - *wanted to ensure my kids would be observant and thought that was more likely to happen if i affiliated with orthodox institutions*
  - *A Lubavitch Rabbi got a hold of me.*
  - *Sort of an inner pull that had been there since I was very young*
  - *MY FATHER PASSED AWAY AND THE SHUL i WAS A MEMBER SEEMED DISINTERESTED IN MY NEEDS EG SERVICES IN MY HOME DURING SHIVA*
  - *attended orthodox school*
  - *Difficult life events forced me to think hard anout life.*
- Sample responses by those who checked "I was influenced by society's and Orthodoxy's views relating to the role of women. – Please briefly explain"**
- *This will be unusual but I found the non-egalitarian Conservative Judaism of that time to be straight up sexist and the Orthodox communities I was in at that time to simply have different roles for women but within an authentic system that was non-egalitarian in many more ways than just about women. Currently I think Orthodox thought is infected with the same reflexive sexism and obsessive worry about women (and "feminism") as I experienced in the old Conservative movement. I still do prefer a mehitzah for davening and a tznius atmosphere for all (just not one that obsesses about women and girls instead of promoting modesty for humans).*
  - *I felt objectified and pressure to self-objectify in secular society. I saw women in Orthodoxy as valued and respected.*
  - *I was tired of secular attitudes towards women and women's issues, and disagreed with them even though they assumed that as a woman, I had to agree with them.*

Q. What sparked your transition to Orthodoxy? In addition to the items in the checklist, 125 responded "Other – Please identify" and provided an explanation; an additional 8 responded "I was influenced by society's and Orthodoxy's views relating to the role of women" and provided an explanation.

## Sample Verbatim Responses – Was there a particular point in time (an event, milestone, accomplishment, etc.) when you felt that you had “arrived” in Orthodoxy (i.e., you no longer thought of yourself mainly as a baal teshuva)?

- *No, I have always felt that I am on a continuous journey of improvement in my knowledge and practice as I think all Baalei Teshuvah and FFB Orthodox Jews should be. There is no end point, certainly not in the learning. It is a long time that I have been shomer mitzvot, so I can't say there was an epiphany moment when I arrived. At some point however, I believe outside impressions changed when with my level of knowledge I became not just a sponge but a teacher to my peers as well. I imagine that is a point of arrival for anyone regardless of background.*
- *No, still feeling like a "outsider" at times*
- *When I left the community in which the shift occurred and moved to a new community where I was just like everyone else.*
- *Probably after I got married and had a kid. We also moved to a new community where people weren't familiar with me from while I was still transitioning.*
- *Once had kids*
- *Getting married and settling as a young couple in an Orthodox community.*
- *CANNOT IDENTIFY WHEN*
- *When my kids married people from regular orthodox families*
- *Raised "traditional" and therefore don't think the ba'al teshuva label fully applies.*
- *Last year at the Bar Mitzvah Project on Simchat Torah. I leyned my Torah Portion.*
- *When I said to my mother, "You know, I've been Orthodox for 15 years now, so my not being able to attend this wedding shouldn't be a surprise to you."*
- *Can not pinpoint exact "moment" If indeed there ever was one*
- *I don't consider myself a baal tshuva because I grew up halachikly observant*
- *After marriage.*
- *A year or so after I got married.*
- *After I came back from Israel where I studied for a few months.*
- *Being recruited by and accepted to semicha programs*
- *after I had kids. because then more people at the shabbat table are talking about kids and schools and not talking about personal backgrounds .*
- *While dedicating more and more time to Torah study, I noticed a yearning for more of it . I noticed the way I work, the way I live, interact was guided by my learning. I became a bat mitzvah in my 60's. A joy!*
- *The rate at which I started taking on new mitzvot and/or major changes to my lifestyle declined over the years as I plateaued in my religious observance, and the last major change occurred more than 10 years ago.*
- *When I moved to Israel.*
- *When my boys were accepted to and attended yshivat har etzion*
- *Never was a Bal Teshuvah. Grew up in Conservative home went to orthodox yeshiva At my Bar Mitzvah decided to become fully shomer Shabbos.*
- *joined an orthodox synagogue*
- *No, it happens gradually*
- *I never thought of myself as baal teshuvah. I grew up going to a very traditional Conservative shul, and my parents kept kosher at home and rarely ate out. When my wife and I moved to California, we joined a newly-established Modern Orthodox shul, and I soon realized that I shared more in common with Modern Orthodox practice and beliefs than I did with a Conservative Judaism that increasingly seemed to treat Halacha as a mere guide rather than law.*
- *i was always orthodox*
- *I think when I got married (my husband was ffb) I no longer thought of myself as mainly a baalat teshuva.*
- *No. I am consistently occupied with teshuva.*
- *I am a ger, so after my conversion, I consider myself a full-fledged Jew, just like one who stood at Har Sinai.*
- *I never really thought of my self as a baal teshuvah, just somebody who became more careful as I learned Halacha. My parent's home always had Shabbos and Kashruth.*
- *When we began to observe Shabbat.*

Q. Was there a particular point in time (an event, milestone, accomplishment, etc.) when you felt that you had “arrived” in Orthodoxy (i.e., you no longer thought of yourself mainly as a baal teshuvah)? 343 provided a response; excluding those who responded “no” with no further explanation, there were 289 who provided a response.

## Sample Verbatim Responses – Which kiruv professional(s) or organization(s) influenced you to become Orthodox? (Responses identifying a specific synagogue or synagogue program, or other professional or organization)

- *Local outreach organization*
- *I just want to be clear that I don't consider Bnei Akiva to be a kiruv org. Also, I attended an Orthodox day school which played a major role in my becoming more observant.*
- *LIVNOT*
- *Family history*
- *online shiurim from individuals affiliated with Neve, Ohr Sameach, and Aish*
- *Machon Shlomo people, second Aish and Ohr Somayach*
- *Isralight*
- *Jewish Marriage Encounter*
- *Orthodox teachers in a non-Orthodox day school*
- *Hebrew U. campus kiruv programs*
- *Friends*
- *UJA Young Leadership*
- *Melton Adult Education Program; Friends*
- *Shvut Ami, Toldot Yeshurun*
- *JLE Teaneck, NJ*
- *Toldot Yeshurun and other kiruv in Russian*
- *a local synagogue called Orah Torah*
- *Baltimore's Partbers in Torah kiruv program*
- *Dallas YJP*
- *Toldot Yeshurun(in Russian)*
- *Friends starting an orthodox synagogue*
- *The rabbi in our local synagogue created tasks for post Bar/Bat Mitzvah students in order to keep them active in the shul.*
- *Alpha Epsilon Pi fraternity*
- *Jewish school*
- *High school*
- *Cong. Kehilath Jeshurun*
- *Chabad's women's circle retreat*
- *Local kollel outreach*
- *Old Broadway Synagogue (NYC)*
- *Ashreinu (Los Angeles)*
- *Meor*
- *Yeshivat Hamivtar*
- *Study in Israel at Hebrew U. At this time I decided to experiment by keeping kosher and Shabbos. I also learned with a chevruta.*
- *JAM, before it was college-only*
- *Lake Park Synagogue (Mordern Orthodox Shul I continue to attend)*
- *Teen Minyan*
- *I attended Pardes*
- *MEOR, Yeshivat Simchat Shlomo, The Carlebach Shul*
- *yuscy*
- *shul life*
- *A Detroit specific group*
- *Mesorah DC*
- *Anshe Sholom B'Nai Israel in Chicago*
- *Rebbetzin Jungreis, Hineni*
- *Atlanta Scholars Kollel*
- *School*
- *MAJOR - Milwaukee Alliance for Jewish Reconnection*
- *Torah Leadership Seminar through YU*
- *Isralight - Rav Binny Freedman*
- *OSTNS*
- *Pacific Jewish Center*

Q. Which kiruv (outreach) professional(s) or organization(s) influenced you to become Orthodox? 68 provided a response in addition to the items in the checklist, comprised of 18 who responded "A synagogue or synagogue program" and provided an explanation, and 50 who responded "Other – Please identify" and provided an explanation.

## Sample Verbatim Responses – What were the main challenges you faced at the time you moved toward Orthodoxy?

- *Most of my friends were Modern Orthodox*
- *Becoming Shomer Shabbos - it felt like losing a day of the week at the time*
- *Fear of rejection from family and friends*
- *Keeping kosher all the time Learning all the rules of Shabbos*
- *Keeping a full Shabbat was hard; three day yomtov was even harder*
- *The language barrier of learning Hebrew.*
- *Acceptance from friends and family, dealing with the extreme lifestyle changes.*
- *Old habits were hard to break.*
- *Explaining it to family.*
- *kashrut*
- *1. My mother was very angry that I kept kosher and at one point would not eat in my Kosher Home! 2. I didn't understand what I didn't know. I would have benefited from a mentor.*
- *Finding a place that was comfortable for me where I could still be involved in out reach but continue learning to fit in to the Orthodox community . This is why I transitioned from Bnei Akiva to NCSY*
- *There was a fear of not being accepted by Orthodox Jews since I definitely did not look Jewish. Giving up my favorite foods (ie. shellfish) was very difficult at the beginning.*
- *Not understanding almost everything.*
- *Family relationships, including resentment of shabbat and deep disdain of the whole package.*
- *Not writing on Shabbos was huge for me. Not eating "out" (non-kosher places). Getting rid of an attitude I didn't even know I had which was that I could take time off from Jewish observance when there were conflicts or choose to not do something if I didn't like it.*
- *Giving up eating out. Eating in the homes of my family.*
- *Some family resistance. Being different than all the other kids in public school.*
- *interactions with family*
- *Dealing with work, taking shabbas, eating only kosher, lunch with the gang, not going out Friday nights.*
- *Convincing my family to take my observance seriously.*
- *change in lifestyle and cost*
- *My parents were vehemently opposed to my choice*
- *My Reform family.*
- *My parents were not supportive and since I was 12, I had little autonomy. We went to my grandmother's house for Friday night dinner most weeks, and I was expected to be there with the family although it meant riding on Shabbat. The positive side was that on Saturday I could observe Shabbat as I chose, so I went to shul in the morning (without my parents) and then visited friends or went to the library Shabbat afternoon. We also had occasional conflicts re: Yom Tov observance at home, though they were OK with my missing school if I went to shul instead.*
- *Being accepted by my school's orthodox community and fitting in - I was not only a baalat teshuva but I was very much an out-of-towner at a heavily Jewish university in Manhattan.*
- *Being accepted within the community as a potential convert was very difficult, and I still feel like an outsider in some regards.*
- *Getting my spouse to be on the same path*
- *Finding others my age in the community as well as finding people who were friendly and not cold and clicky*
- *Maintaining observance while enrolled in a secular school.*
- *Finding a good pace and avoiding the all-or-nothing approach.*
- *My egalitarianism and acceptance of the LGBTQA community.*
- *Disrupting the family schedule by being shomer shabbat and shomer kashrut outside the house. But because I had my parents support, I never felt that what I was doing was other than positive.*
- *CHANGING to a more restrictive lifestyle*
- *Taking on the laws of tzniut.*
- *I still drove on Shabbos and I did not keep kosher, but I didn't think I would become Orthodox.*
- *keeping shabbat*
- *I FELT SOME PRESSURE, LIKE I WASNT MOVING FAST ENOUGH TOWARD OBSERVANCE. THAT WAS FRUSTRATING.*
- *a lot of ignorance. Not knowing a lot*

Q. What were the main challenges you faced at the time you moved toward Orthodoxy? 541 provided a response; excluding the 21 (4%) who responded “no” with no further explanation, there were 520 who provided a response.

## Sample Verbatim Responses – Are there things you have “held onto” from your pre-Orthodox life, i.e., things of value to you personally, which are not commonly found in the Orthodox world? These could include views – religious, social, political, etc. – beliefs, practices, objects, etc.

- *Love of rock music*
- *I'm probably more liberal and egalitarian for having been raised non-Orthodox (though my adherence to those values is based on Torah)*
- *I am very colorful.*
- *I like wearing pants but I usually wear skirts on Shabbos and holidays. I was a "tomboy." I like inclusive environments. It's important to me to get along with and include everybody, Jewish (of any stripe) or not.*
- *Love sitting together as a family in shul*
- *I do miss women's participation in ritual. As a consequence I enjoy going to egalitarian minyanim altho I do not go regularly.*
- *Exercise and fitness*
- *Everything*
- *No -,other than cable television*
- *Politically liberal, active in social action, respect for non-Orthodox and non-Jewish communities.*
- *My political views have not changed.*
- *I still donate to Ramah and USY*
- *I became observant at a time that kosher restaurants did not exist, outside of NYC there was no kosher wine ,except kiddish wine. This very difficult . Also the fact that most Orthodox were not as physically active as my wife and I are , has been a problem , though it is not as difficult as it was in the 1970's, for us to get tennis partners , biking , running and gym friends. No issues with beliefs.*
- *moderation in politics openness to social contacts with non-Jews*
- *Acceptance of non-Orthodox Jews. The biggest thing I HATE about being frum is the constant hatred I hear directed towards non-Orthodox denominations. Biblical Criticism Understanding of God*
- *We allow our children to trick or treat on Halloween*
- *Yes, prayer books and guides to the Holy Days, for instance.*
- *Involvement in women's artistic sports as a professional. Minor involvement.*
- *Eat dairy food that doesn't have hashgacha. Don't care too strongly about Israel.*
- *I'm a woman, I love watching sports - on television and in person. While it isn't uncommon in the Orthodox world, it isn't all that common either, and I learned it from my mother not my father!*
- *I'm still a Mets fan*
- *I value work and making s living more than most other Orthodox Jews I know*
- *A colorful Tallis from Yad l'kashish A political perspective that does not agree with the statement, " The candidate that is best for Israel is the only viable candidate."*
- *Reading literature,*
- *Volunteer, service to the broad community*
- *Music, sports*
- *socializing with non-jews*
- *Yes - putting people before observance.*
- *not really: the modern orthodox world is very comfortable for my views*
- *feminism; belief that foundational texts are historical documents influenced by their contexts (but I think both of these can exist within orthodoxy...)*
- *I'm a bit more liberal politically than many in my shul*
- *Value of high culture - literature, music, theater*
- *I am completely respectful of my broader family's practice*
- *I still have a fondness for S. Patrick's Day ( my family is Irish) but of course I don't celebrate it. It was just a cultural thing for me, not a religious one. And my husband buys me flowers on February 14th.*
- *I haven't changed my political views (affiliate as a Democrat).*
- *I am still a feminist and I found others who share my thinking and even futher support feminist ideals within M.O.*
- *Liberal political and religious beliefs and an appreciation of what the secular and non-Orthodox worlds offer, including in the area of education and science.*
- *My pet dogs. My strident environmentalism.*
- *eating out,*
- *I am still a democrat*

Q. Are there things you have “held onto” from your pre-Orthodox life, i.e., things of value to you personally, which are not commonly found in the Orthodox world? These could include views – religious, social, political, etc. – beliefs, practices, objects, etc. 499 provided a response; excluding the 81 (16%) who responded “no” with no further explanation, there were 418 who provided a response.

## Sample Verbatim Responses – You indicated that you became Orthodox 10+ years ago. Think about your “early Orthodoxy” (3 or so years after you became Orthodox) and compare it to where you are today. (Explanations by those who replied “I am more religious/observant now ...” or “I am less religious/observant now ...”)

Responses from those who indicated: “I am more religious/observant now than I was at that time. “

- *I learn more now. I am more educated.*
- *More Shabbat observant, can daven, attend minyan more often*
- *I have made my peace with the parts of Orthodoxy I used to fight. I also see more contentment, value, and joy in observance these days. (Probably a function of maturity, as it has been 40 years.)*
- *I have a kosher kitchen now!*
- *Some of my married children have become more observant, and I usually tailor my observances to fit them and their children (my grandchildren)*
- *I am much more educated.*
- *More comfortable with ritual.*
- *I studied*
- *I used to eat non-Kosher at home, then only out, then not at all. I set aside time to learn Torah multiple times a week. I daven 3 times a day everyday.*
- *I learned more and was able to fill in the pieces that I was missing*
- *My awareness of mitzvot observance is ever present.*
- *retired able to daven with minyan every tefillah now*
- *My observance evolved over a number of years.*
- *I was extremely punctilious, driven largely by fear. So I was more careful about obscure minutiae than I am now*
- *more careful on kashrus, Shabbat, minor fasts, etc*
- *I have learned a lot; taught some; keep the Mitzvot more fully than when I began in my twenties*
- *Shomer Shabbat, observe more fast days, attend Shul more*
- *Now learn every single day, greater kavana when davening, better understanding why I am doing what I am doing*
- *More consistent with daily tefillah now, more informed (and therefore more observant) about some finer points of Shabbos now, somewhat better on Lashon Hara than the early days (I still have a long way to go).*
- *I go to shul more often. I attend more classes than I did then.*

Responses from those who indicated: “I am less religious/observant now than I was at that time. “

- *I had to move out of the community for family reasons and I really miss the connection - I live in 2 separate worlds.*
- *We've been feeling left out of a lot of the understanding, and so have drifted away a bit on some of the observances - more so my spouse than me. Really wish there had been more "hand holding" at the beginning so this might have been avoided!!!!*
- *I went through two very traumatic life events during that time, and two separate orthodox rabbis at my shul were not only not helpful (the rest of this comment is not shown j\in order to reserve respondent anonymity).*
- *I drank the Kool-Aid hard, and settled somewhere down a madgrea or two*
- *Loss of faith; inertia*
- *I got dicorced and it has negatively impacted my outlook*
- *less stressed out about appearing frum. more comfortable in my own skin. practice pretty much unchanged*
- *The continued piling on of chumra after chumra, coupled with the excessive pressure for conformity on all levels in our communities has really turned me off. I have come to a place of doing what's comfortable for me at every turn. My shul has become a social club for me, and not much more*
- *I'm feeling distant from Hashem and discouraged because my life hasn't turned out the way I wanted it to. Having emuna problems.*
- *I now eat out and wear pants. I'm surprised there's no questions about the place for single adults in the Orthodox community -- much of my decrease in observance is due to my dissatisfaction as to my role in an Othodox community as a 30+ single woman.*
- *... I am now widowed and alone on most Shabboses and the community does little to include me and I am disappointed and disillusioned with strict Orthodoxy.*

Q. You indicated that you became Orthodox 10+ years ago. Think about your “early Orthodoxy” (3 or so years after you became Orthodox) and compare it to where you are today. 202 responded “I am more religious/observant now than I was at that time” and provided an explanation; 95 responded “I am less religious/observant now than I was at that time” and provided an explanation.

## Sample Verbatim Responses – As a baal teshuvah, what advice would you give to your Orthodox community in terms of what they need to better understand and appreciate about baalei teshuvah?

- *Understanding that people need mentors, but that pressuring people to be machmir in exactly the same way you are isn't necessarily helpful.*
- *Be patient. Be ready to explain slowly even the most obvious, clear, "self-explanatory" subjects. Expect the most unexpected question.*
- *They should understand that I'm not going to know every single yeshivish term they learned in day school 25 years ago.*
- *to understand there struggle. moderate off the dock's community does good job at this. the Chariti community not so much*
- *My community has many, many converts and baalei t'shuvah. We are pretty much live and let live, and support one another.*
- *Not sure. One of the unspoken rules of my community is "You accept people and their approach to Yiddishkeit as it is now, and don't ask how it once was."*
- *Don't assume the BTer doesn't know anything. Ask how you can help. Be careful of tone of voice.*
- *Everyone comes with a different story, a different background. There is no single common experience*
- *Appreciate the unique gifts that Baal Yeshiva's bring from their skills and experience*
- *The community here has become very mixed in their practices. Although there is a core of Orthodox people, more and more of the congregation are less observant. The baalei teshuvah are fully accepted as members of the shul community.*
- *don't judge others - worry about yourself*
- *I think my community is very accepting of baalei teshuvah.*
- *My personal community is great. At large, just don't label people. People are people. Accept them as individuals. All "baalei teshuva" are different the same way all "FFB" are different. The problem comes from lumping people in buckets.*
- *The need for more basic learning or to incorporate this into larger learning sessions. Sometimes the learning is completely advanced, and some (like myself) are left in the dust.*
- *I AM NOT A BAAL TESHUVAH. I AM A 'CONVERT " from conservative.*
- *Help connect people! BTs are often inspired through a program that helps guide them, but then they may have a hard time integrating fully. My community is welcoming... but it doesn't always initiate that welcoming.*
- *Don't pressure to answer the story. Stop playing Jewish geography that doesn't matter anyway. Give more inclusive shiurium*
- *Possibly more mentoring opportunities*
- *Please don't go through every introduction with "Do you know so-and-so, he also grew up there" or "did you go to X day school or Y seminary?" The answer is "No." I don't know them, I didn't go there. This is also true of some FFBs, but it's not nice having to explain that I didn't grow up from within 30 seconds of meeting someone. Small talk doesn't always have to involve Jewish geography.*
- *1. Give ideas on how to worship to God and not worship Halacha. 2. How to develop skills of independence: How to look at religious sources to determine answers as to ways of practice. 3. Look at a person's merits and not their genetic lineage (yichus).*
- *My community is very accepting and welcoming. I have no suggestions.*
- *FFBs need to explore and attempt to understand the journeys of the Ba'al Teshuvah.*
- *It's self-defeating to make baalei teshuvah uncomfortable.*
- *Hebrew words need to be translated during shiurim.*
- *Not all baalei teshuva want to openly label themselves as baalei teshuva. Keep this in mind next time someone seems like they're doing something incorrectly or doesn't seem to know what's going on - they might be a baal teshuva but be too self-conscious about it to let you know.*
- *More basic classes, mentors*
- *Gabbais should not assume everyone is comfortable with kibbudim. Drashas should translate Hebrew words into English the first time used.*
- *Have learning opportunities that are more conversation based about big topics rather than the Rabbi ask knowledge holder disseminating knowledge*

Q. As a baal teshuvah, what advice would you give to your Orthodox community in terms of what they need to better understand and appreciate about baalei teshuvah? 402 provided a response.

## Sample Verbatim Responses – As a convert, what advice would you give to your Orthodox community in terms of what they need to better understand and appreciate about converts?

- *Understand more about background, relatives.*
- *More acceptance and guidance*
- *There is so much judgement surrounding conversion, I wish people understood that.*
- *It's discouraging what people who don't know that I converted say sometimes ("oh, he married a goy!") If somebody said that about a Jew they'd be labeled antisemitic. Also, when somebody in your family marries a non-Jew please be welcoming because that person is more likely to convert and raise Jewish children.*
- *In my community, there is a distrust about converts. There shouldn't be, as long as the Rabbi knows the background and has welcomed the convert into the community.*
- *We are anxious about fitting in. We don't always like to talk about our journey, and we don't always know how to raise our children Jewishly as we have not personally seen it done*
- *I don't talk about my conversion status, because I feel judged. The conversion process was horrible—and I am not a bitter person. It needs to be kinder, better managed, and less manipulative.*
- *Get a clue. Not everyone has Ortho family, there are a lot of hidden struggles (particularly for the kids who have no Jewish grandparents) and maybe pay attention to the fact that converts have no family to help out with simchas.*
- *My experience is probably different because I was always doing more advanced level classes but I guess I would say the extreme mismatch of knowledge level. For example I can read a page of gemara but I still don't know all the shabbat songs*
- *Don't be overly curious and demand details about converts former lives and their choices and story of becoming Jewish. And please, please, be more welcoming to Jews of Color.*
- *I identify way more as a baal teshuvah than a convert. i grew up as a reform jew, we belonged to a reform synagogue, i went to twice weekly hebrew school through middle school, and had a bat mitzvah. however, my mom is not jewish. in college i became more religious and decided to do an orthodox conversion, even though i considered myself jewish, ... i identify as a BT. however the experience of being a baal teshuvah is very similar to that of a convert, so the orthodox community should focus efforts on caring for both groups a bit extra.*
- *Don't make assumptions about a person's past. Don't ridicule them for not knowing something. Lean into the discomfort. Engage with "the other." Understand that having a conversation about a different set of beliefs, values, and practices, does not mean that you need to compromise on your own.*
- *Just treat us like Jews and not make it a big deal to be a convert. I converted to Judaism to be Jewish and not a convert!!!*
- *Don't just talk the talk. Individuals and community leaders need to actively eliminate subtle prejudice and overtly different treatment (including the way people are talked about) toward gerim.*
- *Female converts are really discouraged about shidduch opportunities- education on how to better address this issue would be good*
- *Accept us into your homes and family. We are jewish and wish to learn and grow in practice. Please help us.*
- *In my community I am fully accepted. I have heard issues crying racism on converts of color. Perhaps we should be more dan l'kaf zechus in this area and more welcoming.*
- *i haven't told anybody that i converted, i never felt like i should have had to because i always considered myself jewish*

Q. As a convert, what advice would you give to your Orthodox community in terms of what they need to better understand and appreciate about converts? 50 provided a response.

## Appendix II – Survey Questionnaire

The 2019 Nishma Research Study utilized a single survey questionnaire to address the two topics – the future of Modern Orthodoxy and baalei teshuvah. Logic within the questionnaire determined which questions were presented to which respondents. The survey questionnaire shown on the following pages is the entire document.

# Survey Questionnaire (Page 1 of 7)

Nishma Research Survey of The Orthodox Jewish Community – July 25, 2019

Survey instructions and related notes are shown in red

**INTRODUCTION** Section titles are not shown in the online survey

What are the views of the Orthodox Jewish community? What do you think about the major questions facing Jewish life, your community, your family and yourself? This survey addresses these and related questions, and further explores issues raised in our past surveys of the Orthodox community (available at <http://nishmaresearch.com/social-research.html>). **Note that there are sections of questions included in this survey which are aimed at baalei teshuvah (those who did not grow up Orthodox); this will be the largest quantitative community survey ever done of this group.**

The survey is conducted by Nishma Research and is sponsored by The Micah Foundation. The study researchers, foundation benefactors and members of its advisory group are members of the Orthodox community; the foundation's mission is to promote and enhance Jewish religious, cultural and communal life.

**This survey is for all individuals age 18 and older.** Among couples, we encourage spouses to take the survey separately. The survey takes about 18-20 minutes to complete. (Each screen has a "Save and Continue Later" option that you may click at the top if you do not have the time to complete the survey. If you use this option, please return to complete the survey within three days.

**This survey is 100% confidential.** At the end of the survey, you will have the opportunity to get the results sent directly to you. Additionally, you'll be able to sign up for a **chance to win one of five \$50 Amazon Gift Cards.**

The survey results will be clearly communicated to synagogue rabbis, leaders, congregants and the Orthodox community, and will be made publicly available and downloadable.

If you have any questions about the survey, please email Mark Trencher of Nishma Research at [mark@nishmaresearch.com](mailto:mark@nishmaresearch.com).

## ORTHODOX DENOMINATION AND BACKGROUND

### Mandatory Response

Q1. **Note:** This is the only survey question with a mandatory response. We do, however, encourage you to respond to all the other questions as well.

Regardless of your synagogue affiliation, which of the following categories best describes your approach to Judaism? Are you:

- Modern Orthodox or Centrist Orthodox
- *Yeshivish / Litvish / Agudah*
- *Chasidic, Chabad*
- Not Orthodox – **Display Message and Terminate**

Q2. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- **Non-conforming**, other

Q3. At what stage in your life did you begin to identify yourself as being an observant Orthodox Jew?

- **Asked of Q2 = Male** From birth, or at a young age (before Bar Mitzvah)
- **Asked of Q2 = Female** From birth, or at a young age (before Bat Mitzvah)
- **Asked of Q2 = Non-conforming** From birth, or at a young age (before Bar or Bat Mitzvah)
- **Asked of Q2 = Male** Between Bar Mitzvah age and 17 \*
- **Asked of Q2 = Female** Between Bat Mitzvah age and 17 \*
- **Asked of Q2 = Non-conforming** Between Bar or Bat Mitzvah age and 17 \*
- Between ages 18 and 24 \*
- Between ages 25 and 39 \*
- Age 40 or older \*

\* **These respondents are, for the purposes of this survey, viewed as baalei teshuvah.**

**Ask of Baalei Teshuvah per Q3**

Q4. How many years ago did you begin to identify yourself as an observant Orthodox Jew?

- Within the past 3 years
- Between 4 and 9 years ago
- Between 10 and 19 years ago
- 20 or more years ago

## PERCEPTIONS OF MODERN ORTHODOXY & DAY-TO-DAY RELIGIOUS LIFE

In this survey, when we refer to "Modern Orthodox" we are including all those who identify themselves as **Modern Orthodox or Centrist Orthodox** ... and not *Charedi (yeshivish / Agudah / Litvish or Chasidic / Chabad)*.

Additionally, when we use the term "*baal teshuvah*" to refer to someone who made a transition to Orthodoxy, to simplify things we are using the same term for men and women.

**Asked of Q1 = Modern Orthodox or Centrist Orthodox**

Q5. 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

# Survey Questionnaire (Page 2 of 7)

## Asked of Q1 = Modern Orthodox or Centrist Orthodox

Q6. Do you agree with the following statements?

- Modern Orthodoxy is spiritually inspiring.
- Modern Orthodoxy lets me think about ideas in an intellectually honest and critical way.
- Modern Orthodox Jews are quite knowledgeable about the fundamental underpinnings of faith.
- Modern Orthodoxy is as “Jewishly authentic” as *Charedi* (*yeshivish* or *chasidic*) Judaism.
- Religious observance within the Modern Orthodox community is where it should be.

Scale:

- Agree Fully
- Agree Somewhat
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree Somewhat
- Disagree Fully
- Don't Know

Q7. Where do you see yourself in terms of religious practice?

- I am pretty much a “Shabbat Orthodox Jew.”
- I tend toward being mostly a “Shabbat Orthodox Jew.”
- I tend toward being a “Full-time (24/7) Orthodox Jew.”
- I am pretty much a “Full-time (24/7) Orthodox Jew.”

## Ask of Baalei Teshuvah per Q3

Q8. You indicated that you became Orthodox at or after Bar/Bat Mitzvah age. How do you view yourself at this time?

- In my mind, I still think of myself mainly as a *baal teshuvah*.
- I think of myself as “just a member of the Orthodox community” but am quite conscious of still being a *baal teshuvah*.
- I think of myself as “just a member of the Orthodox community” and do not really still view myself as a *baal teshuvah*.

## Asked of Q8 = Option 2 or 3

Q9. Was there a particular point in time (an event, milestone, accomplishment, etc.) when you felt that you had “arrived” in Orthodoxy (i.e., you no longer thought of yourself mainly as a baal teshuva)? **Open-Ended**

## Asked of Q1 = Modern Orthodox or Centrist Orthodox

Q10. The goal of Modern Orthodoxy is to meld **religious life** with **participation in society**. How often do you personally experience any positive interactions between your Orthodoxy and your participation in secular society?

- Often
- Sometimes
- Seldom
- Never

## Asked of Q10 = Often or Sometimes

Q11a. Can you give an example or two of how your Jewish Orthodox life and your participation in secular society interact in a positive way? **Open-Ended**

## Asked of Q10 = Seldom or Never

Q11b. Why do you think your Jewish Orthodox life and your participation in secular society do not more often interact in a positive way? **Open-Ended**

Q12. Do you ever experience conflict between your Orthodoxy and your participation in society? If so, how do you generally resolve it?

- I have not experienced any such conflict
- I have experienced such conflict but stand firm in my religious practice.
- I lean toward standing firm in my religious practice, but I sometimes need to compromise
- I have a flexible attitude toward compromising.

## Asked of Q12 = Option 3 or 4

Q13. Can you give an example or two of a time that you needed to compromise your religious practice? **Open-Ended**

Q14. How religiously comfortable are you with:

- Davening
  - Jewish learning
  - Day-to-day Orthodox living
- Scale:
- Fully or Mostly Comfortable
  - Somewhat Comfortable
  - Somewhat Uncomfortable
  - Fully or Mostly Uncomfortable

Q15. There has been some discussion about people using smartphones on Shabbat, e.g., for texting (not in a professional capacity, such as physicians, but for social reasons). Do you ever do this?

- Often
- Sometimes
- Seldom
- Never

## Survey Questionnaire (Page 3 of 7)

Q16. How do you rate your Orthodox community in terms of its acceptance of baalei teshuvah in general?

- Very accepting
- Somewhat accepting
- Somewhat not accepting
- Not accepting
- Don't Know

Ask of Baalei Teshuvah per Q3

Q17. As a *baal teshuvah*, what advice would you give to your Orthodox community in terms of what they need to better understand and appreciate about *baalei teshuvah*? **Open-Ended**

Asked of Q1 = Modern Orthodox or Centrist Orthodox

Q18. Because Modern Orthodoxy interacts with society, it needs to deal with change. Which of the following statements best reflects your views on this?

- Modern Orthodoxy is too focused on “drawing lines” to prevent change ... and not focused enough on making changes that I feel are needed.
- The current balance between making changes and “drawing lines” is appropriate.
- Modern Orthodoxy is too focused on making changes that I feel are not desirable ... and does not preserve tradition enough.

Asked of Q18 = “Modern Orthodoxy is too focused on ‘drawing lines’ ...”

Q18a. You indicated that Modern Orthodoxy is too focused on “drawing lines” ... and not focused enough on making changes. What changes do you feel are needed? **Open-Ended**

Asked of Q18 = “Modern Orthodoxy is too focused on making changes ...”

Q18b. You indicated that Modern Orthodoxy is too focused on making changes and does not preserve tradition enough. What changes do you feel are not desirable? **Open-Ended**

Asked of Q1 = Modern Orthodox or Centrist Orthodox

Q19. Do you agree with the following statements?

- Modern Orthodoxy is being too much affected by its liberal wing.
- Modern Orthodoxy is being too much affected by its right wing and by *Charedi* Judaism.

Scale:

- Agree Fully
- Agree Somewhat
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree Somewhat
- Disagree Fully
- Don't Know

### BAALEI TESHUVAH AND THE JOURNEY TOWARD ORTHODOXY

Ask of Baalei Teshuvah per Q3

Q20. You indicated that you became Orthodox at or after Bar/Bat Mitzvah age. Which of the following best describes how you viewed yourself Jewishly before becoming Orthodox?

- Conservative or Orthoprax
- Reform, Reconstructionist, Renewal, or other denomination
- Traditional, cultural, ethnic Jewish (or “just Jewish”)
- Secular/Humanist Jewish
- Not Jewish
- Other – Please describe **Open-Ended**

Ask of Baalei Teshuvah per Q3

Q21. What sparked your transition to Orthodoxy? Please check up to five factors that were most important in your decision to become Orthodox.

[Up to 5 responses]

- I was Influenced by a friend.
- I was influenced by my spouse or other partner relationship (fiancé, boyfriend, girlfriend, etc.).
- I was influenced by my child(ren).
- I was influenced by my parent(s).
- I was influenced by other relative(s).
- I was Influenced by *kiruv* (outreach) professional(s) or organization(s).
- I was intellectually attracted to or curious about Orthodoxy; or interested because of religious knowledge that I had acquired.
- I saw Orthodoxy and the Torah as more truthful.
- I saw Orthodoxy as a more authentic kind of Judaism than existed in my prior Jewish community.
- I wanted to better connect to my Jewish roots and heritage.
- I was generally dissatisfied with my life.
- I disliked the type of morality I saw in secular society/culture.
- I was searching for more meaning in my life.
- I wanted more structure in my life.
- I felt isolated and had a desire for community.
- I was influenced by society's and Orthodoxy's views relating to the role of women. – Please briefly explain **Open-Ended**
- Other – Please identify **Open-Ended**

# Survey Questionnaire (Page 4 of 7)

Asked of Q21 = "I was influenced by a *kiruv* (outreach) ..."

Q22. Which *kiruv* (outreach) professional(s) or organization(s) influenced you to become Orthodox? Please check up to three. [Up to 3 responses]

- NCSY
- Other Orthodox youth program (Bnei Akiva, etc.)
- Other youth program (BBYO, USY, etc.)
- Chabad Lubavitch
- Hillel or other college / campus program (excluding Chabad)
- Neve Yerushalayim
- Aish HaTorah
- Ohr Somayach
- Oorah
- NJOP (National Jewish Outreach Program)
- MJE (Manhattan Jewish Experience)
- JWRP (Jewish Women's Renaissance Project – Momentum)
- Gateways
- A synagogue or synagogue program – Please identify Open-Ended
- Birthright or other Israel trip
- Summer camp
- A rabbi or other mentor/personality
- Other – Please identify Open-Ended

Asked of one or more responses selected in Q22

Q23. Thinking of the *kiruv* approaches that influenced you, how would you rate them overall in terms of their:

- Effectiveness at the time you moved toward Orthodoxy.
- Effectiveness since that time, i.e., their follow-up and lasting impact.

Scale:

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Don't Know

Ask of Baalei Teshuvah per Q3

Q24. What were the main challenges you faced at the time you moved toward Orthodoxy?  
Open-Ended

Ask of Baalei Teshuvah per Q3

Q25. Are there things you have "held onto" from your pre-Orthodox life, i.e., things of value to you personally, which are not commonly found in the Orthodox world? These could include views – religious, social, political, etc. – beliefs, practices, objects, etc. Open-Ended

## COMMUNAL ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES

Asked of Q1 = Modern Orthodox or Centrist Orthodox

Q26. Do you agree with the following statements?

- Modern Orthodoxy's national communal organizations provide religious leadership that meets the community's religious needs.
- Modern Orthodoxy's national communal organizations provide leadership on key issues that meets the community's needs in areas of internal and societal interactions, and policy advocacy.
- Modern Orthodox communal organizations should take stands on political and/or social issues.

Scale:

- Agree Fully
- Agree Somewhat
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree Somewhat
- Disagree Fully
- Don't Know

Asked of Q1 = Modern Orthodox or Centrist Orthodox

Q27. If you would like to make any suggestions to our Modern Orthodox national communal organizations, what would they be? Open-Ended

Asked of Q1 = Modern Orthodox or Centrist Orthodox

Q28. Do you agree with the following statements?

- Modern Orthodox shuls and community organizations have access to an adequate supply of skilled Modern Orthodox leaders.
- Modern Orthodox schools have access to an adequate supply of skilled Modern Orthodox educators.
- Too many of our communal leaders (rabbis, teachers, organizations) come from more right-leaning segments of Orthodoxy.
- *Aliyah* (Jews moving to Israel) is having a significant negative impact on American Modern Orthodoxy (i.e., what has sometimes been called a "brain drain").
- **Asked of Q2 = Female** I often find my talents valued more by the non-Orthodox world or even the non-Jewish world, and I therefore direct more of my energies towards those communities.
- **Asked of Q3 = Baal Teshuvah** As a *baal teshuvah*, my Orthodox community sometimes asks me for advice that I might be in a position to offer, given my background.

Scale:

- Agree Fully
- Agree Somewhat
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree Somewhat
- Disagree Fully
- Don't Know

## Survey Questionnaire (Page 5 of 7)

Q29. What is your current marital/relationship status?

- Married
- Single
- Divorced
- Separated
- Widowed
- Living with a partner or in a long-term relationship

Asked of Q29 = Married

Q30. Would you say that your spouse is:

- At about the same level of religious observance as you are
- More religious (observant) than you are
- Less religious (observant) than you are
- Don't Know

Ask of Baalei Teshuvah per Q3 and Q29 = Married

Q31. Is your spouse also a baal teshuvah?

- Yes, my spouse is a baal teshuvah (or a convert)
- No

Q32. Do you have any children? If so, how many?

- None
- One
- Two
- Three
- Four
- Five or More

Asked of Q32 = Has One or More Children

Q33. Are any of your children in grades K to 8 (the just-completed school year)?

- Yes
- No

Q34. Do you agree that:

- The school systems in my Orthodox community are successful at creating committed Orthodox Jews.
- **Asked of Q33 = Yes (Has Children in Grades K-8)** I consider the cost my children's Jewish education to be money well-spent.
- **Asked of Q33 = Yes (Has Children in Grades K-8)** Eventually, sending my child(ren) to a public school might be an option to consider.

Scale:

- Agree Fully
- Agree Somewhat
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree Somewhat
- Disagree Fully
- Don't Know

Asked of Q1 = Modern Orthodox or Centrist Orthodox and Q32 = Has One or More Children

Q35. How religious, in general, do you want your children to be?

- I prefer that they be typical Centrist Modern Orthodox Jews.
- I prefer that they be more observant than the typical Centrist Modern Orthodox Jew, e.g., right-leaning Modern Orthodox, or *Charedi*.
- I prefer that they be less observant than the typical Centrist Modern Orthodox Jew, e.g., left-leaning Orthodox, traditional, secular, etc.
- Don't Know
- This is not so critical or relevant to me – Please explain **Open-Ended**

### RELIGIOUS TRENDS AND WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

Q36. Do you agree with the following statements?

- I am very concerned about people leaving Orthodoxy and becoming non-*frum* ("Off the Derech").
- I feel our Orthodox communal leaders are not adequately addressing the issue of people leaving Orthodoxy.

Scale:

- Agree Fully
- Agree Somewhat
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree Somewhat
- Disagree Fully
- Don't Know

Asked of became Baal Teshuvah 10+ years ago (options #3-4 in Q4)

Q37. You indicated that you became Orthodox 10+ years ago. Think about your "early Orthodoxy" (3 or so years after you became Orthodox) and compare it to where you are today. Which of the following is most accurate?

- I am at about the same place religiously now as I was at that time.
- I am more religious/observant now than I was at that time. – Can you briefly explain? **Open-Ended**
- I am less religious/observant now than I was at that time. – Can you briefly explain? **Open-Ended**

## Survey Questionnaire (Page 6 of 7)

Q38. Do you agree with the following statements?

- Being an Orthodox / Observant Jew is an important part of my life.
- Some positive views and values (in my opinion) of broader secular society are making their way into my Orthodox community.
- Some negative views and values (in my opinion) of broader secular society are making their way into my Orthodox community.
- **Asked of Q1 = Modern Orthodox or Centrist Orthodox** There is no longer a single, cohesive Modern Orthodox community. Modern Orthodoxy should acknowledge this and would perhaps be better off splitting into separate camps.

Scale:

- Agree Fully
- Agree Somewhat
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree Somewhat
- Disagree Fully
- Don't Know

**Asked of agree (fully or somewhat) with Q38 option #2 ("Some positive views...")**

Q38a. You agreed that some positive societal views and values are making their way into your Orthodox community. Can you provide some examples? **Open-Ended**

**Asked of agree (fully or somewhat) with Q38 option #3 ("Some negative views...")**

Q38b. You agreed that some negative societal views and values are making their way into your Orthodox community. Can you provide some examples? **Open-Ended**

Q39. What future do you foresee for Modern Orthodoxy over the next few decades, in areas of:

- Religious strength
- Growth in numbers
- Cohesiveness, togetherness

Scale:

- I am very optimistic
- I am somewhat optimistic
- Neither optimistic nor pessimistic
- I am somewhat pessimistic
- I am very pessimistic
- Don't Know

**Asked of Q1 = Modern Orthodox or Centrist Orthodox**

Q40. Do you have any suggestions for approaches that the Modern Orthodox community should consider over the next few decades in order to strengthen itself? **Open-Ended**

### DEMOGRAPHICS

Q41. What is your age?

- 18 to 24
- 25 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 54
- 55 to 64
- 65 to 74
- 75 or older
- Prefer not to answer

Q42. Are you and/or either of your parents a convert to Judaism (*geirim*)? Please check all that apply.

- I am a convert
- One or both of my parents is a convert

**Ask of Converts per Q42**

Q43. As a convert, what advice would you give to your Orthodox community in terms of what they need to better understand and appreciate about converts? **Open-Ended**

Q44. What is the highest level of schooling you have completed?

- Less than high school graduate
- High school graduate
- Some college, no degree
- Two-year associate degree
- Four-year Bachelor's degree
- Some postgraduate or professional schooling, no postgraduate degree
- Postgraduate or professional degree, including master's, doctorate, medical or law degree

Q45. What is the highest level of formal Jewish studies you have completed?

- None
- Talmud Torah (e.g., a Sunday or weekday evening Jewish studies program run by a synagogue)
- Some Jewish elementary school (did not graduate)
- Jewish elementary school (8th grade)
- Jewish high school
- Jewish post-high school study

## Survey Questionnaire (Page 7 of 7)

Q46. Thinking of the Jewish community in which you currently reside, would you say it is a:

- Large Jewish community of 200,000+ Jews (e.g., New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Boston, Greater DC, Philadelphia.)
- Mid-size Jewish community of 50,000 to 199,999 Jews (e.g., Atlanta, Miami, San Diego, Cleveland, Denver, etc.)
- Smaller Jewish community of under 50,000 Jews (e.g., Pittsburgh, Minneapolis, Hartford, Cincinnati, etc.)

Q47. Have you ever moved from one community to another for “religious reasons”?

- Yes – Can you briefly explain? **Open-Ended**
- No

Q48. For our final question, let's have a little fun. What is your favorite “Jewish book”? It could be a sefer (religious book), Jewish study, commentary, biography, fiction, etc., and you can define “Jewish book” any way you like. Tell us the first one that comes to mind. **Open-Ended**

### THANK YOU SCREEN

Thank you very much for sharing your thoughts. Your response is very important to us.

Q49.

- Please check here if you would you like to get a free report of the survey results.
- Please check here if you would you like to be entered into the raffle for a chance to win one of five \$50 Amazon Gift Cards.

**Show if either box in Q49 is checked**

Please let us know your email address, so that we can contact you as appropriate. Your email will be totally confidential. It will not be used for any other purposes and will not be attached to your survey responses. **Small Text Box, formatted for email address**

### SHARING OF SURVEY LINK

This survey has been widely distributed, but not everyone may be received it. So feel free to share this survey with your Orthodox family, friends or colleagues. Just provide them with the link: [bit.ly/Orthodox-Survey-2019](https://bit.ly/Orthodox-Survey-2019).

### END OF SURVEY

## The Study Advisory Group

- **Steven Bayme, Ph.D.** – Essayist, author and lecturer; director of Contemporary Jewish Life of the American Jewish Committee and the Koppelman Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations; serves on the Wexner Heritage Foundation faculty.
- **Prof. Rivkah Blau, Ph.D.** – Author, professor at Yeshiva University; Jewish Studies and humanities teacher in high school and college; has served as principal of two yeshiva high schools.
- **Dr. Erica Brown** – Educator, author of twelve books on leadership, Bible and spirituality, Director, George Washington University Mayberg Center for Jewish Education and Leadership; associate professor of curriculum and pedagogy; tweets Daf Yomi daily.
- **Rabbi Dr. Michael Brojde** – Professor of law, academic director of Emory Univ. Law and Religion Program, and senior fellow in its Center for the Study of Law and Religion; Fulbright scholar; former pulpit rabbi and *dayan* of Beth Din of America; written extensively and is widely consulted on Jewish law and ethics.
- **Aliza Bulow** – Jewish adult educator of basic Judaism, philosophy and textual learning skills; served in the IDF; was national coordinator of Ner LeElef's North American Woman's Program; co-founded CORE, which creates warm and inspiring Jewish communities by nourishing and networking Orthodox women.
- **Rabbi Dr. Zev Eleff** – Chief academic officer, Hebrew Theological College (Chicago); author or editor of nine books (including Modern Orthodox Judaism: A Documentary History) and more than forty scholarly articles in the field of Jewish history and sociology; two-time finalist for the National Jewish Book Award.
- **Prof. Sylvia Barack Fishman, Ph.D.** – Renowned expert on Modern Orthodoxy; Joseph and Esther Foster Professor of Contemporary Jewish Life, Brandeis; co-director of Hadassah-Brandeis Institute; author of eight books and many articles on Jewish social issues.
- **Rabbi Avrohom Gordimer** – Has written extensively on a wide range of topics affecting the Jewish community; *kashruth* professional; Chairman of the Rabbinic Circle at Coalition for Jewish Values; member of the New York Bar.
- **Leslie Ginsparg Klein, Ph.D.** – Academic Dean of General Studies at Women's Institute of Torah Seminary; instructor of Jewish studies, Jewish history and research methods
- **Bethany Mandel** – Author, political and cultural commentator; served on the Rabbinical Council of America committee on safeguards against abuses in the conversion process.
- **Jeremy Pava, West Hartford, CT** – CFO at Aspen Square Management; trustee of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation; Managing Trustee of the Micah Foundation; founder and past president of the Hebrew High School of New England.
- **Rabbi Ezra Schwartz** – Rosh yeshiva and *bochein* (Official Examiner for shiur placement) at Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (YU); teacher in the *semicha* program; former Assistant to the President for Research and Communications; Senior Rabbi at the Mount Sinai Jewish Center.
- **Rabbi Avi Shafran** – Widely published commentator, political and social critic, columnist and blogger on Jewish world events and trends; Director of public affairs at Agudath Israel of America; a author of five books.
- **Ariel Weiner** – Advisory Board member, Midreshet Lindenbaum Women's Institute for Halachik Leadership; Past board chair Yeshivat Maharat and JOFA board member; serves on SAR Academy Board of Education; Wexner Heritage Fellowship.
- **Rabbi Elie Weinstock** – Rabbi at Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun and oversees its highly successful Beginners Program; member of Judaic Studies faculty at Ramaz School; serves as special advisor to the National Jewish Outreach Program.
- **Rabbi Dr. Dov S. Zakheim** – Rabbi, university professor, entrepreneur, writer and former US government official (including Undersecretary of Defense) who has been active in the national Jewish community.

