
Highlights from The Guttman Institute Report:

Beliefs, Observances and Social Interaction Among Israeli Jews

- *"...the rhetoric of secular and religious polarization generally used to characterize Israeli society is highly misleading."*
- *"...Israeli society has a strong traditional bent, and, as far as religious practice is concerned... there is a continuum from the 'strictly observant' to the 'non-observant', rather than a great divide between a religious minority and a secular majority."*
- *"Israeli Jews are strongly committed to the continuing Jewish character of their society, even while they are selective in the forms of their observance. They believe that public life should respect the tradition, but are critical of the 'status quo' governing State and Religion."*

The Louis Guttman Israel Institute of Applied Social Research

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The findings and conclusions are solely those of The Guttman Institute.

Highlights from The Guttman Institute Report:

Beliefs, Observances and
Social Interaction
Among Israeli Jews

Shlomit Levy Hanna Levinsohn Elihu Katz

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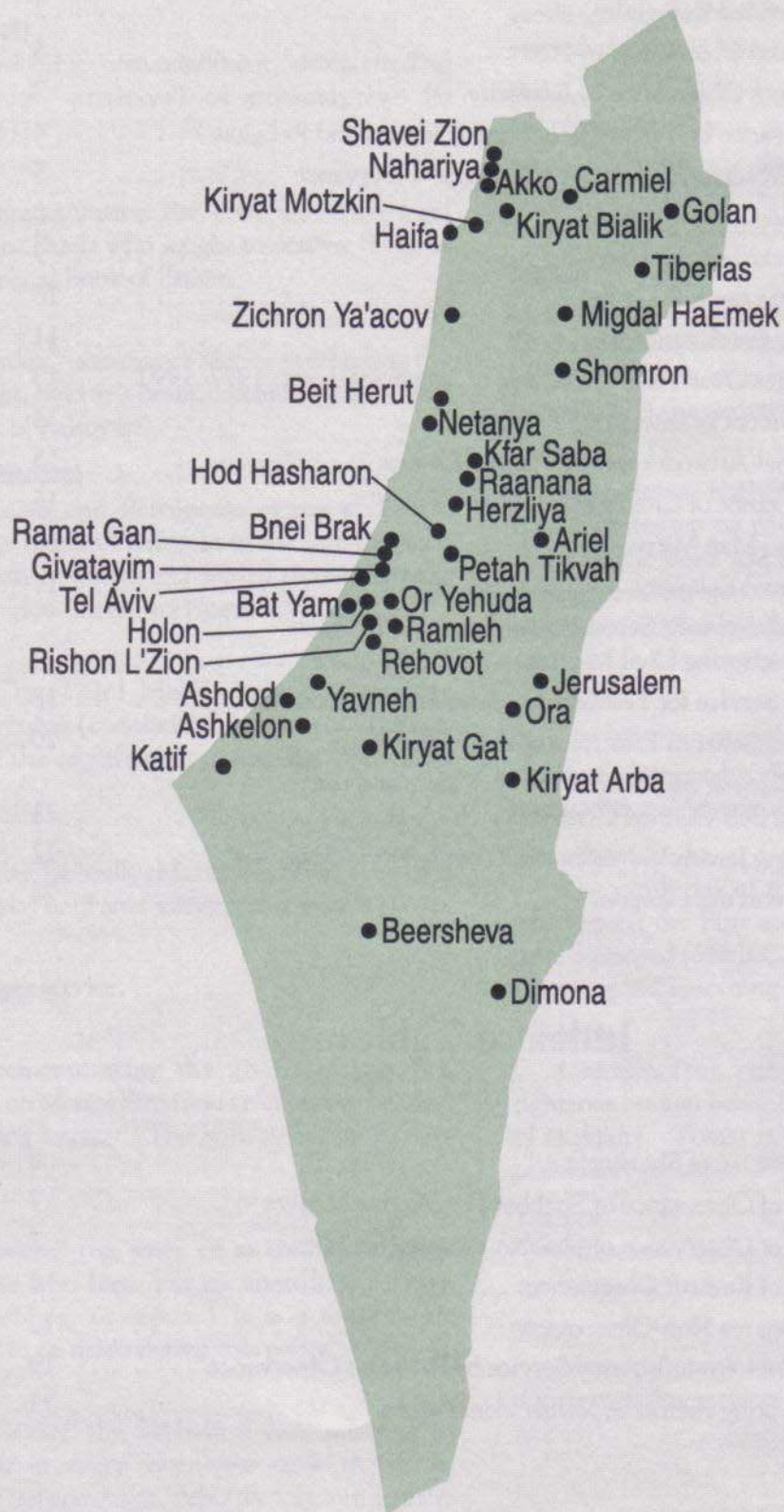
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Geographic Dispersion of Communities in National and Settlers Samples



Beliefs, Observances and Social Interaction Among Israeli Jews

PREFACE

The Research Objective

The objective of this study, commissioned by AVI CHAI, is to study religious observance, social interaction, and beliefs and values of Jews in Israel. Specifically, it explores the actual observance of mitzvot¹, social and demographic differences in religious behavior, the role of religion in public life, Jewish identification, Jewish beliefs and values as well as general social values, and issues of interaction among social groups that differ in the character of their religious observance and ethnic origin.

To the best of our knowledge, the present research is the most comprehensive that has been conducted on the topic of religious behavior of Jews in Israel, with respect both to the representativeness of the sample population and the range of topics covered.

The Samples and Field Work

The study was conducted by The Louis Guttman Israel Institute of Applied Social Research, under the direction of Dr. Shlomit Levy, Hanna Levinsohn and Professor Elihu Katz, Scientific Director of the Institute.

The research population consists of Jewish adults² twenty years of age and over, residing in all types of communities in Israel [see map]³. Two samples, each of which comprised about 1,200 respondents (1,195 and 1,204), were selected to ensure proper representation of the population and coverage of a broad range of issues. Different questionnaires were designed for the two samples, one focusing primarily on Jewish religious behavior and social values, and the other focusing primarily on social interaction among Jews. There were 85 common questions asked of the 2,399 respondents.

Field work was conducted between October 20 and December 16, 1991. The respondents were interviewed in their homes by interviewers who were especially trained for this purpose under the supervision of the Institute's field supervisors.

In addition, certain supplementary questions were asked of respondents in field work from February 14 to

March 22, 1993. These questions were designed to examine prevailing images of religious beliefs and behaviors so that they might be contrasted with the actual beliefs and behaviors revealed in the main study.

SUMMARY

In sum, the study finds that there are certain traditional attitudes, values and practices that embrace almost all of Israeli Jews: the commitment to Jewish continuity, the celebration of major holidays, the performance of life-cycle rituals. Certain practices - such as marking the Shabbat eve - encompass about two-thirds of the population, by virtue of the fact that the large group of "somewhat observant" augments the ranks of the "strictly" and "mostly" observant. Israeli Jews are strongly committed to the continuing Jewish character of their society, even while they are selective in the forms of their observance. They believe that public life should respect the tradition, but are critical of the "status quo" governing State and Religion.

While there is a sense of tension in the relations between groups of different degrees of religiosity, more stereotypical than real, and an antipathy to the ultra-Orthodox and the anti-religious, the study strongly suggests that the rhetoric of secular and religious polarization generally used to characterize Israeli society is highly misleading. It would be more accurate to say that Israeli society has a strong traditional bent, and, as far as religious practice is concerned, that there is a continuum from the "strictly observant" to the "non-observant," rather than a great divide between a religious minority and a secular majority.

The following are selected findings described in the various chapters of the monograph, which is available upon request to AVI CHAI⁴. These Highlights, naturally, are not a substitute for the full monograph of 145 pages of analysis, plus Appendices, which include the complete text of the questionnaires and 149 pages of cross-tabulations. Like the monograph, these Highlights divide into three sections: Observances, Social Interaction (including questions concerning the place of religion in public life), and Beliefs and Values.

1-A glossary of Hebrew terminology appears at the end of this document.

2-Only Hebrew-speaking persons were interviewed.

3-Excluding kibbutzim; data were gathered utilizing the same questionnaires on a sample of the settlers in Gaza, Golan, Judea, and Samaria. The geographic dispersion of the communities included in the national and settlers samples appears on the map. Although the data on the settlers are not incorporated here, they are available upon request.

4-Shlomit Levy, Hanna Levinsohn, Elihu Katz, "Beliefs, Observances and Social Interaction Among Israeli Jews," Jerusalem: The Louis Guttman Israel Institute of Applied Social Research, 1993.

Observances

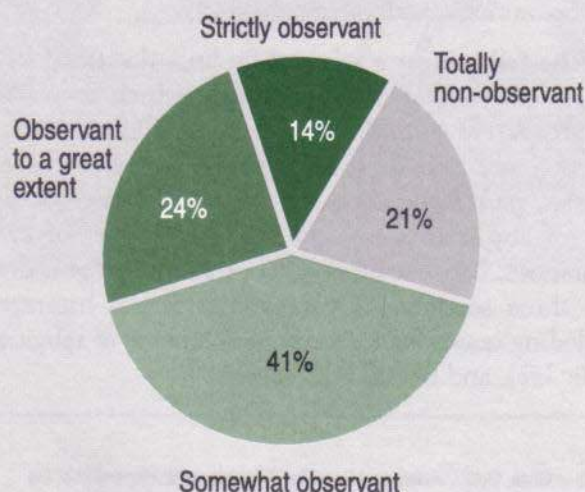
Fourteen percent of Israeli Jews define themselves as “strictly observant,” and 24% more say they are “observant to a great extent.” Approximately 40% report themselves “somewhat observant,” and about 20% “totally non-observant” [Figure 1].

This distribution of religious observance has remained essentially unchanged over the past 25 years. It extends also to specific observances; for example, the proportion of synagogue attendance corresponds, by and large, to Guttman Institute observations since 1969⁵.

Nevertheless, when asked to estimate the proportion of Israelis “that observe the religious tradition in the same way that you do,” respondents at each level of religiosity overestimate the number of others who behave as they do. The majority are not well acquainted with the facts regarding religious observance of the Israeli public, and at each level of religiosity overestimate the proportion of Israelis “that observe the religious tradition in the same way that I do.” In other words, regardless of the extent of their observance, Israelis feel well supported in their positions. This sense of support rises with the decline in observance; that is, the less observant feel that there are even more of them.

Figure 1

Self-Defined Religiosity (Percent of Respondents)



When asked about affiliation with a particular religious trend, nearly half reported no affiliation. Only in recent years has the Israeli public become aware of the existence of “denominations” in religious affiliation⁶.

Observance By Background Traits

Self-defined religious observance does not much vary among different age groups, between men and women, and between old-timers and newcomers [Figure 2].

Ethnic origin makes a difference, both in observance and in some attitudes. Those from Eastern ethnic backgrounds (Asian-African, known as Sephardim) are, in general, more sympathetic to religious tradition, while those from Western ethnic backgrounds (Ashkenazim) are, in general, less sympathetic. There is a high concentration (70%) of Jews of Eastern origin in the category, “observant to a great extent,” just as there is a high concentration of Western Jews among the “totally non-observant.” Israelis born to Eastern parents are generally less observant than their Eastern-born parents, while the Western-born and their Israeli offspring do not differ with respect to religious observance [Figure 3].

5—For purposes of comparison over time, we allude at various points to The Continuing Survey of The Guttman Institute, founded in 1967; Shlomit Levy, *Social Problem Indicators for Israel: State and Society*, Jerusalem: The Louis Guttman Israel Institute of Applied Social Research, 1992 (Hebrew); Hanna Levinsohn, *Attitudes of the Israeli Public on Issues of Religion and Jewish Tradition*, Jerusalem: The Louis Guttman Israel Institute of Applied Social Research, 1990 (Hebrew); and Yehuda Ben-Meir and Peri Kedem, “A Measure of Religiosity for the Jewish Population of Israel,” *Megamot*, 24,3, 1979, pp. 353-362 (Hebrew).

6—The Hebrew equivalents of Conservative and Reform denominations are not well recognized by Israelis. The word *masorti*, in particular, is ambiguous and probably does not specifically connote Conservative Judaism. “The term *Haredi* (pl. *Haredim*) literally means ‘fearful’ and recalls the Scriptural reference to the righteous person who fears the word of God. In the nineteenth century, the term was a synonym for an Orthodox Jew. Today, in Israel, Orthodox Jews are divided into Religious-Zionists, also called National-Religious, and *Haredim*, whom the press refers to as ‘ultra-Orthodox.’ *Haredim* are generally characterized by their strict interpretation of Jewish law, their rejection of secular culture, and their ambivalent attitude to the Jewish State, which in the case of some *Haredim* is hostile.” (from Charles S. Liebman, ed., *Religious and Secular*, Keter Publishing House/AVI CHAI, 1991.) Lines between *Haredim* and National-Religious are not as neatly drawn as most believe. In fact, the present study shows that more *Haredim* are likely to define themselves as “Zionist” than as “non-Zionist.” The findings, however, may also be affected by the lower level of respondent cooperation within the *Haredi* sector.

Figure 2

Religious Observance by Age

(Percent of Respondents)

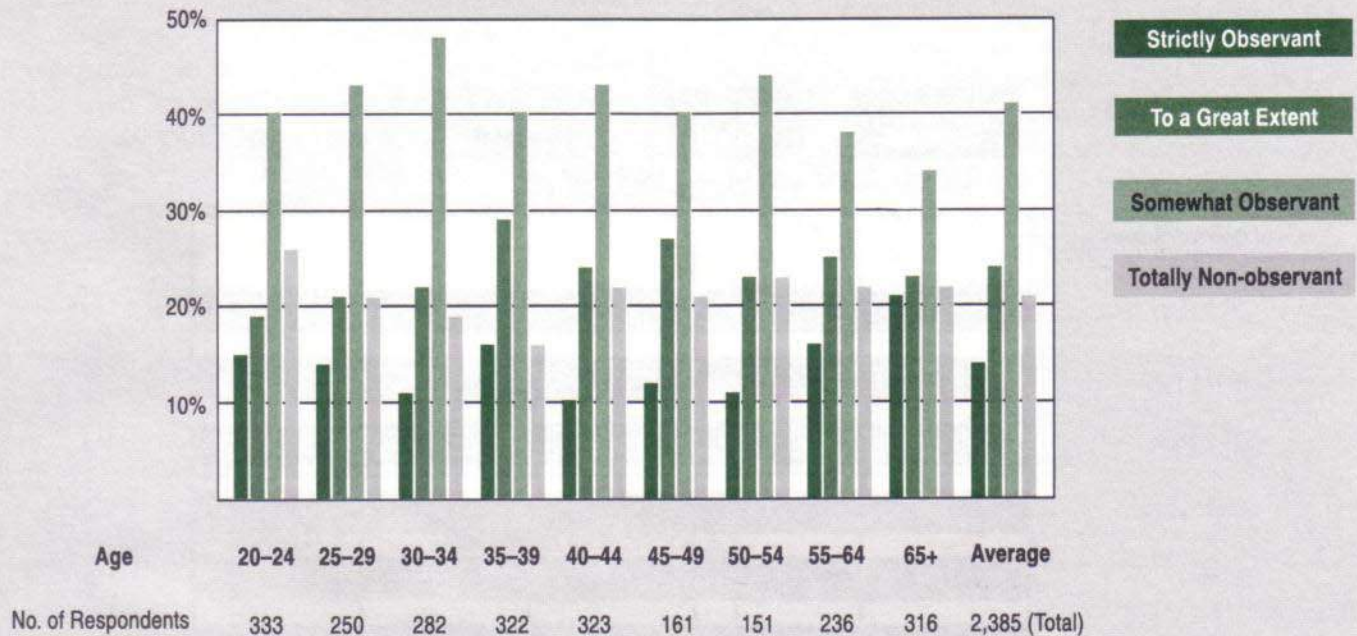
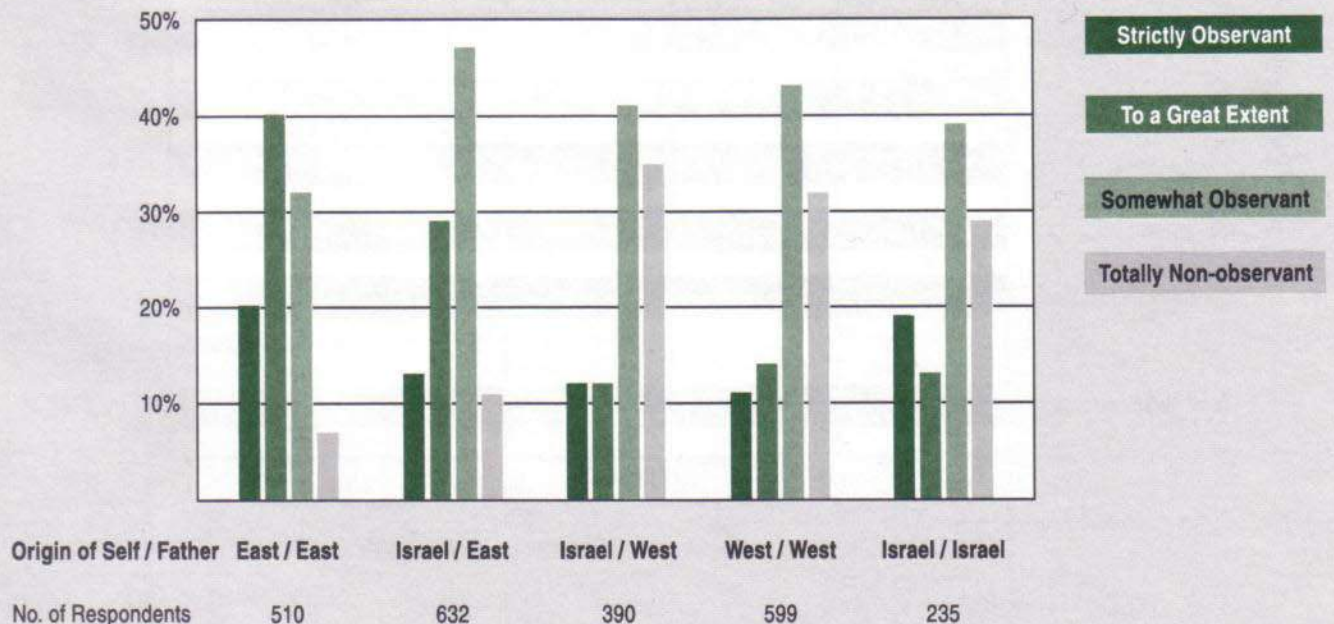


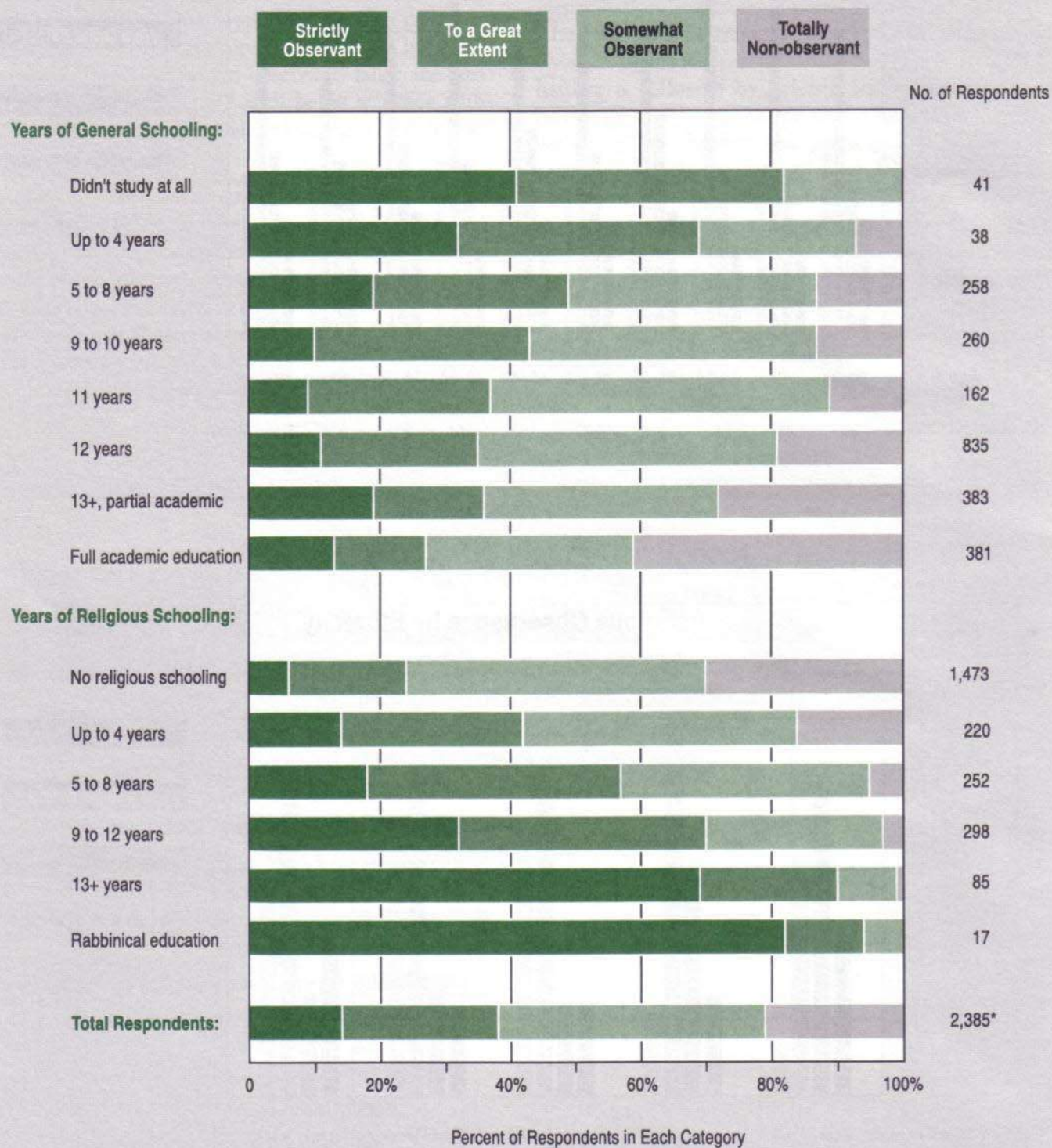
Figure 3

Religious Observance by Ethnicity

(Percent of Respondents)



Observance by Years of Schooling (General and Religious)



Religious observance varies with levels of education, both general and religious. Respondents with low levels of general education are the most observant, while the non-observant concentrate among the better educated, especially those with full university education [Figure 4].

In a religious school setting, however, increased levels of education lead to increased observance. It should be noted that "religious schooling" refers to only 37% of the population, since 63% reported that they had no religious schooling.

Stability of Religious Observance and Attitudes Over Time

In addition to the relative stability of religious observance over time, and the striking similarity in the distribution of observance across age groups, respondents also report high correlations between own and parents' observance. Only 20% report themselves to be radically different from their parents in this respect [Figure 5].

Behaviorally speaking, then, it is fair to conclude that inter-generational continuity outweighs change, to which one should add that there is somewhat more movement toward lesser rather than greater observance. Thus, fewer respondents from "strictly observant" homes follow their parents as closely as those from "totally non-observant" homes.

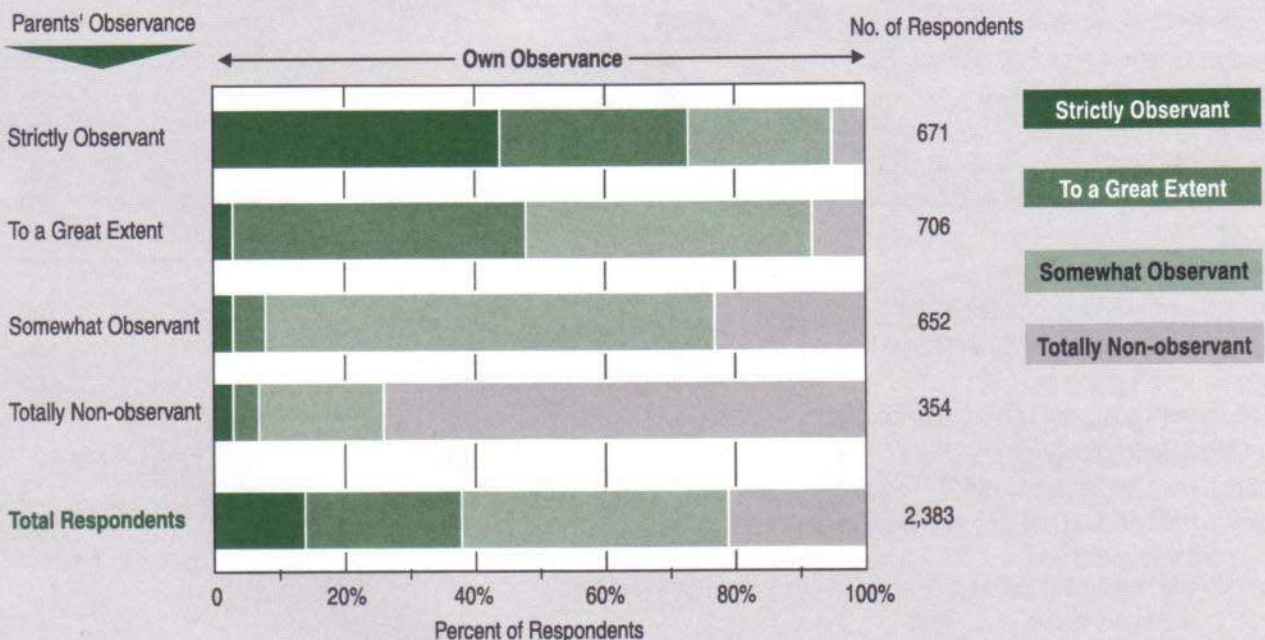
Nevertheless, there appears to be an attraction towards increased religious observance. A third say that they would like to be "somewhat more" or "much more" observant, while only 5% say that they would want to be "a little less" or "much less" observant. Sixty-two percent say that they would want to remain the same. The more observant the respondent, the greater the wish to be even "more" observant. Interestingly, 10% of the "totally non-observant" also express a wish to be "somewhat more" observant, and one-half of the "non-observant" would prefer their children to be "somewhat observant" rather than "totally non-observant."

Observing Shabbat

Until very recently, the Seventh Day - the Shabbat - was the whole of the Israeli "weekend," and had to double as a religious holiday replete with mitzvot, as well as to serve as a "day off" in the Western sense. For the past few years, Friday has been added to the weekend, and the five-day work week now encompasses about half the work force. As a day off, Friday also carries a burden of traditional duties having to do with preparation for the Sabbath. Public observance of Shabbat begins at sundown on Friday, when shops, most public transportation, and most places of entertainment are closed until after sundown on Saturday.

Figure 5

Own Observance Relative to Parents' Observance*



*For example, of the 671 respondents who reported their parents as "strictly observant," 44% reported themselves as equally observant, 29% consider themselves observant "to a great extent," 22% say they are "somewhat observant," and 6% say they are "totally non-observant."

Two-thirds of the population mark Shabbat as a special day by observing some mitzvot, such as lighting candles or participating in a special meal on Friday night; almost half recite Kiddush. It should be noted that more households mark Shabbat by lighting candles than is generally perceived to be the case. Overall, 77% say that marking Shabbat in some way is an important principle in their lives, including 39% of those who consider themselves "totally non-observant" [Table 1].

Most Israelis desire that Friday night remain a quiet, home-centered evening (68%), and Friday-night rituals have far more adherents than Shabbat-day observances. Only a minority (20%-30%) "never" observe mitzvot such as candle-lighting, Kiddush, or a festive meal. Even some of the non-observant mark Shabbat eve in a traditional manner (especially by lighting candles and having a special meal).

On the other hand, only a minority attend synagogue on Shabbat morning, and this fact is, by and large, more accurately perceived by the public than the more wide-spread Shabbat-eve practices.

Prescriptive mitzvot (*'ase*) have more adherents than proscriptive ones (*lo ta'ase*). Only 20-40% "always" observe Shabbat proscriptions against work, lighting fire, travel, paid entertainment, electricity and telephone, while regular observance of prescriptive mitzvot ranges from 20-60%. Two thirds "never" observe the prohibitions against turning electricity on or off and using the telephone.

Scale analysis of the prescriptive mitzvot for Shabbat suggests that synagogue attendance on Shabbat morning is probably the first precept to be dropped en route to non-observance, while lighting Shabbat candles is the durable commandment ("last to go") [Table 2]. As for Shabbat proscriptions, the first departure from strict observance is using electricity. The next step is travel, followed in turn by paid entertainment, lighting a fire, and working inside the home, while the "last to go" is performing work in public⁷. Thus, working in public on Shabbat best defines non-observance of proscriptive mitzvot [Table 3].

Table 1

Observance of Shabbat

	Always	Occasionally	Never	Total
Prescriptive Mitzvot (Self or Others in Home)				
	(Percent of Respondents)*			
Light Shabbat candles	56	24	20	100
Have a special meal on Friday night	54	26	20	100
Light Shabbat candles with blessing	51	21	28	100
Recite Kiddush on Friday night	46	21	32	100
Recite Kiddush on Shabbat morning	28	16	56	100
Pray at synagogue on Friday night	24	22	53	100
Pray for the welfare of Israel	23	24	53	100
Pray at a synagogue on Shabbat morning	23	22	56	100
Recite Havdalah	23	17	60	100
Conduct Seuda Shlishit	21	17	62	100
Proscriptive Mitzvot				
Refrain from working in public	42	19	39	100
Refrain from working inside the home	37	21	43	100
Refrain from lighting fire	37	14	50	100
Refrain from going out to paid entertainment	28	14	59	100
Refrain from traveling	26	16	57	100
Refrain from turning on electricity / phone	22	14	64	100
Refrain from hosting persons who must travel	18	11	70	100
in order to reach you				
Refrain from being a guest at a	18	14	67	100
non-observant home				

*May not total exactly, due to rounding.

7-Work in public means doing work outside the home which others will notice, such as gardening, hanging laundry, etc.

Table 2

Scale of Observance of Shabbat Prescriptive Mitzvot*

(For each mitzvah, 1=Always 2=Occasionally or Never)

	Most Observant		PROFILE					Least Observant	
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9
Light Shabbat candles	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Shabbat candles with blessing	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
Special meal on Friday night	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
Recite Kiddush on Shabbat eve	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
Recite Havdalah	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2
Pray on Shabbat eve	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2
Pray on Shabbat morning	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Pray for the State	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Number of Respondents	365	57	14	56	264	72	140	51	785
Percent of Sample	(15%)	(2%)	(1%)	(2%)	(11%)	(3%)	(6%)	(2%)	(33%)

Total Number of Scalable Respondents: 1804 (75% of sample)

*Profile #1, for example, refers to 15% of the sample, who "always" adhere to all eight mitzvot of which the scale consists. The scalogram encompasses 75% of all respondents; the remaining 25% have "deviant" profiles that do not fit the scale.

Note that the predominant types are #1 (all), #9 (none), and #5 which consists of adherence to Shabbat eve practices only.

Table 3

Scale of Observance of Shabbat Proscriptive Mitzvot*

(For each mitzvah, 1=Always 2=Occasionally or Never)

	Most Observant		PROFILE				Least Observant
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7
Refrain from working in public	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Refrain from working inside the home	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
Refrain from lighting fire	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
Refrain from paid entertainment	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
Refrain from traveling	1	1	2	2	2	2	2
Refrain from turning on electricity	1	2	2	2	2	2	2
Number of Respondents	446	54	58	104	73	105	1,189
Percent of Sample	(19%)	(2%)	(2%)	(6%)	(3%)	(4%)	(50%)

Total Number of Scalable Respondents: 2,029 (86% of sample)

*Profile #1, for example, refers to 19% of the sample who "always" adhere to all six mitzvot of which the scale consists. The scalogram encompasses 86% of all respondents; the remaining 14% have "deviant" profiles that do not fit the scale. Comparing Table 2 and Table 3, note that 33% of respondents fall into the least observant Profile #9 in the Prescriptive scale, whereas 50% of respondents fall into the least observant Profile #7, in the Proscriptive Scale.

In short, the Israeli Shabbat is best characterized in terms of (1) in-home rituals of “welcoming Shabbat,” (2) refraining from work in public, and (3) relaxing and spending time with the family on a “free” day (not necessarily at home, except for the “strictly observant”).

With respect to Shabbat observance, the Western groups — first and second generation — are more consistent than the Eastern groups in the sense of performing “all” or “nothing.”

However, non-observant Western groups are more likely to perform certain rituals “symbolically” (e.g., by lighting candles without a blessing, or eating a festive meal) rather than in the manner prescribed. Most of these are Westerners

who define themselves as “somewhat observant.” In the long run such symbolic patterns may be indicative of those who see themselves as “traditional” (masorti) in Israeli society. Compared to the Western groups, the less observant of Eastern origin tend to augment the symbolic marking — candles or special meal — with Kiddush.

A generational change is evident between Eastern-born respondents and their Israeli offspring. The latter are less observant and more similar in their religious behavior to other Israeli-born respondents. This applies especially to proscriptive mitzvot of Shabbat, such as refraining from travel, using electricity, etc.

Figure 6

Kashrut Observance

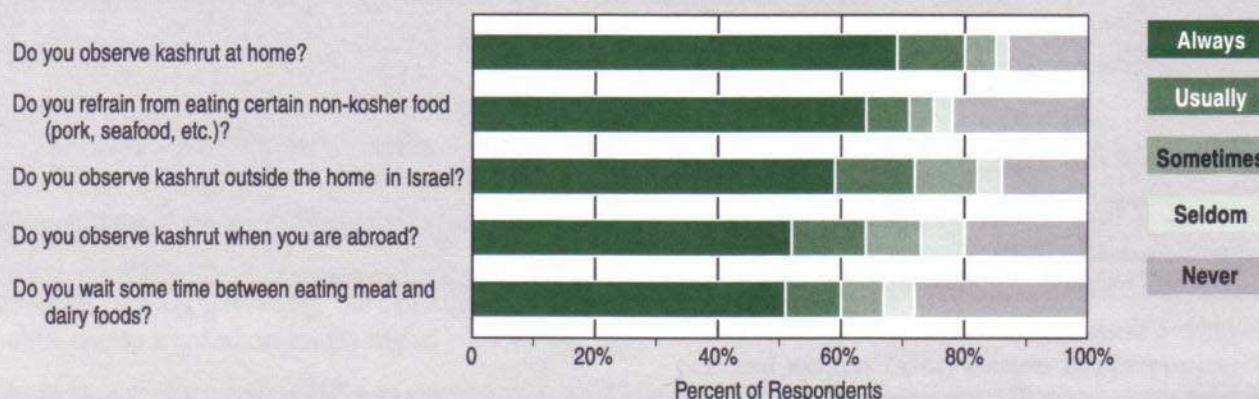


Table 4

Scale of Kashrut Observance*

(For each item, 1 = Always 2 = Usually or Sometimes 3 = Seldom or Never)

Profile	PROFILE									
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10
Kosher food at home	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3
Kosher food outside the home in Israel	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	3
Observe interval between meat and dairy foods	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3
Refrain from non-kosher food (pork, seafood, etc.)	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	3	3	3
Separate utensils**	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Number of Respondents	849	199	94	14	13	66	60	117	22	260
Percent of Sample	37%	8%	4%	1%	1%	3%	3%	5%	1%	11%

Total Number of Respondents: 1,694 (74% of Sample)

*Profile #1, for example, refers to 37% of respondents in the sample who “always” perform the five kashrut observances of which the scale consists. The scalogram encompasses 74% of all respondents; the remaining 26% have “deviant” profiles that do not fit the scale.

**Note that all items are scored at three levels, except “separate utensils” which is scored dichotomously (yes or no).

Keeping Kosher

Almost all Israeli Jews (90%) observe some kashrut behavior at least occasionally; about 40% strictly observe all of the kashrut behaviors studied. Public perception of the observance of kashrut, however, underestimates the extent of its prevalence.

Two-thirds report that they "always" eat kosher food at home. However, since kosher food is predominant in Israel, a more stringent indicator of kashrut is having separate utensils for meat and dairy foods. This practice is maintained by approximately one-half of the population, who also wait an interval between eating meat and dairy foods. Even when abroad, half report observing kashrut "always," but a higher proportion of respondents "never" observe kashrut abroad compared to "never" observing kashrut in Israel [Figure 6].

Scale analysis of kashrut practices confirms that the most vulnerable practice ("first to go") is keeping separate utensils for meat and dairy foods, and most tenacious ("last to go") is avoidance of explicitly non-kosher food [Table 4].

Quality of food (healthy, clean) is considered by the respondents no less important a reason for observing kashrut than observing the mitzvah for its own sake.

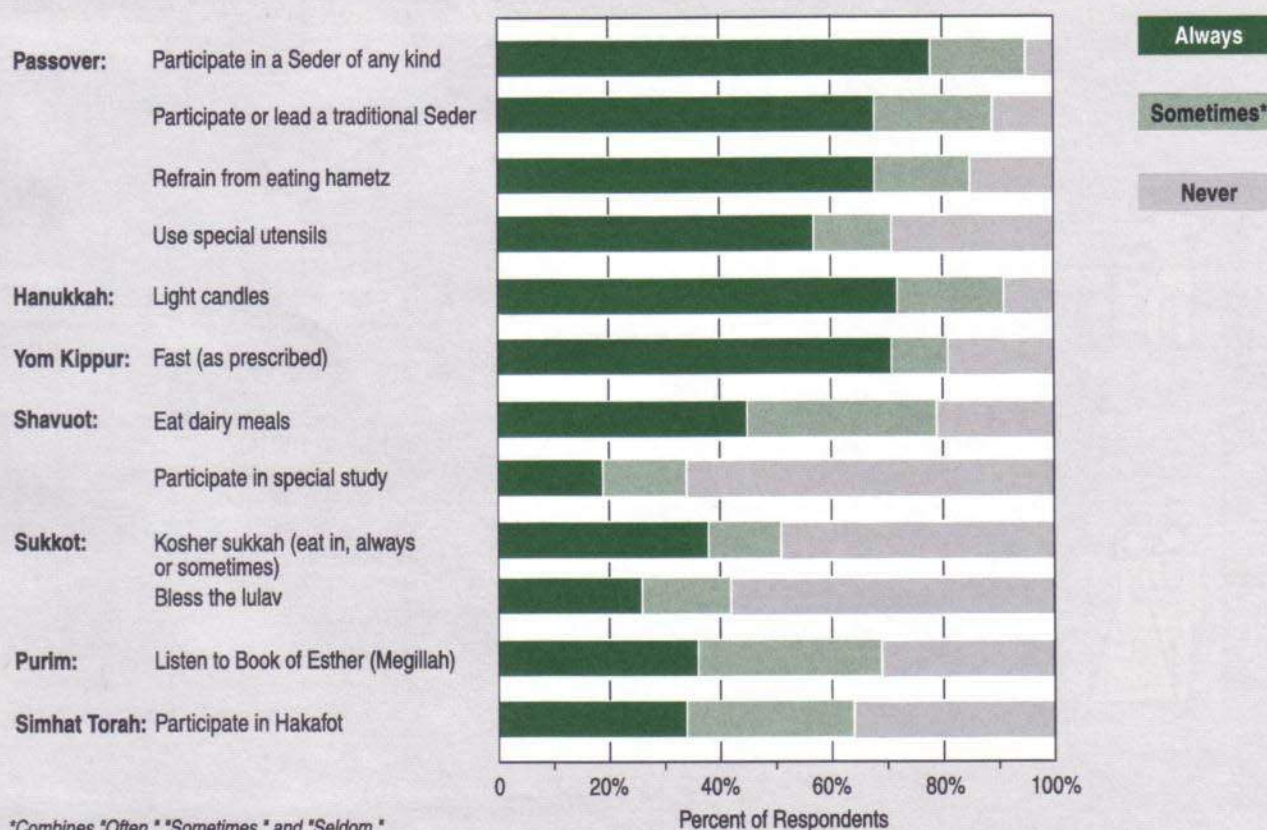
Celebrating Holidays

Holidays are more widely observed than Shabbat and most aspects of kashrut. Indeed, more than the other domains of observance, holidays are a consensual domain, embracing both observant and non-observant. This may be because holidays are special events that occur only rarely, compared to everyday or even weekly routines. Moreover, many of the holidays have a unifying power, national or existential, in addition to their more strictly religious definition. The public is well aware of the pervasive observance of major holidays.

Indeed, a wide consensus prevails with respect to the celebration of the major holidays, both religious/national (Passover, Hanukkah) and religious/existential (Yom Kippur): 78% always participate in a Passover Seder; 72% always light Hanukkah candles; on Yom Kippur 71% always fast and 69% always pray [Figure 7].

Figure 7

Observance of Holidays



Passover observance is very widespread. Even most of the “totally non-observant” always or frequently participate in a Seder. Beyond celebration of the Seder, most Israeli Jews, including more than one-fifth of the “non-observant,” refrain from hametz on Passover.

Fewer respondents (36%-38%) “always” observe Sukkot (having a kosher sukkah) or Purim (listening to the Megillah of Esther). Customs relating to holidays, such as eating dairy foods on Shavuot, are often more widely observed than particular mitzvot such as blessing the lulav on Sukkot.

Those of Eastern origin, whether born abroad or in Israel, tend to be more observant of the holidays than Westerners. Noteworthy is the fact that lighting Hanukkah candles, participating in a Seder, and building a sukkah (not necessarily a kosher one) are more prevalent among Israeli-born respondents of Western origin than among their foreign-born parents. This is apparently a function of age and the presence of small children, as well as an expression of the desire for Jewish continuity even among this relatively non-observant sector of Israeli society.

Marking the Life-Cycle

Over 80% feel it is important to them that life-cycle events be invested with a Jewish religious character [Figure 8]: brit milah (92%); bar mitzvah (83%); wedding (87%); burial, shivah and kaddish for parents (88%-91%). Only a small minority (4%-7%) consider such ceremonies “not at all important.” Even most of the “totally non-observant” consider it important to mark these turning points (birth, maturity, marriage, death) with Jewish ceremony.

Attending Synagogue and Prayer

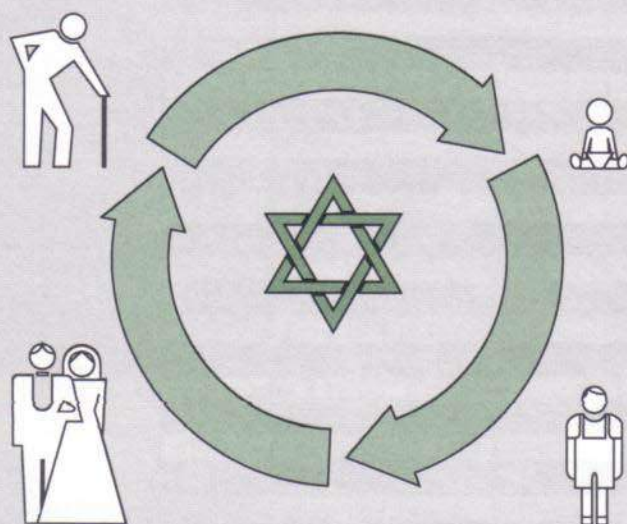
Most Israeli Jews go to synagogue at some time during the year. About one-quarter attend regularly—daily or weekly—and the remainder go occasionally on High Holidays or for special events. About one-fifth report that they “never” go to synagogue [Figure 9]. Present synagogue attendance of Israelis is very similar to that reported by the Guttman Institute a quarter of a century ago. Those born in the East attend synagogue most regularly.

Almost a fifth (22%) of men and 10% of women say that they pray daily. Asked, “Do you know how to pray from a prayer book?” 46% replied, “only a little” or “not at all.”

Figure 8

Marking the Life-Cycle

Over 80% feel it is important to them that life-cycle events be invested with a Jewish religious character:



- Brit Milah (92%)
- Bar Mitzvah (83%)
- Wedding (87%)
- Burial, Shivah and Kaddish for parents (88%-91%)

Figure 9

Synagogue Attendance

- 8% attend daily
- 16% attend on Shabbat and holidays
- 56% attend on High Holidays or for special events
- 80% go to synagogue sometimes
- 19% never attend



Other Observances: Mezuzah, Kippah, Tefillin, Mikveh

Four perennial observances exemplify the wide range of similarities and differences in religious behavior: mezuzah, kippah, tefillin, mikveh.

There is no difference at all between the “strictly observant” and the “totally non-observant” in affixing a mezuzah. Virtually all respondents (98%) have a mezuzah on their front doors; the great majority have one on each of the required doors. Almost all of the “non-observant” (92%) have a mezuzah at least on the entrance door of their homes, with 36% of them having a mezuzah on each of the doors traditionally required to have one. Seventy-four percent (46% “definitely”) believe that “the mezuzah protects your home.”

Wearing a kippah moves between the extremes of always (22%) and never (37%), with a plurality using a head-covering on a variety of special occasions. Among those who do wear a kippah, 62% use a “knitted kippah,” 30% a “black kippah,” and 8% use other types of head-covering.

Over half (56%) of married women never use a head-covering, compared to 13% who always do so. About a third (30%) use a head-covering occasionally, mainly when lighting Shabbat candles, when praying, and on a variety of special occasions.

Seventy-nine percent of Jewish men own tefillin, and about a quarter use them regularly. About half do not use them at all. For their part, 16% of women go to a mikveh regularly, and an additional 8% go occasionally. This proportion is unchanged since 1969, as is also noted with respect to certain other practices - synagogue attendance, for example.

Scope of Observance and Reasons for Non-Observance

If performance is taken as the measure of observing mitzvot — regardless of intent or frequency — virtually all Israeli Jews are observant in some way. The ubiquitous mezuzah is an example. Even if intent or the attribution of “importance” is added to the behavioral definition of observance, some 80%-90% of Israeli Jews would qualify as observant of mitzvot such as ritual circumcision, bar mitzvah, and Passover Seder.

Additional evidence comes from scalogram analysis of ten observances from three different domains — Shabbat, kashrut and holidays — which reveals that 93% of Israelis observe at least one of the relevant mitzvot from these domains. That is, only a small minority (7%) of respondents are objectively non-observant in terms of these ten cross-domain precepts, compared to one-fifth who describe themselves as “totally non-observant.”

Respondents were asked to accept or reject four different explanations for non-observance and to rate the importance of each as an explanation. The rank order ranges from 67% who said that "people lack proper education" to 38% who said that "ethical people don't need mitzvot." In between, the explanations that "mitzvot are hard to observe" and "mitzvot may be observed selectively" were supported by about half of the respondents. For the "strictly observant," the predominant explanation is that "people lack proper education" and, perhaps surprisingly, over half of the

"totally non-observant" agree. The non-observant give more weight to "ethical people don't need mitzvot." In sum, non-observance — in the eyes of both the "strictly observant" and the "totally non-observant" — is not so much a matter of difficulty of performance as it is a matter of different outlook, related to education and ethics. In fact, about half of the non-observant agree with all four of the explanations offered for non-observance [Table 5].

Table 5

Reasons for Non-Observance

(Percent of Respondents Replying "Very Important" or "Important")

	Self-Defined Religiosity				Total
	Strictly Observant	Observant to a Great Extent	Somewhat Observant	Not at all Observant	
"People lack proper education"	76	77	66	52	67
"Selective observance is adequate"	48	64	58	42	55
"It is difficult to observe"	45	56	58	46	53
"Ethical people don't need mitzvot"	24	36	39	58	38

Social Interaction

(Including State and Religion)

Intergroup Relations: Attitudes

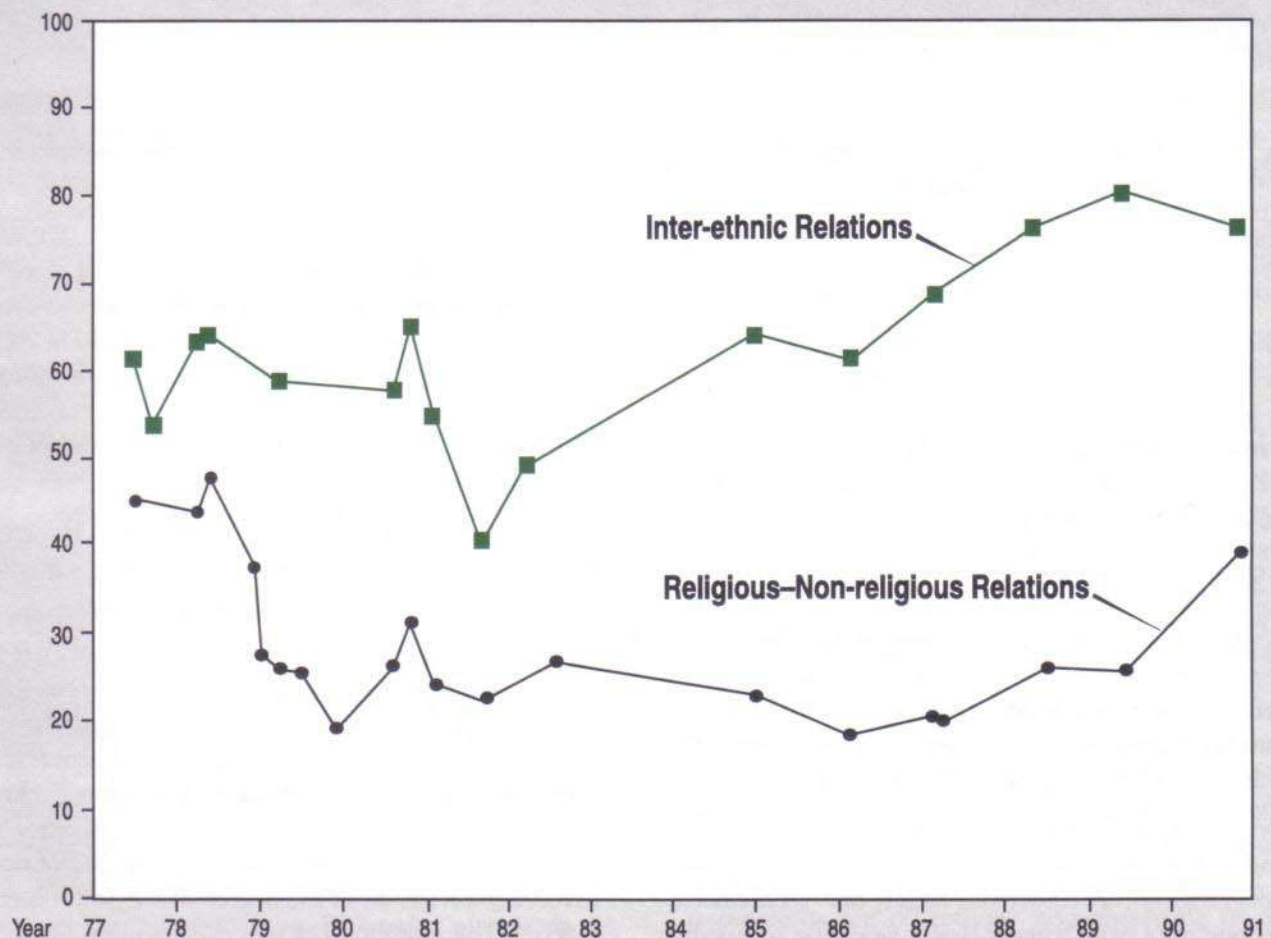
Relations among Jews of different religious backgrounds and commitments to observance are considered much more problematic by Israelis than inter-ethnic relations. Although there are ups and downs in the assessment of the quality of these relations, ethnicity has been judged the less problematic for many years [Figure 10].

The study substantiates that ethnic background hardly segregates Israeli society today. Two-thirds think that relations between Ashkenazim and Sephardim are good. Relations of veteran Israelis with "Ethiopian newcomers" and "Russian newcomers" are also rated good by two-thirds of the population.

Figure 10

Changes Over Time in Feelings of Social Solidarity 1977–1990

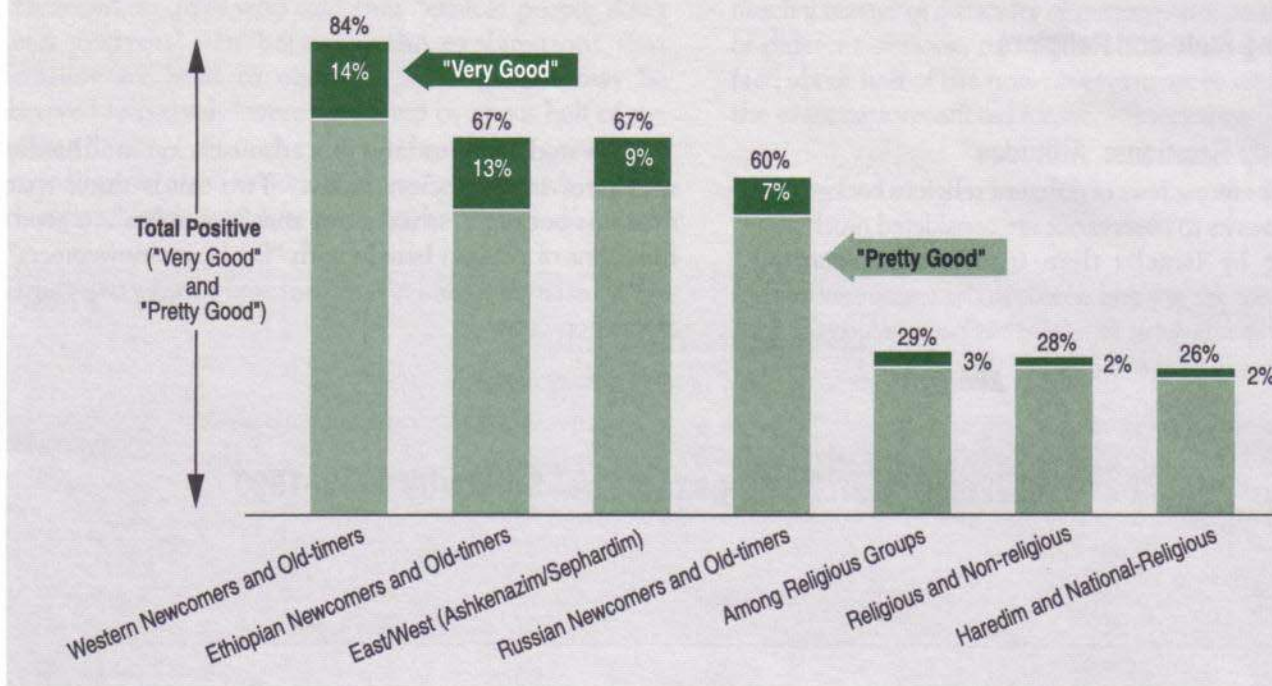
Percent Positive Answers



Adapted from: Levy, Shlomit (1992): *Social Problem Indicators for Israel: State and Society*. Jerusalem: The Louis Guttman Israel Institute of Applied Social Research.

Figure 11

Assessment of Intergroup Relations (Percent of Respondents Replying "Very Good" and "Pretty Good")



By contrast, less than one-third regard relations between religious and non-religious as good [Figure 11]. It is the less observant (with a preponderance of the Western-born and their offspring, and the higher educated) who are least positive in their assessment.

Though respondents place somewhat more blame for poor relations at the door of the religious, the predominant image is that in both groups "some do and some don't" show respect and acceptance of the other group. The non-observant accuse the observant of disrespect, more than the other way around.

Stereotypes of the quality of intergroup relations along religious lines are more problematic [Figure 12] than the actual attitudes of respondents speaking for themselves. There appears to be high readiness of mutual acceptance of both ethnic and religious differences, except that religious differences are perceived to be something of a barrier in the most intimate relationships, especially marriage.

On a personal level, in other words, attitudes of respondents to a variety of groups, including the religious and non-religious, are reported as largely non-problematic. Three-fourths of Israelis assert that it would be acceptable for people of different religious perspectives to live in their neighborhoods. But they view with equal antipathy those

groups on the extreme ends of the religious spectrum — the Haredim and the anti-religious.

When it comes to personal attitudes toward the extreme groups of Haredim and anti-religious, the full force of the religiosity variable comes into play: the more observant the respondent, the more he/she appreciates the Haredim and the less he/she appreciates the anti-religious. The assessment of the Haredim by the non-observant, and the anti-religious by the observant, is not only negative, it borders on very strong rejection.

The more impersonal the social setting, the greater is the acceptance and the presence of people who differ in religious observance.

Even when close family is considered, only a minority are opposed to the marriage of their children to someone different in ethnicity (17%) or religious observance (24%). (In contrast, there is virtual unanimity in opposition to a child's marriage to a non-Jew.) However, the proportion who "definitely agree" to inter-ethnic marriage is far higher (46%) than in the case of marriage involving difference in the degree of religious observance (16%). The likelihood of success of a marriage in which "one spouse is religious and the other is not" is judged to be considerably lower than the likelihood of success attributed to inter-ethnic marriage [Figure 13].

Figure 12

Personal Attitudes toward Various Groups (Percent of Respondents Replying "Very Positive" and "Positive")

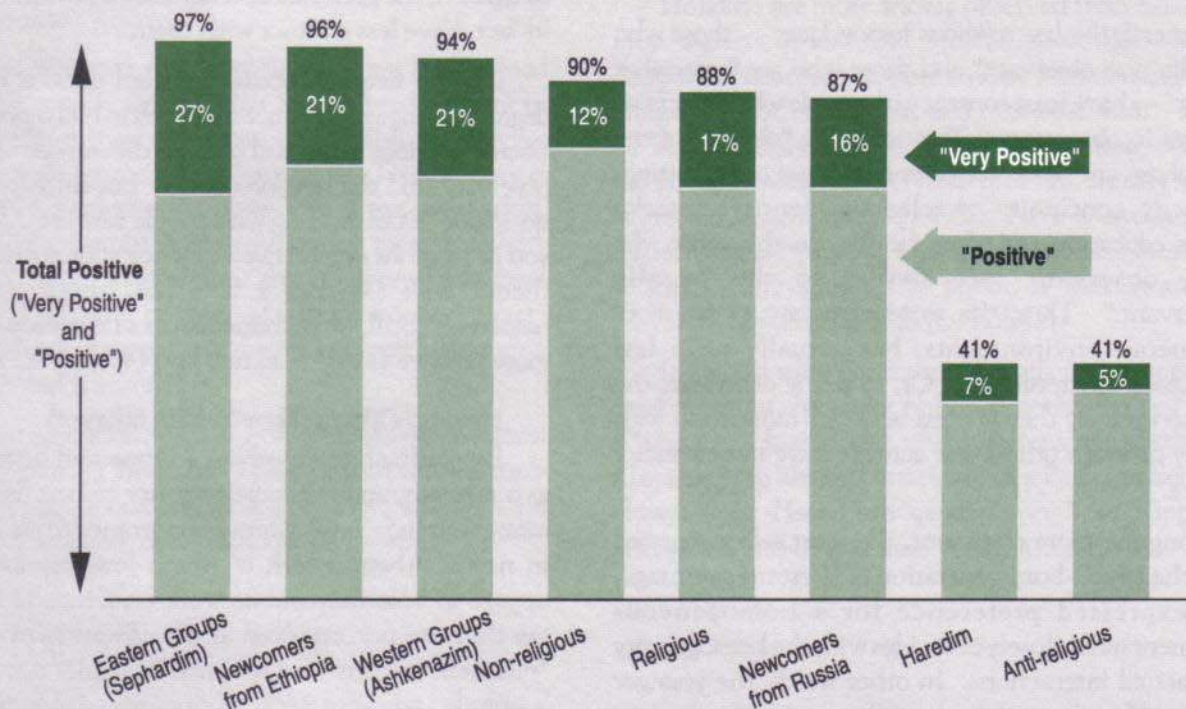
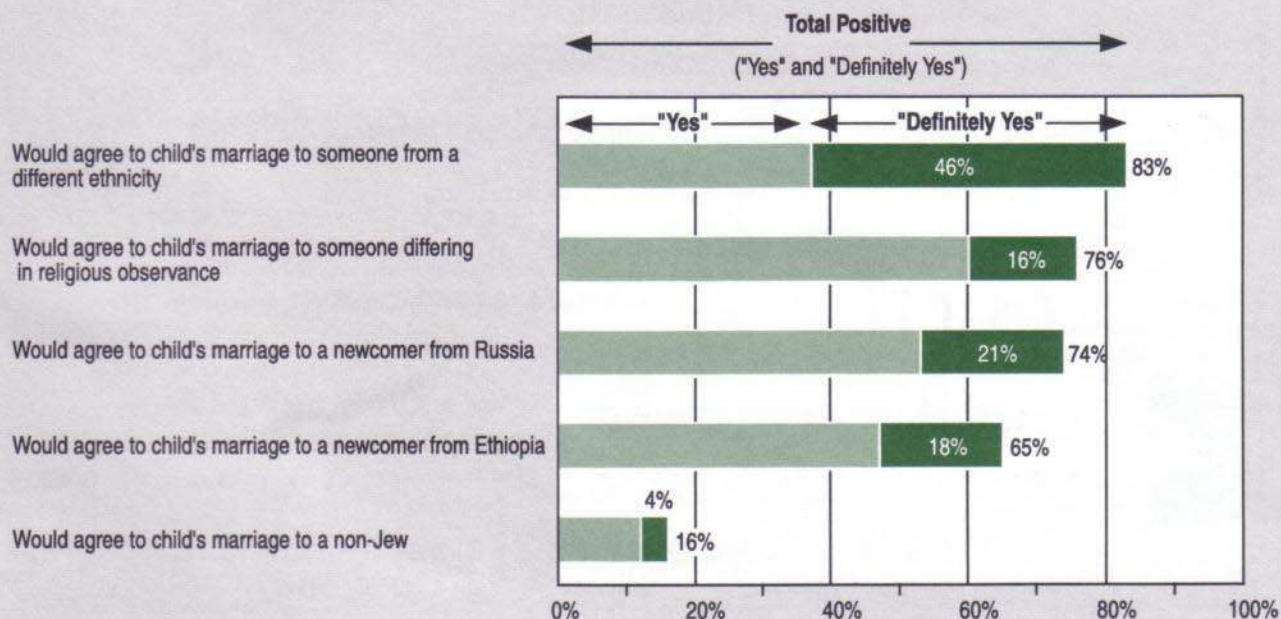


Figure 13

Acceptance of Child's Marriage to "Other" (Percent of Respondents Replying Positively*)



*Percentages based on 90% of the respondents who answered the question.

Intergroup Relations: Interaction

In the course of their daily lives, three-quarters of the population report that they occasionally or frequently interact with people who differ from them in terms of religious observance.

In general, the less religious respondents — those who are “totally non-observant” and those who are “somewhat observant” — have least contact with people who differ from themselves in observance. The ostensible “closure” of the “strictly observant” is expressed only in those social settings that specify continuity of religious identity, namely, children’s education and close family. In this sense, the “strictly observant” are similar to the “totally non-observant.” Thus, the more observant prefer more homogeneous environments, but actually have less homogeneous environments. Or, to put it otherwise, the more observant say they are less ready for interaction with religiously different others, but actually have more contact with them.

Among the more observant, the most self-segregated group is the Israeli-born generation of Western parentage, whose expressed preference for a homogeneous environment most closely coincides with the homogeneity of their actual interactions. In other words, the younger generation of observant Ashkenazim are less likely than their observant parents — and less likely than the observant in both generations of Eastern ethnicity — to want contact, or to have contact, with others who are different from themselves religiously, whether among

family, friends, neighbors, children’s classmates or fellow workers.

The non-observant of Western ethnicity differ from their observant counterparts in that they are more likely to agree to the presence of religiously different others, but, in fact, have less contact with them.

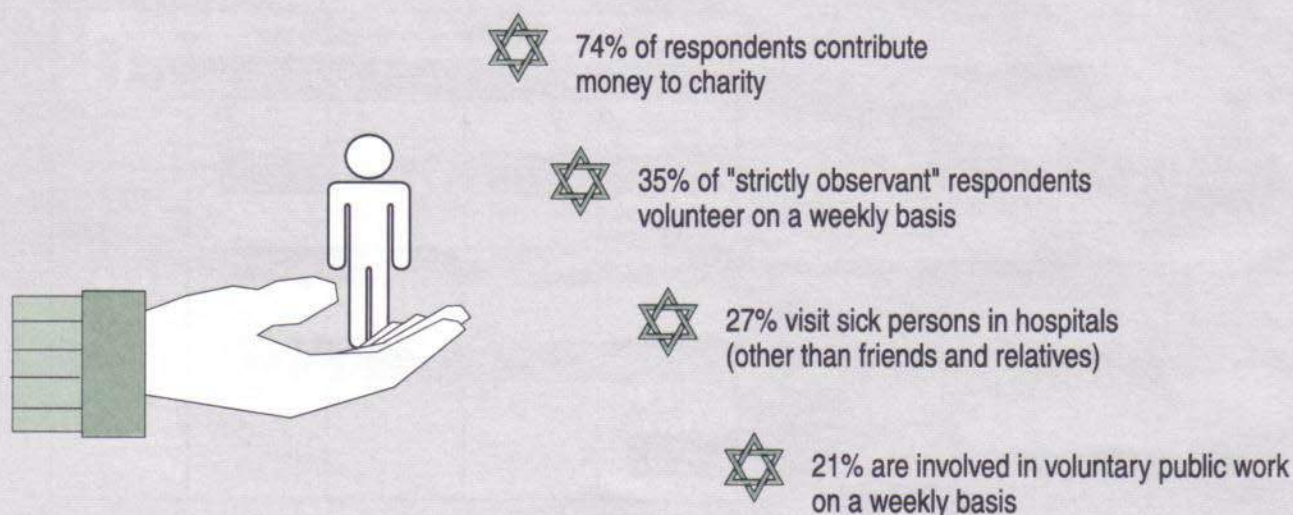
On the frequent occasions when persons of different degrees of religiosity do meet, more than half report that they discuss religious issues and lifestyle differences between the observant and the non-observant. But in response to the question: “Does meeting with people who are different from you in religious observance influence your attitude towards them?” 84% say that it does not, either positively or negatively. Still, when influence does take place, it is judged more positive (11%) than negative (4%).

Helping Others (Man-to-Man Mitzvot)

Extending help to others, in time and money, counts as a mitzvah, and the large majority of Israelis (75%) are aware that Judaism attributes importance to assisting those in need. About a fifth of Israeli Jews report that they engage in voluntary public work on a regular basis; 43% say they are not involved at all. Twenty-seven percent “visit sick persons who are neither family nor friends, in hospitals and other mitzvah situations.” Many fewer are systematically helping new immigrants, families in distress, or serving in the Civil Guard, although many express readiness to do so if asked [Figure 14].

Figure 14

Man-to-Man Mitzvot



Contributing money to charity is much more pervasive than contributing time. A high proportion do so “often” or “sometimes.”

Devoting time, as well as contributing money to others, is strongly associated with self-defined religiosity. In general, the higher the level of observance, the greater the level of community service. The more the need is defined in religious terms, the greater the gap between the observant and the non-observant.

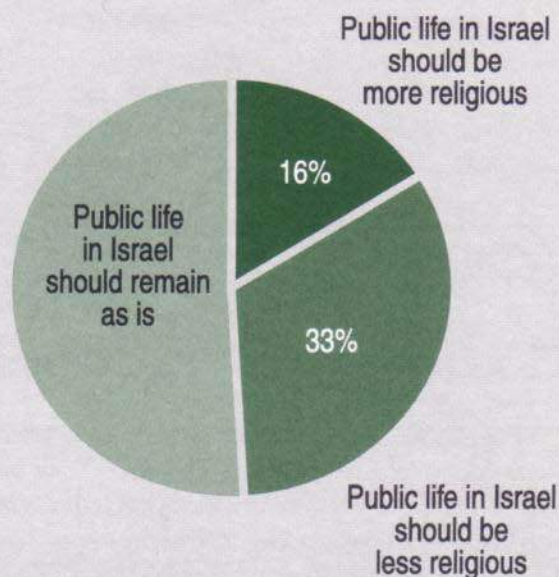
State and Religion

From the work of the Guttman Institute since the 1960’s, we know that almost half of Israeli Jews believe it to be a concern of government that public life comply with Jewish religious tradition. However, the majority of respondents since the mid-1970’s have been critical of the “present” relationship between state and religion. When asked, “In your opinion, how successful is the present integration of religion and State in Israel?” 60%-75% of respondents in the last 15 years have held the opinion that the “present” situation is unsatisfactory in this respect. The less the religious observance, the lower the positive assessment; the proportion of approval drops from 50% among the “strictly observant” to 10% among the “not at all observant.”

In answer to a related question, half of the respondents think that public life in the State of Israel should remain as is, neither more nor less religious. Those who think that change is required are more likely to say that public life should be less religious (33%) than more religious (16%) [Figure 15]. Each of the two extreme groups — “strictly observant” and “totally non-observant” — pulls in its own direction.

Figure 15

State and Religion (Percent of Respondents)



When a more legalistic question is put to respondents about the “status quo” that governs the place of religion in Israel, two-thirds of respondents support change. These include, for different reasons, well over half of the “strictly observant,” and 78% of the “non-observant.” Forty-two percent favor separation of State and Religion [Figure 16].

Figure 16

Attitudes towards Separation of State and Religion and Instituting Civil Marriage

(Percent of Respondents)

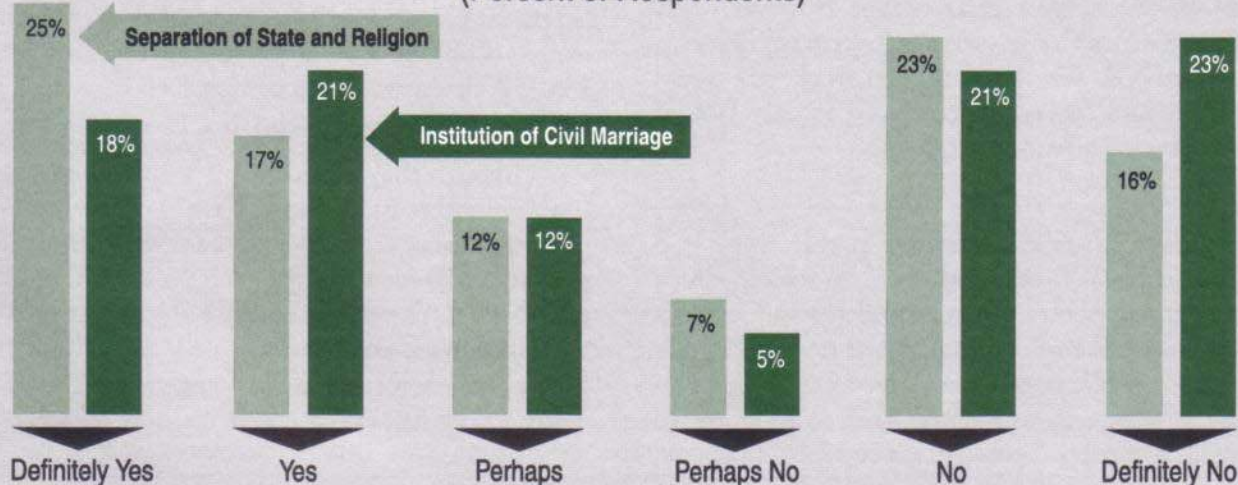


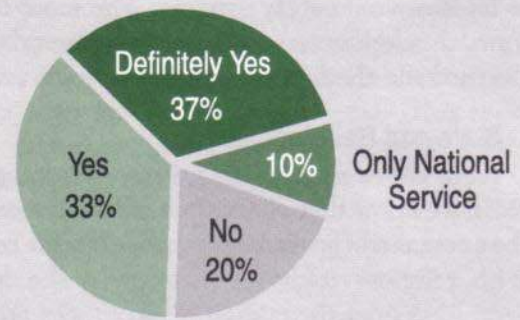
Figure 17

Army Service for Yeshivah Students and Religious Girls (Percent of Respondents)

Should Yeshivah students be conscripted?



Should religious girls be recruited to the Army or national service?



Four in ten Israeli Jews favor instituting civil marriage (18% “definitely yes”), and they concentrate among the non-observant of Western origin. An equal number oppose it. If instituted, however, over half of the respondents believe that they would not utilize it themselves, and only 16% claim that they would “definitely” choose this kind of marriage.

About two-thirds of the population (one-third “definitely” and one-third “moderately”) are in favor of liberalization of rules governing the opening of theaters and public transportation on Friday night.

There is near unanimity (94%) in support of kosher food in public institutions and in the army. Most object, however, to making kosher licenses contingent on other forms of observance.

As noted earlier, the Hebrew equivalents of Conservative and Reform denominations are not well recognized by Israelis⁸. Nevertheless, the study attempted to ask whether Conservative and Reform movements should be given status equal to that of the Orthodox. Findings suggest that a majority would favor such a change. However, when asked “if there were a Conservative or Reform synagogue in your neighborhood, how often do you think you would attend?”, 55% said “never,” as compared to only 19% of Israelis who “never” attend synagogue.

Army Service

Israeli Jews affirm that service in the Army is a fundamental expression of commitment to society. As a result, the conscription of yeshivah students and religious girls is another of the most controversial topics. A great majority of the public does not approve of the exemption from army service given to male yeshivah students and to religious girls; 90% support conscription of yeshivah students,

and 70% support conscription of religious girls [Figure 17]. Even a majority of the “strictly observant” (59%) support recruitment of yeshivah students, but only 23% of them support recruitment of religious girls; and an additional 22% favor an alternate form of national service [Table 6].

In all religiosity groupings, the drafting of yeshivah students is supported more than the drafting of religious girls.

The Rabbinate

About three-quarters do not consult a rabbi either on personal matters or on matters of observance. Regular consultation on personal matters is much more characteristic of “strictly observant” respondents than of the other religiosity groups. Consulting “always” and “often” is reported by 38% of the “strictly observant,” as against 11% of the “mostly observant,” and none of the “somewhat” and the “non-observant.”

Eastern-born respondents tend more than any other ethnic group to consult a rabbi on both personal matters (38%) and questions of observance (39%). Among their Israeli offspring the inclination to consult a rabbi is more on matters of observance than on personal matters (34% versus 24%). A similar trend, but with smaller differences, prevails among the Western-born and their Israeli offspring.

Although they would like it to be otherwise, Israeli Jews view the Rabbinate as ritual functionaries who neither address themselves to current societal problems nor provide guidance in people’s personal lives. Almost two-thirds think that the official Rabbinate should address itself to current problems, but only 30% think that the Rabbinate is now successfully doing so. Positive responses increase with the increase in religious observance.

8—See footnote #6 for a discussion of the difficulties involved in wording such questions.

Table 6

Attitudes towards Army Service by Religious Observance

(Percent of Responses)

	SELF-DEFINED RELIGIOSITY				
	Strictly Observant	To a Great Extent	Somewhat Observant	Totally Non-observant	Total
Are you for, or against, the drafting of yeshivah students into the army?					
Definitely For	30%	47%	60%	69%	55%
For	29	43	36	29	35
Opposed	16	7	4	2	6
Strongly opposed	25	3	0	0	4
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Number of respondents	158	276	509	247	1,190
Are you for, or against, the drafting of religious girls into the army?					
Definitely For	11%	26%	44%	53%	37%
For	12	34	36	36	33
Opposed	16	20	11	4	12
Strongly opposed	39	7	2	1	8
Only national service	22	13	7	6	10
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Number of respondents	161	278	510	245	1,194

Beliefs and Values

Principles of Faith

Sixty percent of respondents firmly believe in the existence of God or a Supreme Power that guides the world [Figure 18]. Even among the non-observant, one-fifth hold these beliefs.

About half of Israeli Jews firmly believe the Torah was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, that Divine Providence watches over everyone, that the Torah and mitzvot are God's commands, and that good deeds are rewarded. Over 40% believe that bad deeds are punished, and a smaller number (27%) believe that those who don't observe mitzvot will be punished. More than a third believe in a world-to-come, and in the coming of the Messiah.

These principles of faith are very highly inter-correlated — that is, one belief leads to another. Multivariate analysis reveals that the same structure of inter-relations among beliefs holds, by and large, across religious and ethnic groups.

The more observant the respondents, the more they report belief in each of the principles. However, the "strictly observant" and the "totally non-observant" are at polar ends with respect to only two main issues: the world-to-come including the coming of the Messiah, and the origin of mitzvot (as God's command, as well as punishment for non-observance).

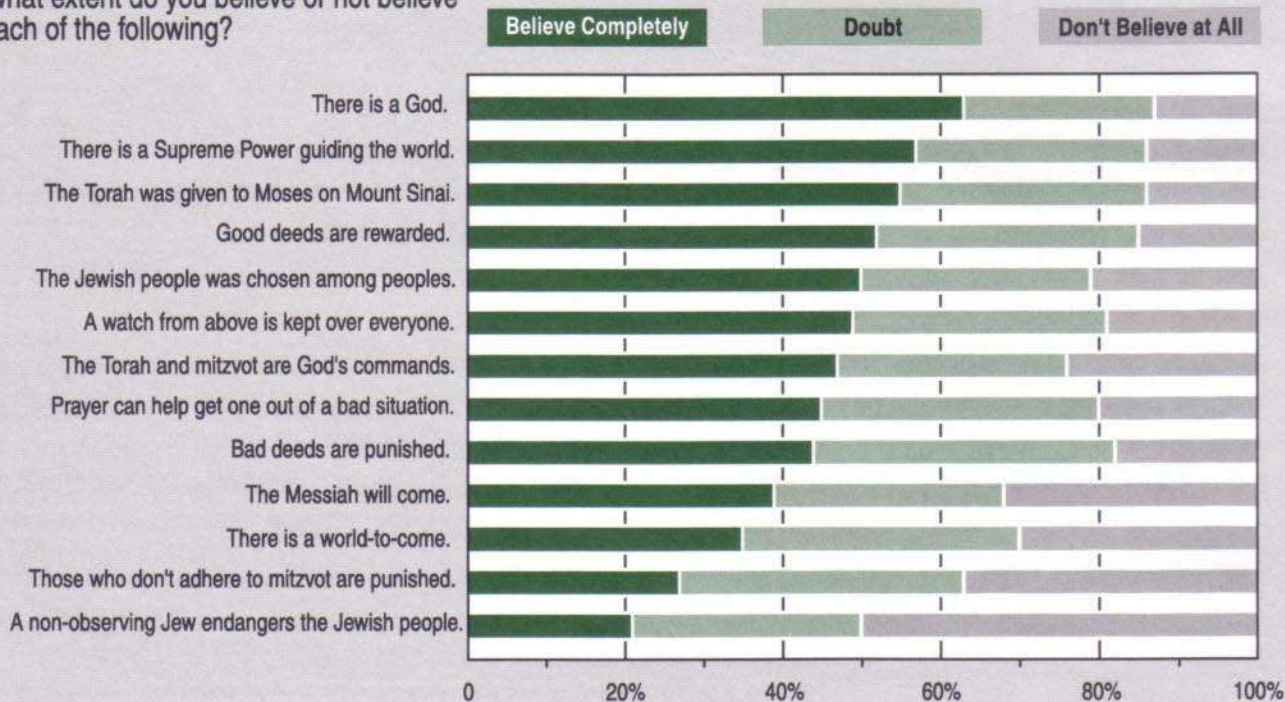
More of those of Eastern ethnicity believe in each of the principles of faith than do their Western counterparts. The second generation of Eastern origin is slightly less believing than their parents, while the first and second generation of Western origin do not differ at all.

Belief declines with years of education: without taking account of specifically religious education, those with more years of schooling tend to believe somewhat less in the principles of faith. But belief is not correlated with age; respondents of different age groups are similar in their belief in each of the principles of faith.

Figure 18

Israelis' Belief in Principles of the Jewish Faith (Percent of Responses)

To what extent do you believe or not believe in each of the following?



General and Jewish Values

"To honor parents" and "to raise a family" are at the top of the ranking of values for the entire population (and for all the religious groupings who report at least "some observance"). Among the non-observant, values of self-fulfillment such as "to be at peace with oneself" and interpersonal values stemming from general ethics rank higher than "to honor parents" and "to raise a family." However, the vast majority among the non-observant, as well as among respondents from the other religious groupings, also regards these precepts as very important guiding principles.

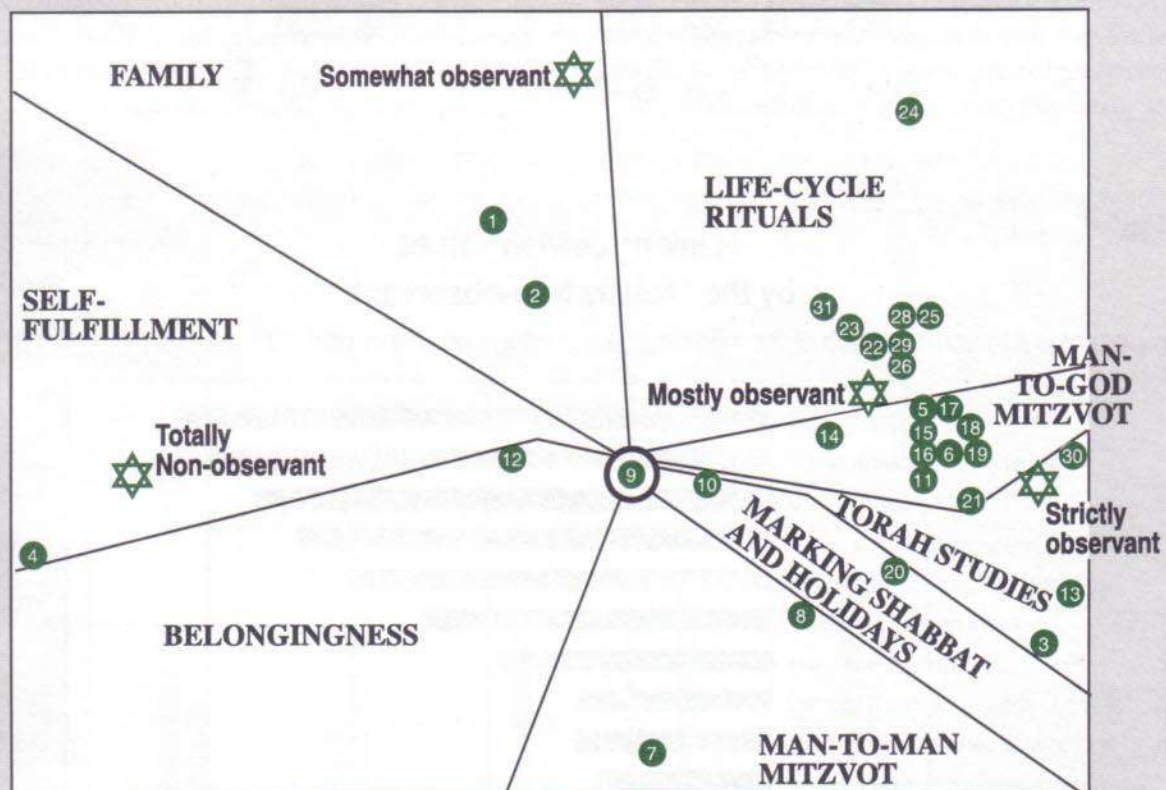
Multivariate analysis of the inter-relations among Jewish values ("importance") and performance

("observance") suggests that the public, in general, acts to a great extent in accordance with its values.

By calculating the "distance" between each Jewish value and all of the others, Smallest Space Analysis (SSA) reveals a circular structure consisting of wedges for each domain, with a common origin in the value of belongingness ("feeling part of the Jewish people") [Figure 19]. One side of the circle arrays mitzvot between Man-and-God in a consecutive series consisting of life-cycle rituals, mitzvot and beliefs, Torah study and marking Shabbat and holidays. The other side groups family, self-fulfillment, belongingness and mitzvot between Man-and-Man.

Figure 19

The Circular Structure of Jewish Values and the Loci of Self-Defined Observance (SSA-I)



LEGEND

Family:

- 1-To raise a family
- 2-To honor parents

Life-Cycle Rituals:

- 22-Brit Milah
- 23-Bar Mitzvah in some way
- 24-Bat Mitzvah
- 25-Religious Bar Mitzvah
- 26-Religious wedding
- 27-Religious burial
- 28-Sit Shivah
- 29-Kaddish
- 31-Not marry non-Jew

Man-to-God Mitzvot:

- 5-Believe in God
- 6-Observe Mitzvot
- 11-Traditional Holidays
- 14-Passover Seder
- 15-Yom Kippur fast
- 16-Soul-searching on Yom Kippur
- 17-Kashrut at home
- 18-Kashrut outside home
- 19-Religious Shabbat
- 21-Observe as parents

Torah Studies:

- 3-Study Bible
- 13-Study Talmud
- 30-Study Torah

Marking Shabbat and Holidays:

- 10-Mark Holidays in some way
- 20-Mark Shabbat in some way

Belongingness:

- 9-Feeling part of the Jewish people
- 12-Live in Israel

Self-fulfillment:

- 4-At peace with oneself

Man-to-Man Mitzvot:

- 7-Help needy
- 8-Contribute to charity

The SSA diagram also shows the optimal location for each of the four types of religiosity. It is as if those who define themselves as "strictly observant" want to be characterized statistically as having one foot in Torah studies and another foot in mitzvot. The "mostly observant" may be found on the borderline between life-cycle rituals and Man-to-God mitzvot. The "somewhat observant" are located in the area of family concerns, between the domains of family and life-cycle observances. The "totally non-observant" fall in the area of self-fulfillment, concerned with being at peace with oneself and, at the same time, belonging to the Jewish people.

Adherence to general ethical values, as well as to values implying belongingness to the Jewish people, and attributing importance to Jewish holidays and Jewish life-cycle ceremonies, are considered as guiding principles across all sectors of society. Values related to observance of mitzvot are not shared across sectors (except for a few mitzvot governing interpersonal relations) [Figure 20] and are guiding principles only in the eyes of the observant.

Factors that Motivate Jewish Identification

Living in Israel, upbringing at home, and observances related to the life-cycle, Shabbat and holidays, are all viewed as factors which influence the feelings of Israelis that they are part of the Jewish people.

At the top of a list of factors that motivate Jewish identification, respondents name the Zionist experience (the history of Israel in recent times, the respondent's living in Israel) and parental influence [Table 7]. Current history is followed by celebrating national/religious holidays (Passover Seder and Hanukkah), family gathering on Shabbat and participating in life-cycle ceremonies such as Brit Milah and Kaddish. At the bottom of the list — but still affirmed by two-thirds to three-quarters of respondents — are specific religious observances, "the Jewish religion," and "ancient" history. These self-assessments imply that the Jewish tradition motivates Jewish identification through holidays and certain life-cycle rituals, more than through specific religious observances. This result coincides with results reported above on observances and values.

Figure 20

Ranking Jewish Values by the "Totally Non-observant"

How important is it to you that each of the following be a guiding principle in your life?

Percent of
"Totally Non-observant"
Responding
"Very Important" and "Important"

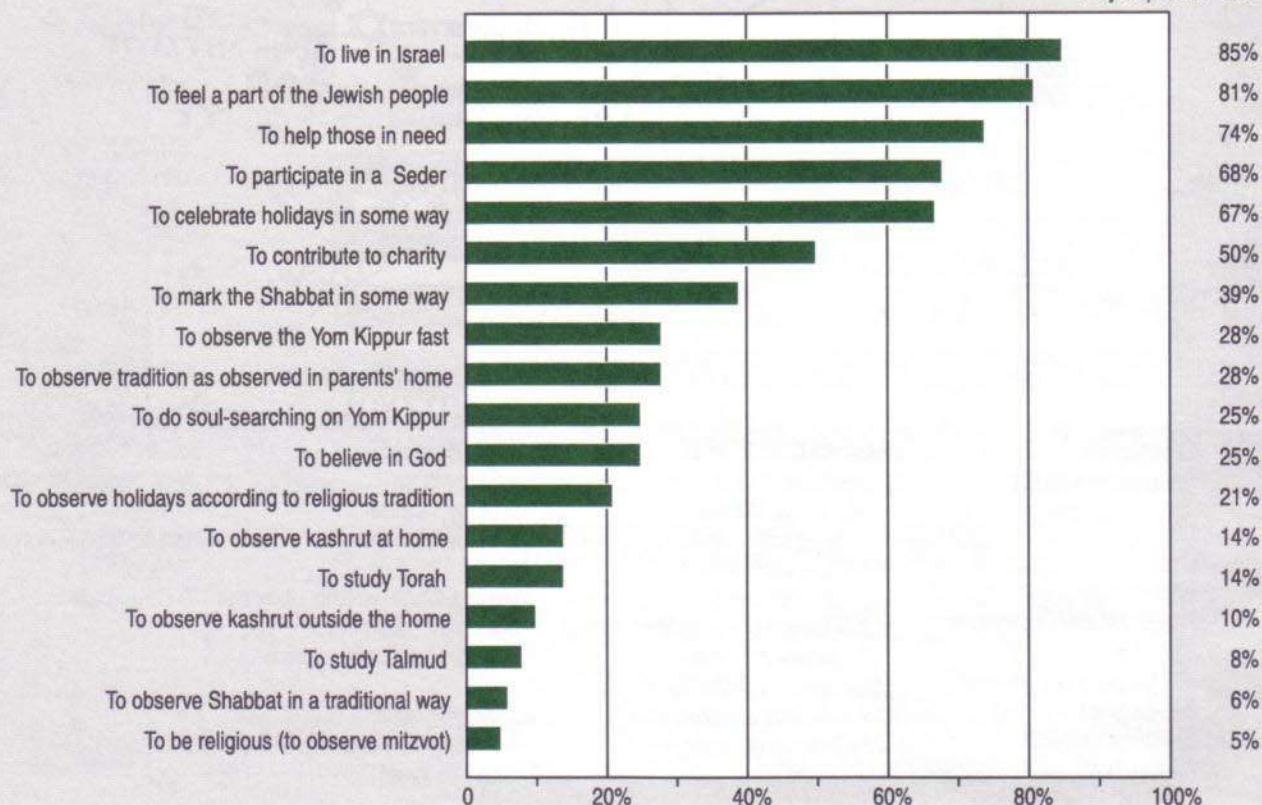


Table 7

Motivating Factors in Jewish Identification

To what extent does each of the following influence your feeling that you are part of the Jewish people?	ASSESSMENT OF INFLUENCE		Objective Correlation with Jewish Identification*
	Subjective (Percent Replying)		
	"Influences a Lot" and "Influences"	"Influences a Lot"	
The establishment of Israel	95	68	.55
Living in Israel	94	67	.59
Upbringing in parents' home	89	56	.59
The history of Jewish settlement in Israel	84	36	.51
Participating in a Passover Seder	82	50	.57
Celebrating Hanukkah	82	46	.60
Being with family on Shabbat or Holidays	81	46	.60
Participating in a Brit Milah ceremony	80	47	.59
To assist fellow Jews in need	78	38	.54
Saying/hearing Kaddish/Yizkor	75	45	.56
The Jewish religion	75	44	.58
Special meals on Shabbat and Holidays	75	40	.52
Celebrating Purim	73	38	.54
Jewish history of over 3,000 years	72	30	.45
"Kol Nidrei" prayer	67	42	.50
Lighting Shabbat candles	67	16	.53

*Feeling part of the Jewish people.

It is noteworthy that 84% of the respondents report visiting the Western Wall: 11% often, 35% sometimes, and 35% seldom. The Wall is considered a visible symbol of the continuity of history and heritage.

An "objective analysis" correlating the importance attributed to each motivating factor of Jewish identification with the respondents' overall sense of belonging to the Jewish people, suggests that religious and national factors may have almost equal influence after all. In other words, the objective ranking differs from the subjective ranking in that the former gives equal weight

to the religious and national factors, while the latter places more emphasis on recent national events as a motivator of Jewish identification than on the Jewish religious tradition.

Earlier research revealed that a tie to Israel alone (recent history), when not accompanied by others of the motivating factors, may actually be associated with a lower level of Jewish identification⁹. This proposition finds support in the rather lower feeling of belongingness to the Jewish people expressed by the "totally non-observant" in the present study.

9—See the doctoral thesis of Shlomit Levy, "Components of the Jewish Identity as Motivators for Jewish Identification among Jewish Youth and Adults in Israel 1967–1982," Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1985 (Hebrew, with Abstract and Table of Contents in English).

Israel and the Diaspora

Israelis overwhelmingly take pride in being Jewish (94%) and believe it is important to live in Israel (93%). They also feel a connectedness to fellow Jews around the world (96%). The observant exceed the non-observant not only in this aspect of Jewish peoplehood, but, interestingly, also in answer to the question, "Do you consider yourself a Zionist?" Sixty-percent of the "strictly observant" answered "definitely, yes" compared to 40% of the non-observant.

Three-fourths of Israelis believe that Jews in Israel and Jews in the Diaspora share a common fate [Figure 21]. More than half believe the Jews are a chosen people. About two-thirds agree to the proposition that Israel would not be able to survive without a strong relationship with the Jewish people worldwide. A somewhat larger majority agree to the reciprocal proposition that the Jewish people in the Diaspora would not be able to survive without the existence of the State of Israel. In other

words, the percentage of respondents who believe that the survival of Diaspora Jewry is dependent on the existence of the State of Israel is somewhat higher than those who believe that the existence of the State is dependent on a strong relationship with Diaspora Jewry.

It is of interest to note that the reverse situation prevailed in 1975, when more respondents thought that Israel could not survive without a strong relationship with the Jewish Diaspora than those who agreed to the reciprocal proposition, that the Jewish people in the Diaspora could not survive without Israel. It appears that during the past 18 years Israelis have gained more confidence in the independence of the State and its centrality for the Jewish people. These views are shared across all sectors of the population. In effect, most Israeli Jews see the State of Israel as the State of the Jewish people as a whole, essential for the survival of Jews in the Diaspora, but also dependent upon them.

Figure 21

Israel and the Diaspora



Glossary

Ashkenazi (pl. Ashkenazim)

Jews of European origin, "Ashkenaz" being a Biblical geographical term that was later applied to Germany and the regions of Jewish settlement north of the Roman Empire.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Literally, "son/daughter of the commandment," referring to coming-of-age with regard to adult responsibilities for observance of mitzvot (13 for a boy, 12 for a girl). In common parlance, the term is used to describe the celebration of reaching this stage of life.

Brit Milah

Ritual circumcision performed on male infants on the eighth day after birth, representing entry into the Biblical covenant between Abraham and God.

Haggadah

Ritual text of the Passover Seder ceremony that is read at home celebrations on the first night of the holiday.

Hakafot

Festive processions around the synagogue with the Torah scrolls, held on the holiday of Simhat Torah.

Hametz

Leavened grain products that are prohibited during the Festival of Passover.

Hanukkah

Eight-day holiday commemorating the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Maccabees in the year 165 B.C.E. and marking the overthrow of Hellenist rule in Israel. Observed by home candle-lighting ceremonies with an eight-branched candelabrum.

Havdalah

Ceremony that indicates the conclusion of the Sabbath, using the symbols of wine, spices, and a multiwicked candle.

Kaddish

Prayer in the Aramaic language that calls upon the community to sanctify God's Name, requiring a minyan for recitation. The prayer is recited at every daily service, and by mourners, for example, for 11 months following the death of a parent, and yearly on the anniversary of the parent's death.

Kashrut (Kosher)

Jewish dietary laws, specifying permitted and forbidden foods, separation of meat and dairy products, etc.

Kibbutz (pl. Kibbutzim)

Cooperative settlements in Israel.

Kiddush

Sanctification of Shabbat and other holidays through a blessing recited over wine at night and the following day.

Kippah (pl. Kippot)

A skullcap, worn by males out of reverence for God and as a form of religious identity.

Kol Nidrei

Prayer for the annulment of vows, recited on the eve of Yom Kippur; used also to refer to the Yom Kippur evening service.

Lulav

A palm branch, combined with other species of plants, for use during holiday prayers on the Festival of Sukkot.

Ma'ariv

Evening prayer service (also known as *Arvit*).

Masorti

Traditional Jew, as opposed to "secular" or "religious" Jew in contemporary Israeli parlance. The term has also been adopted in Israel by the Movement for Conservative Judaism.

Megillah of Esther

Scroll containing the Biblical Book of Esther, read in the synagogue on the holiday of Purim.

Mezuzah

Parchment containing verses (*Shema Yisrael*) from the Biblical book of Deuteronomy, encased in a protective box and attached to the doorposts of Jewish homes, offices, and institutions.

Mikveh

A ritual bath, primarily used by married women for immersion at the conclusion of the menstrual cycle, prior to resumption of marital relations.

Mincha

Afternoon prayer service.

GLOSSARY (continued)

Minyan

Quorum of ten adult males (over the age of 13), required for public prayer services.

Mitzvah (pl. Mitzvot)

Biblical or rabbinic commandment, categorized as prescriptive ('aseh—positive) or proscriptive (lo ta'aseh—negative).

Purim

Holiday commemorating the Jews' salvation from enemies in ancient Persia who sought to destroy them, as related in the Biblical Book of Esther.

Seder

Literally, "Order;" sacrosanct service celebrating the Exodus from Egypt, held as a home ceremony over a meal on the first night of Passover.

Sephardi (pl. Sephardim)

Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin who were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and settled throughout the Mediterranean region, including North Africa.

Seudah Shlishit

Literally, "The Third Meal"; held between the afternoon and evening (concluding) services of Shabbat, in order to fulfill the requirement of feasting three times on this holy day.

Shabbat

The seventh day; biblically ordained day of rest extending from sunset on Friday until after sunset on Saturday.

Shacharit

Morning prayer service.

Shavuot

Festival commemorating the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai and celebrating the "first fruits" of the spring harvest. The holiday occurs 50 days after Passover.

Shivah

Literally, "seven;" the week of mourning at home observed by those who have lost an immediate relative (parent, child, sibling, or spouse.) It is a mitzvah for condolence calls to be made during this period.

Shmitah

Literally, "release;" the Sabbatical year, referring to the seventh year in every seven-year cycle in which, according to Biblical command, debts are forgiven and the land is left fallow.

Simchat Torah

Literally, "the rejoicing of the law;" the concluding day of the Sukkot festival season on which the annual reading of the entire Torah is completed and immediately started anew, amid great festivities.

Sukkah

A booth erected as a temporary outdoor home for meals and dwelling during the festival of Sukkot, in commemoration of the makeshift homes used by the Israelites in the wilderness, after the Exodus from Egypt.

Sukkot

Festival of Tabernacles (Booths), commemorating God's watching over the Jewish people during the period of the wilderness, after leaving Egypt, and celebrating the plentitude of the autumn harvest.

Tefillin

Phylacteries; leather boxes containing passages from the Bible written on parchment and attached by leather straps to the head and arm of males 13 years and older during week-day morning prayers. The tefillin symbolize commitment of mind, heart and might to fulfill Biblical precepts.

Torah

Literally, "teaching" or "the law;" referring to the Five Books of Moses and at times denoting the entire Scripture and traditional Jewish learning.

Tisha B'Av

The ninth day of the summer month of Av, during which both the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem were destroyed (586 B.C.E. and 70 C.E.); observed as a day of fasting and mourning.

Tzaddikim

Literally, "the righteous;" referring to outstanding righteous human beings; in this context to rabbinic sages of antiquity. Tombs of such sages are seen as places of petitionary prayer.

Yeshiva

School at various levels, from primary to theological seminary, for study of traditional religious texts.

Yizkor

Memorial prayer for the dead, recited in the synagogue during morning services on Yom Kippur and other major holidays.



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52 Vanderbilt Avenue
New York, NY 10017
USA

28 Ramban Street
92268 Jerusalem
Israel



The Louis Guttman Israel Institute
of Applied Social Research

19 Washington Street
P.O. Box 7150
91070 Jerusalem
Israel