

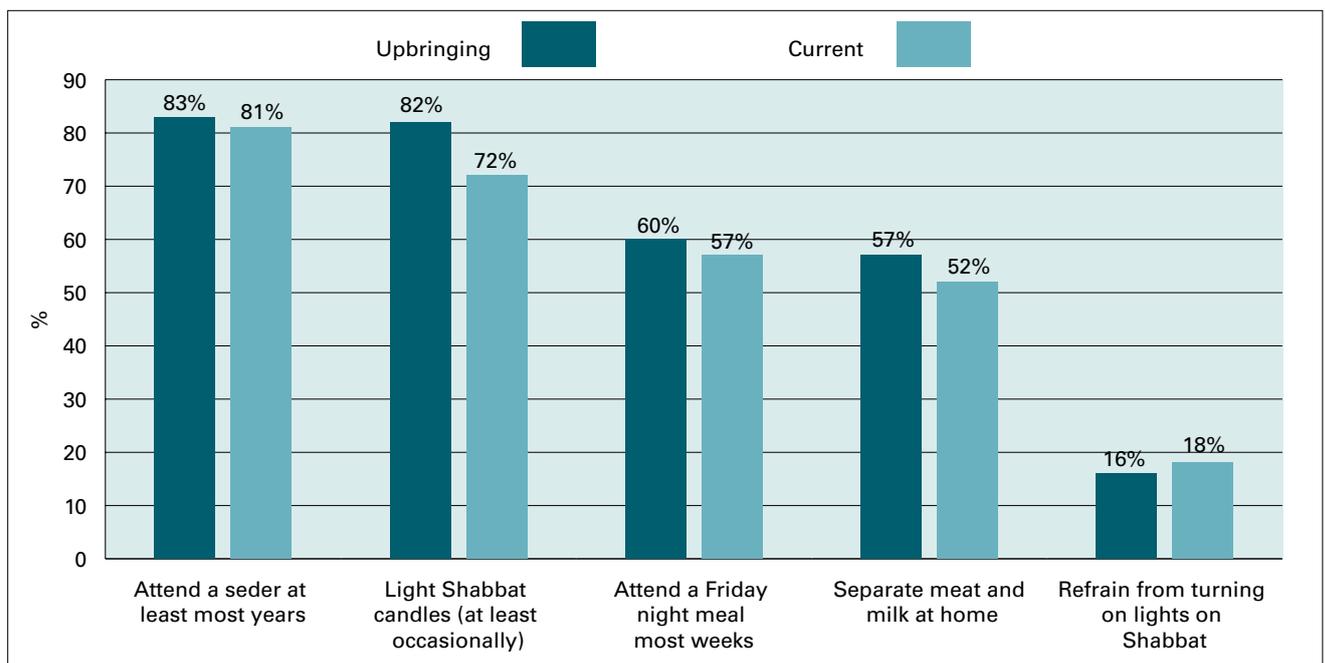
Data night

Four questions to make your seder night
different from all other seder nights

1 / *She'hecheyanu*: What has brought us to this moment?

Statistically, attendance at a seder is one of, if not, the most widespread Jewish practice of all Jewish rituals. Three to four out of every five Jews in the UK are likely to participate in a seder this year. It is more common than attending a Friday night Shabbat meal, and certainly far more common than observing Shabbat according to *halacha* (Jewish law), measured in the figure below by the practice of refraining from turning on lights on Shabbat. And this is certainly not unique to the UK: attending a seder is one of the most widely-practiced Jewish rituals throughout the Jewish world.

Figure 1. Observance of select Jewish practices during upbringing and current (N=3,736)



Why might this be the case? Certainly, the fact that it is an annual event rather than a weekly or daily one, creates a genuine sense of occasion. The fact that it typically takes place in the home rather than in the synagogue lends it a distinct family feel. The food almost certainly helps (hopefully!). But all of these elements can be found in other Jewish festivals and rituals. What is it that is special about a Pesach seder?

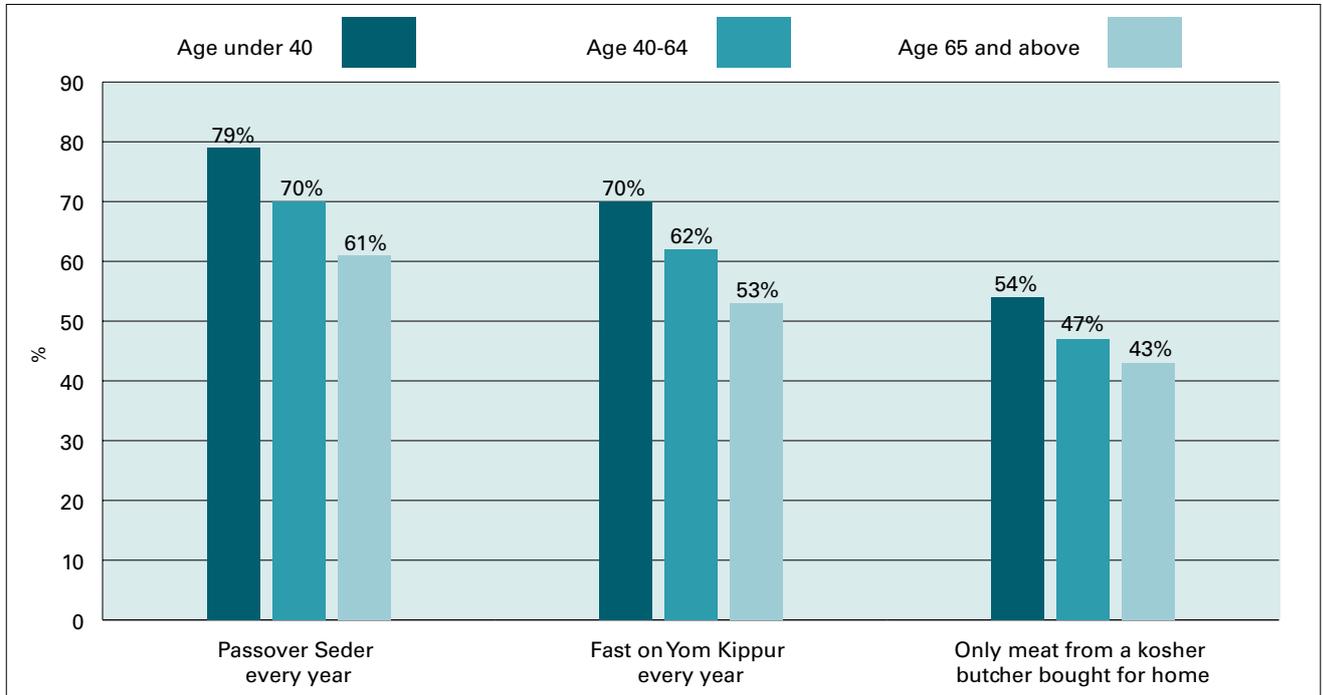
Figure 1 also contrasts the rituals Jews in Britain practice today with those they practiced during their upbringing. It shows that, in four out of the five cases, the proportion of Jews who practiced these rituals while they were being brought up is higher than the proportion who practices them today. However, in most cases, the drop is small, and in one, which measures Shabbat observance according to *halacha*, there is a slight increase.

Questions for discussion

- What is it about a Pesach seder that makes it such a successful Jewish event?
- What can we learn from the experience to enhance Jewish education and communal life at other times during the year?
- Looking at the contrast between the figures for “upbringing” and “current”, what, if anything, surprises you?
- Has your level of practice changed over the course of your life?
- Which, if any, of the five rituals did you practice during your childhood, and which do you practice today?
- What do you think caused the stability or change?
- When you reflect on any changes in your own Jewish practices, how do you feel?
- If you have children, do you want them to become more or less religiously observant than you and why?

2 / B'chol dor vador: Will we have Jewish grandchildren?

Figure 2. Percentages observing particular Jewish rituals by age group*



* (N=3,736 for Pesach seder; N=3,298 for fasting on Yom Kippur as it excludes those who do not fast for health reasons; N=3,385 for type of meat bought for home as it excludes vegans and vegetarians).

Conventional wisdom has it that the younger Jews are, the less likely they are to be religiously observant. Indeed, the issue of declining levels of communal engagement, affiliation and religiosity among young people has been a concern in the UK Jewish community, along with all other Jewish communities around the world, for many years. Seen in this light, JPR's National Jewish Community Survey data show something quite extraordinary: the younger Jews are, the *more* likely they are to be religiously observant. We see the pattern not just for those who attend a Pesach seder every year, but equally for those who fast on Yom Kippur every year, and those who only buy kosher meat for their home (see Figure 2). In fact, we see it across a whole array of practices not shown here: separation of meat and milk utensils at home, never eating non-kosher meat out, attending a Friday night Shabbat meal most weeks, not travelling on Shabbat, and refraining from turning on lights on Shabbat. Whilst the proportions of people observing each of these differ, the pattern is always the same: younger people are more likely to be religiously observant than older people.

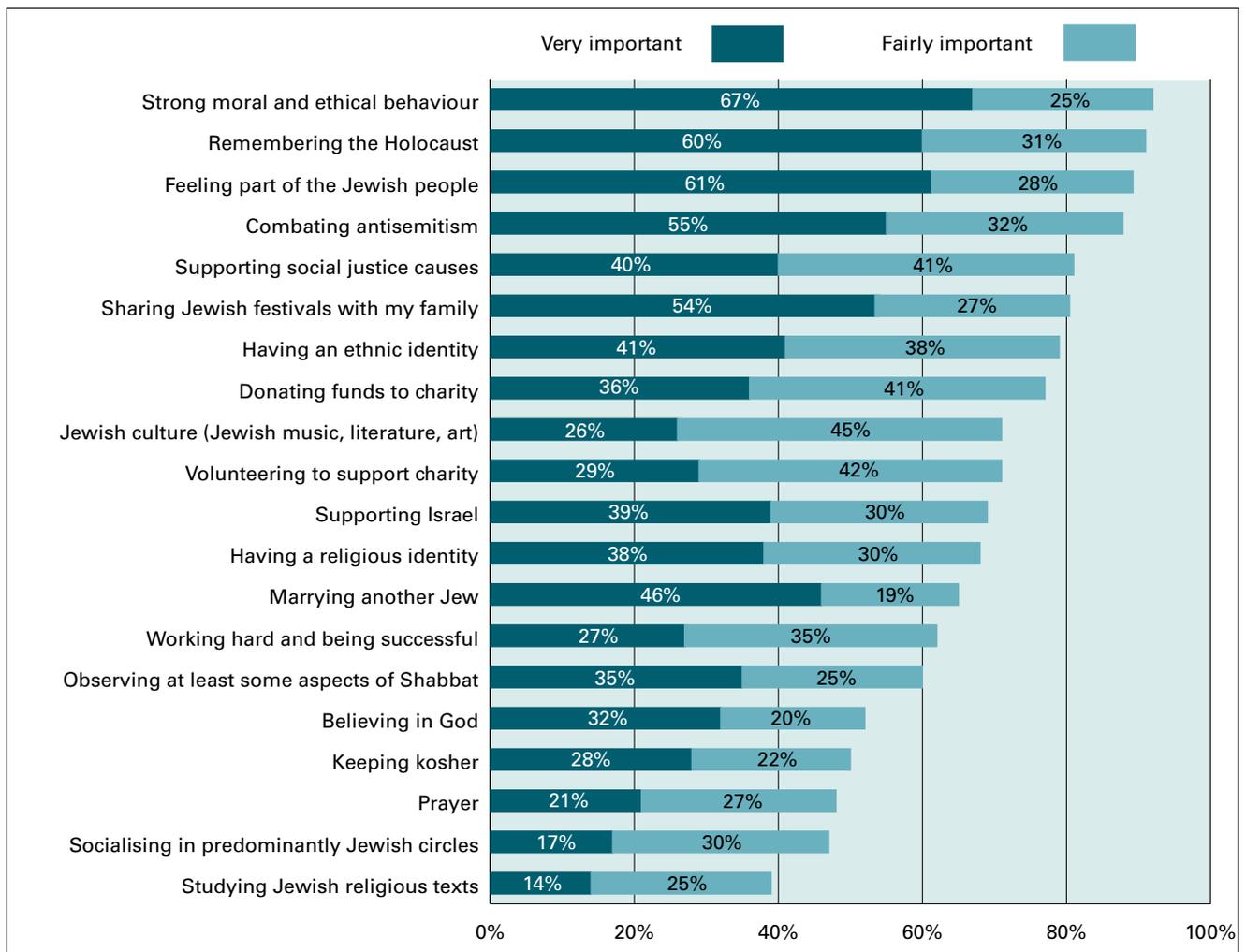
Questions for discussion

- What might explain why, looking at the Jewish population as a whole, younger Jews are more likely to be religiously observant than older Jews?
- Has the British Jewish community discovered a solution to the problem of how best to engage young Jews, and if so, what is it?
- What has happened in the Jewish community to turn around our fortunes?
- And before we jump to conclusions, how should we explain the fact that the survey also finds that when it comes to measuring the importance of "Supporting Israel", "Combating antisemitism", "Volunteering to support charity" and "Supporting social justice causes" we see the conventional age gradient – i.e. older people are *more* likely to do these things than younger people?

3 / Who knows twenty: What matters to us about our Jewish identity?

In JPR's National Jewish Community Survey, we presented the respondents with twenty statements and asked them how important or unimportant each of them is to their own sense of Jewish identity. The results can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Importance of various dimensions of Jewishness to sense of Jewish identity (%; N=3,736)



The figure provides us with an extraordinary portrait of the Jewish identities of Jews in Britain today. It allows us to see what aspects of Jewishness are most and least important to us as a collective, and perhaps even what we think our Jewishness is all about. In the many discussions that have taken place about these findings since the survey was published, people have been particularly struck by the facts that “strong moral and ethical behaviour” comes top of the list; that “supporting Israel” comes mid-way down the list in eleventh place; and that most of the more religious elements (“prayer”, “believing in God”, “Shabbat observance”) are all clustered together at the bottom.

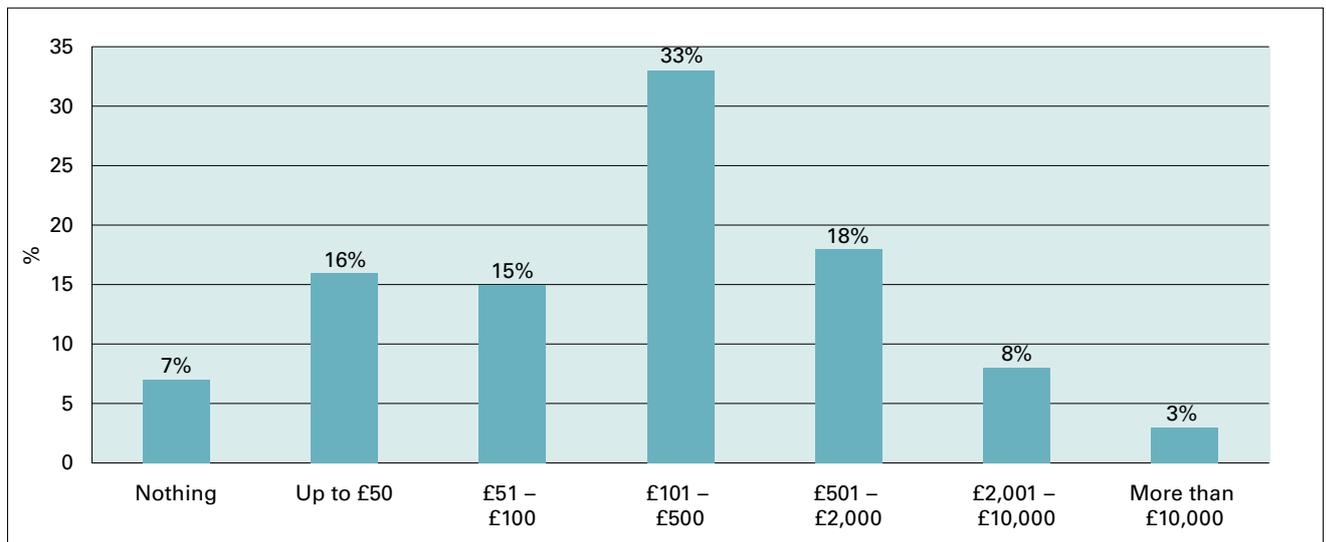
Questions for discussion

- What strikes you about the findings?
- If you had to choose the five items that are most important to your own sense of Jewish identity, which ones would you choose?
- How do your choices differ from other people around your seder table and the overall picture presented above?
- What concerns you about the findings?
- What gives you cause for optimism?

4 / Dayenu: Are we giving enough?

One of the key tenets of Judaism is to help people less fortunate than ourselves, and one of the fundamental ways to achieve this is through charitable donations. In general, Jews in the UK are very charitable: JPR's National Jewish Community Survey found that 93% had made at least one donation to a charity in the previous year. But the amounts we give vary significantly (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Charitable giving (to Jewish and/or non-Jewish charities) in year prior to survey (%)*



* N=3,399. Percentages are calculated after exclusion of respondents who answered 'Prefer not to say'.

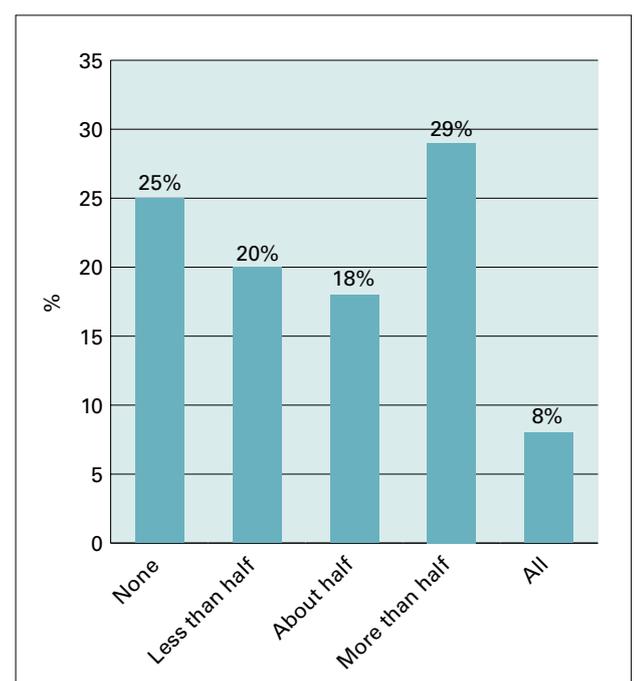
In fact, almost four in ten give no more than £100 over the course of the year – the equivalent of a maximum of about 27p per day, or less than £2 per week. Whilst many of these people are young or from low income families, we also find that a further third give between £101 and £500 over the course of the year – i.e. a maximum of £1.37 per day, or under £10 per week. These may or may not be reasonable sums to contribute depending on people's circumstances or beliefs, but the data should at least cause us to consider whether we should or could give more.

The survey also investigated the proportion of people's total giving that is donated to Jewish charities as compared to non-Jewish charities. Figure 5 shows the results: 37% give *more than half or all* to Jewish charities, whereas 45% give *less than half or none* to them.

Questions for discussion

- Looking at Figure 4, which of the seven brackets have you fallen into in the past year?
- Are you content with that, or do you feel you should be in a different bracket?
- Looking at Figure 5, what do you feel the appropriate balance should be between our individual and collective giving to Jewish and to non-Jewish charities?
- Where have your priorities been recently, and to what extent, if at all, do you think they should be revised?

Figure 5: Estimated proportion of total charitable giving specifically donated to Jewish charities*



* (N=3,175) includes only respondents who disclosed they gave some money to charity in the past 12 months as well as the approximate amount given.

About JPR and the 2013 National Jewish Community Survey

The Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) is a London-based independent research organisation, consultancy and think-tank. It aims to advance the prospects of Jewish communities in Britain and across Europe by conducting research and developing policy in partnership with those best placed to influence Jewish life. You can find out more about our work at: www.jpr.org.uk

The 2013 National Jewish Community Survey was a study of the Jewish beliefs and behaviours of self-identifying Jews in Britain aged 16 and above. Conducted by JPR with the support of Pears Foundation and multiple Jewish charities and organisations, it was designed to produce data to support planning across the Jewish community. Together with data from the 2011 UK Census, it is now being used by JPR to produce commissioned reports for a variety of Jewish organisations, synagogues and schools. To read the report in full, which explores many of the questions posed above, go to www.jpr.org.uk/publications. To find out about how the data could be used to support your organisation's needs, or just to wish us *chag sameach*, email us at jpr@jpr.org.uk.

© Institute for Jewish Policy Research 2014

ORT House, 126 Albert Street London NW1 7NE
Tel: +44 (0)20 7424 9265
Email: jpr@jpr.org.uk
Website: www.jpr.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 252626