

# Praying for the Haredim



A Journey into the Heart of an Unreached People Group

# Contributors

This Haredi Prayer Journey was composed through the participation of those who have a heart and a hunger to see the Haredim embrace the promises of Yeshua. On behalf of Jews for Jesus we would like to thank the following ministries:

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*Praying for the Haredim*

All Bible verses are in the English Standard Version translation, unless otherwise noted.

To protect individuals' privacy, many names in this document have been changed, indicated by an asterisk (\*). In some cases, additional details may also have been changed. It can be risky for Haredim to explore other belief systems and to follow Yeshua, and we wish to protect those people whom we have been privileged to meet.

# Foreword

I only knew one Jewish person before moving to New York City: my uncle. He was raised in New England and came from Jewish-Italian roots. After he came to faith in Jesus in college, he moved to Texas, where he married my aunt. His love of education, a good story, and the Jewishness of the Bible have influenced my life profoundly.

But truth be told, like many American Christians, I was ignorant of Jewish customs and history. I had read the Old and New Testaments many times, but I was never exposed to the development and diversity of modern-day Jewry—until some teenagers nearly tackled me outside a New York City subway station.

It occurred a few days after I moved to the city. The young teenagers, wearing black fedoras, suits, shoes, and pressed white shirts, charged into my path and asked, “Are you Jewish?” “No,” I murmured as I scurried past them, trying to process who they were. Then I noticed a Mitzvah tank: a large van that acts as a portable synagogue to attract unaffiliated Jews to follow Torah. I learned that this was part of a Hasidic sect known as Chabad Lubavitch, a group headquartered in Brooklyn who spared no costs to bring non-observant Jewish people back to the fold.

Over the following years, I learned of myriads of Jewish groups more diverse than I could imagine. There are Zionists and anti-Zionists. There are speakers of Hebrew, Arabic, Bukharic, Russian, Yiddish, and English. Some diaspora groups were connected to Jewish people and politics. Others were isolated for millennia and only connected to other Jews through migration.

Despite the variances, one trend is certain: ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Judaism is on the rise everywhere. High birth rates and the efficacy of their insular communities help Haredim strengthen their population, recovering remarkably from the devastation of the Holocaust.

The insularity of their communities, however, also shields Haredim from their greatest hope. Among the most significant unreached people group communities in North America, the top 12 groups are Jewish (upgnorthamerica.com). Of these groups, the Haredim have the least exposure and most resistance to the message of the gospel.

That reality is what makes this prayer guide of eternal significance. Knowledge of the Haredim creates awareness, which awakens responsibility for the global body of Yeshua (Jesus) to devote prayer and resources to help the Haredim discover Jesus. Will you intercede with us through this booklet, remembering what Yeshua commanded? “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2).



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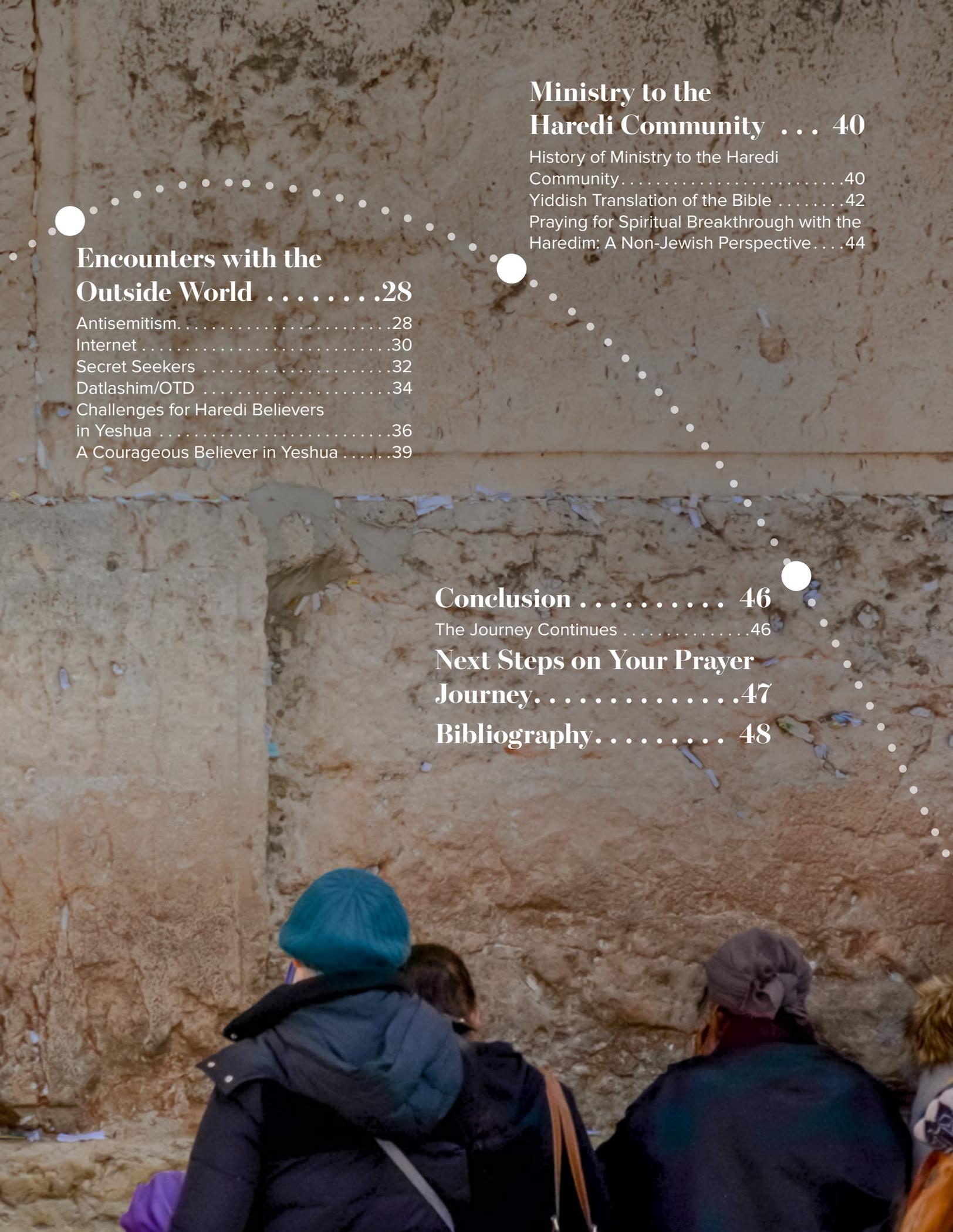
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# Introduction

## The Crucial Importance of Prayer

In the 1800s, in the Jewish quarter of Kamensky, in Zhytomyr, Ukraine, lived a man who loved the Lord and loved the Jewish people. The prayer of this Gentile cabinet maker was that he would have the opportunity to lead a Jewish person to Yeshua. The answer to his prayer was Isaac Cohen,\* a fatherless young man from a Hasidic family.

The cabinet maker took Isaac in as an apprentice, and as he taught him the craft of cabinet making, he also taught him about his Messiah. As a result of prayer, testimony, and opening of the Scriptures, Isaac came to faith in 1881 at the age of 22.

Isaac was my great-grandfather. He married Abby,\* his second cousin, a young woman from a prominent rabbinic family whose father had passed away when she was a young girl. Shortly after their marriage, Abby came to faith in Yeshua. As they ministered to their people in Ukraine and Turkey, they experienced opposition and persecution, but they also led many to faith. Unfortunately, Isaac passed away in 1898, but his two sons, Asher\* and David,\* continued to preach the good news.

Abby then married another Messianic Jew named Reuben,\* and they had two children. They worked with several different Jewish ministries in places such as London and Toronto. Today, many of Isaac's, Abby's, and Reuben's descendants serve as leaders in the Messianic community as heads of ministries, pastors, and more.

The prayers of this one Gentile cabinet maker to lead one Jewish person to the Lord changed the destiny and legacy of generations. Won't you consider how your prayers can do the same?

*A true story, with some details changed*

With their closed enclaves, unique hats and hairstyles, and rigid dress codes, the Haredim can seem unapproachable and perhaps completely different from how we envision the Jewish people of the Bible. The Haredi community's devotion to God, community, Torah study, and purity can be alienating in many ways, but it can also be inspiring and convicting. We may even feel a strange sense of kinship with these people whose whole lives are centered around God.

The Apostle Paul, a Jewish man with experience keeping the law, wrote these words about his community:

**Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.**

(Romans 10:1–2 NIV)

If Paul so earnestly desired and prayed for the salvation of the Jewish people, then how much greater must be Yeshua's own love and concern for the Haredim! Facing the stubbornness of the religious Jewish community and their rejection of the gospel, Yeshua was moved to tears:

"As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. . . . You did not recognize the time of God's coming to you'"(Luke 19:42, 44 NIV).

God is moving in this community, and we sense that the time is ripe to increase our efforts to reach them with the good news. The key to this outreach is prayer. We invite you to journey with us into the world of the Haredim, to meet Haredi men and women as well as the believers who serve them, and to join us in the critical work of prayerful intercession.

# Who are the Haredim?

**T**he Hebrew word for “tremble” in this verse is *hared*, and from it is derived the term “Haredim,” used to describe the ultra-Orthodox (or Haredi) Jewish community. As the very meaning of their name implies, Haredim are God-fearers. Haredi communities are found around the world, with major hubs in Israel, the United States (New York City), Canada (Montreal), Belgium (Antwerp), and the UK (London). Haredim are characterized by their strict observance of Jewish law and their self-isolation from modern society. The focus of Jewish life in the Haredi world is about what you do, not necessarily about what you believe.

Although they often live in major cities, the Haredim remain insulated from the culture around them. In their attempt to stay uncorrupted by the world, Haredi communities censor news media, smart phones, televisions, computers, and the internet. When Christians consider unreached people groups, they may conjure up images of remote places in Africa or Asia. Yet the Haredim are one of the most unreached people groups in the world.

Though the Haredim may seem so different, it is important to not slip into generalizations or biases about them, especially as we pray for and seek to serve them. Instead, let us ask God to fill our hearts with His love for these people! Who can you invite to join you in interceding for this neglected community?

**But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.**

(Isaiah 66:2)

## Prayer Points

Praise God for the opportunity to pray and intercede for His people. Ask God to give you a heart of love and compassion as you pray for the Haredim.

The Haredim's devotion to God and to holiness can be an example to us. As you begin this prayer journey, ask God to create in you a clean heart (Psalm 51:10).

God not only wants us to “tremble at His word” but also to experience His perfect love which drives out our fears (1 John 4:18). Pray for the Haredi community to be open to God's love.



# Haredim around the World



Though they may be our neighbors, they are also a world apart. The Haredim perceive outsiders, especially Christians, as a threat to their survival. This perception creates huge barriers as we seek access points for gospel engagement, but we have seen God open up cracks in these barriers. *As you pray, we encourage you to lay your hands on this map that shows the hubs of Haredi life. Ask God to open the hearts of the Haredim and to send His Spirit and His laborers into each harvest field.*

**The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.**

(Luke 10:2)

# A Brief History of the Haredim

Many stories and legends are told about the *Baal Shem Tov*. As the tale is sometimes told, Israel ben Eliezer was a young orphan who grew up in 18th-century Eastern Europe. At that time, many Jewish families were too poor to afford a Torah education for their sons, and these unlearned Jews were scorned by the few wealthy scholars of the Talmud.

Israel did not only work for a living but also secretly prayed and studied with holy men. It is said that on Israel's 16th birthday, the prophet Elijah appeared to him and revealed that the faith-filled prayers of the simple were more powerful than the great learning of the sages.

Eventually, Israel earned the title *Baal Shem Tov*, that is, the “master of the good name” (the name of God, through which miracles were worked). He taught that “the simple blessing of the unlettered Jew was as holy as advanced Torah study, . . . joy and humility were to be admired, and even the simplest peasant could serve G-d through passionate prayer.”<sup>1</sup> The *Baal Shem Tov* was the founder of the Hasidic movement.<sup>2</sup>

Haredim see themselves as following in the footsteps of the most pious Jewish people throughout the ages, all the way back to Moses. More precisely, the Haredi movement began in the early 1800s, when traditional Jews pushed back against European Jewry becoming more modern or “worldly.” Haredim began to avoid contact with the outside world, became more stringent in their observance of traditions, and called for Jewish people to return to Torah-abiding lives.<sup>3</sup>

The Haredim are divided into two main streams: Hasidic and Yeshivish. The Hasidim (whose name derives from the Hebrew word for “lovingkindness”) endorsed a more mystical, spiritual approach to Judaism, accessible to the common peasant as well as to great rabbinic scholars. The Hasidic community itself is divided into many subgroups—including the Satmar, Bobover, and Chabad-Lubavitch—each holding to the beliefs and practices which its rebbe (dynastic spiritual leader) prescribes.

For over 100 years, leading rabbis spurned the Hasidim because of their lack of focus on Talmud study. Today, followers of those rabbis are called “Yeshivish” because of their focus on yeshivas (Jewish

schools). They are also called “Litvish” because of their Lithuanian origins.<sup>4</sup>

The Haredi community may seem static, but it has changed drastically from what it was in 18th- and 19th-century Europe. Younger Haredim are more prone to questioning their way of life, and the need to interact with the outside world has pressed people to venture outside of the community. In order to curtail this questioning and curiosity, Haredi communities today can also be much more insular and rigid than they were in the past.

## Prayer Points

- Yeshua once said, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me” (John 5:46). Pray that the Haredi community’s esteem for Moses and the traditions would be a gateway for them to recognize Yeshua as Messiah.
- Pray for the Father to give the Haredim new hearts, that they may worship Him “in spirit and truth” (John 4:23).

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1. Peretz Golding, “The Baal Shem Tov—A Brief Biography,” Chabad.

2. Adapted from “Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov,” Jewish Virtual Library; Golding, “The Baal Shem Tov—A Brief Biography.”

3. Raysh Weiss, “Haredim (Charedim), or Ultra-Orthodox Jews,” My Jewish Learning.

4. Weiss, “Haredim (Charedim), or Ultra-Orthodox Jews”; “The Jewish People of North America,” Global Gates; Shmolo Fischer, “Annual Assessment: The Situation and Dynamics of Jewish People 2016,” The Jewish People Policy Institute.

# Daily Life

## Gender Roles and Regulations

Before anything else, you pray.

**E**tty walks into the bedroom to wake her six children sleeping soundly side by side. Even though there is barely space to walk around the tiny room, she deftly pulls out the basin from under a bed frame. Jewish law requires that a person wash their hands after waking, before they walk more than six feet. But even before handwashing, they must pray: “I offer thanks to You, living and eternal King. . . .”

As the children dress, ETTY reminds the young ones to put the right shoe on first, but to tie the left shoe first because *tefillin* (Jewish prayer phylacteries) are tied on the left arm.<sup>5</sup> The rest of the morning is a whirlwind of preparation for another day of learning and religious routines. ETTY’s day will fly by until it ends again in prayer.

*Fictional story*

Western societies prize individualism and independence. Regardless of gender, we are encouraged to pursue self-expression, education, and employment that we find fulfilling. The opposite is true in the Haredi community; gender roles are strictly defined, and every aspect of life is regulated from birth to death.

The most prestigious thing a Haredi man can do is study the Talmud and rabbinic literature. Boys, as well as married men who can afford it, study full time. Thus, women frequently become the breadwinners in addition to caring for their families. This is no easy task, since Haredim typically have many children (six to eight is the average) to ensure survival and continuity.

To promote purity, the two genders are strictly separated. Males and females of different families are not permitted to touch, not even for a handshake. In the strictest sects, they walk on different sides of the street and sit in different sections on buses. Boys and girls attend separate schools. Men aren’t even supposed to listen to a woman singing.

Haredim typically marry young, often under the age of 20. Marriages are arranged by the families or matchmakers. Although many young adults have the right to accept or reject their match, they are generally expected to trust their elders’ guidance and pressured to make a good match.

**So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them.**

(Genesis 1:27–28)

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5. Learn more about these rituals in Lorne Rozovsky, “Jews and Shoes” and “The Laws Upon Awakening in the Morning,” Chabad.

## Prayer Points

Pray that the Haredim will realize God has uniquely fashioned them and that He loves them individually (Psalm 33:15).

Pray for healthy and loving marriages within the Haredi community.



# Women

**R**aya\* has five children and another one due this month. We went to visit her, helping her around the house and assisting her children with their homework. I explained that we had received God's love in Yeshua and want to bless others the way we were blessed. She appreciated the help and said she was happy to have us come again. However, her husband spoke to the rabbi, who told them not to have us come back, so they asked us not to return. We continued to pray for her from afar.

This week we felt compelled by the Lord to bring Raya some groceries and donated clothing for her children. When we arrived, she exclaimed, "You've fallen from heaven to help me!" I played with her children in the park, and my teammate explained the whole gospel to her, beginning with Jeremiah 31:31–34. She had so many questions and told us that she had changed her perception of believers after meeting us and seeing that we respected her community.

*A true story from an outreach team*

Reaching Haredi women with the good news is incredibly difficult because they are a closed community within a closed community. Women's main role is to support their husbands in Torah scholarship and to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). We know that the labors of a wife and mother are truly honorable, yet Haredi women have limited personal choice and lack legal status. Because women are held to strict standards, carefully watched, and busy with domestic responsibilities, they are generally even more isolated from the outside world than Haredi men.

Haredi women maintain a high level of modesty (*tznius*). Rabbis interpreted Psalm 45:14 ("Inside [the palace], the king's daughter looks splendid"<sup>6</sup>) to mean that a woman's beauty should only be displayed before her husband in the privacy of the home. Moreover, images of women are censored and female faces erased in books and photos so that men will not be tempted away from Torah study. Sometimes when calamity strikes the community, the rabbis will fix the cause as lack of modesty among the women.

Women accept these standards as a fact of life, and in exchange they can rely upon a strong community safety net, ready to help with everything from celebrations to childcare to crises. Women will never be alone.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, they can be stifled by the fear of bringing shame and lack opportunity to truly flourish as the individuals God created them to be.

Then shall the young  
women rejoice in the  
dance, and the young men  
and the old shall be merry  
. . . I will comfort them,  
and give them gladness  
for sorrow.

(Jeremiah 31:13)

6. Psalm 45:14, *Complete Jewish Bible*.

7. Yaron Yadan, "The Status of Women in Public and Social Roles," Daat Emet.



## Prayer Points

Pray for Raya\* and her family—that they will trust the Lord more than they fear man, that the Lord will provide the help they need, and they will know to trust Him.

Pray that God will create more access points to reach these isolated Haredi women. Pray that they will have interactions with believers and that God will open ways for us to serve and reach them with the good news.

Pray that God will miraculously meet these women exactly where they are, just as Yeshua met the isolated woman at the well (John 4)!

Pray that God will help these women find work, even with limited education, so they can provide food, clothing, and other necessities for their families. Ask God to give them strength to fulfill their many tasks.

# Children

“[Yitta Schwartz] had certainly lived what almost anyone would consider an epic life. . . . But what was most remarkable about her was that at her death she had left behind 2,000 living descendants, an entire tribe, including 15 surviving children, more than 200 grandchildren, and hundreds of great- and great-great-grandchildren.

“And she remembered everyone’s name,” her daughter, Nechuma Mayer, told me . . . that attentiveness was, as she saw it, her payback to God for blessing her with such abundant progeny even after the losses she endured.

“She faithfully attended the circumcisions, bar mitzvahs, engagements, and weddings of each of her descendants.”<sup>8</sup>

The ultra-Orthodox are the fastest-growing segment of the Jewish community worldwide, currently numbering around 1.5 million in Israel, North America, and Western Europe combined. Haredim take seriously the command to be fruitful, consider each child a precious gift, and are committed to making up for the millions of lives lost in the Holocaust. Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics estimates that by around 2060, the Haredi population will make up 50% of the global Jewish population.<sup>9</sup> This is just one reason why we must pray for God to break into this community, the next generation of Jewish people, with a revelation of His great love for them.

The Haredim prioritize family life. Every Friday night, families gather around the table for *Shabbat* (Sabbath). Fathers or mothers can often be seen pushing a stroller down the road while young children walk nearby hand in hand.

But cases of child abuse also exist in the community, including sexual abuse from relatives and religious authorities. Sadly, many of these instances are concealed and justice is not served, although a few have been reported in the secular press.

Adina, a woman who has left the Haredi community, was sexually abused by her uncle, despite the fact that “he’s supposed to be a holy man.” When Adina, as an adult, told her mother about the abuse, her mother

said, “Oh, your sister told me he did that to her too.” Adina asked why her mother didn’t warn her, and her mother replied, “Well, I figured you’d get over it.”<sup>10</sup> Sexual sin and abuse is a spiritual stronghold in this community, and we must pray against it.

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.”

(Matthew 19:14)

8. Joseph Berger, *The Pious Ones: The World of Hasidim and Their Battles with America*, 28–29, 32.

9. Israel Kasnett, “The Future of Israel’s ‘Haredi’ Population: Is It Growing or Shrinking?” Jewish News Syndicate.

10. Lynn Davidman, *Becoming Un-Orthodox: Stories of Ex-Hasidic Jews*, 51.

A young girl with dark curly hair in two braids, wearing a black cap and a blue and red striped shirt, is leaning on a black metal railing. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

## Prayer Points

Pray against abuse within the community.  
Pray that the home would be a safe space.

Pray that each husband, wife, and child would  
know the love of one another and of God.

Pray for women who struggle with depression and feel trapped in loveless  
relationships where they are expected to have numerous children.

# Education

I don't remember a time when I didn't love learning. I have always been curious. But in school, I was denied the knowledge for which I hungered.

By the time I finished high school, I had a 4th-grade level in math. I had only read a limited selection of literature. The natural curiosity I possessed inside me and the deep desire to increase my knowledge was in direct contrast to what the people around me believed that Hashem (God) wanted.

I wondered if it was really God's will that we be limited in our knowledge. If it was His will, why did He give me such a thirst to know more?

Through my educational journey, I now understand that it is okay to question my culture and social constructs without losing faith in God.

*Testimony (paraphrased) from a young woman who left the Haredi community*

"Ultra-Orthodox rabbis take the phrase 'you shall study it day and night' [Joshua 1:8]—referring to the Torah—literally. So outside of prayer, eating, sleeping, and using the bathroom, men are expected to learn the Torah every waking moment."<sup>11</sup>

Boys' education is focused on studying the Torah through the lens of Jewish commentary. In the Yeshivish community, boys also receive a secular education. In Hasidic sects, elementary school boys receive only a few hours of instruction in English and math every week and no instruction in subjects like history or science. Even this minimal secular education is dropped in high school, where Hasidic boys study Torah for up to 13 hours a day. Many Hasidic males may not learn the language of their host country (English in the US, Hebrew in Israel).<sup>12</sup>

Haredi girls are not required to study Torah and, in fact, are hindered from doing so. The renowned Jewish scholar Maimonides stated, "The sages command that a man should not teach his daughter Torah since most women are not given to being taught."<sup>13</sup> Girls are taught the value of modesty, the laws of the Sabbath,

and how to be a good wife and mother. They receive some strictly limited secular education for the purpose of finding work.<sup>14</sup>

A 2019 report on the Haredim in Israel states that 9% of men and 12% of women pursued higher education (college/university) at the time,<sup>15</sup> though more recent research suggests this number is rising.<sup>16</sup>

Oh, how I love your law!  
It is my meditation all the day.

(Psalm 119:97)

11. Yaffed, "Why Does Yaffed Fight for the Education of Hasidic Boys and Not Girls?"

12. Moshe Krakowski, "What Yeshiva Kids Are Actually Studying All Day," *Forward*; Fischer, "Annual Assessment: The Situation and Dynamics of Jewish People 2016"; Leslie Brody, "Investigators Say 26 Yeshivas Fall Below New York's Education Standards," *The Wall Street Journal*.

13. Rahel Berkovits, "Maimonides," Jewish Women's Archive.

14. Yaffed, "Fight."

15. Lee Cahaner and Gilad Malach, "Statistical Report on Ultra-Orthodox Society in Israel: 2019," The Israel Democracy Institute.

16. Gilad Malach and Lee Cahaner, "Statistical Report on Ultra-Orthodox Society in Israel: 2020," The Israel Democracy Institute.

## Prayer Points

As Christians, there is much we could learn from the Haredi community's commitment to the Torah. Perhaps you may wish to begin by confessing your need to cherish God's word more. Pray through Psalm 119:97-104.

Pray that those who desire to learn (including women desiring higher education) would have the resources and opportunities to do so. Pray that this knowledge would open doors to encountering God.

Pray for Hasidic leaders to comply with state and federal education requirements.



# Employment and Poverty

**S**hulem Deen, a Haredi man who later left the community, describes the lack of preparation Haredi men receive for finding a “real” job and their total detachment from non-Haredi society. Already a father to multiple children, Deen was offered a job interview. His preparations included buying *Job Interviews for Dummies*, purchasing and learning how to tie a tie for the first time, and buying modern eyeglasses. Deen recalls his absolute cluelessness in dealing with the eyeglasses clerk.

He nodded approvingly when I pointed to a gold-wire frame. “Givenchy,” he said, removing it from the display case and laying it on the counter.

“What?”

“Givenchy,” he said again, with an excited nod. “A brand name.”<sup>17</sup>

Limited language skills and lack of secular knowledge means that Haredim who need to find jobs often find it hard to secure work and may end up with low-paying jobs within their community. In 2018, only about 50% of ultra-Orthodox men in Israel were employed, and only about 75% of ultra-Orthodox women.<sup>18</sup>

Many people assume that all Jewish people are wealthy. But the exact opposite is often true in the Haredi world. With limited life skills, large numbers of children, and men engaged in full-time Torah study, Haredim can be some of the poorest Jewish people in the world. In 2020, 60.4% of ultra-Orthodox children in Israel were living in poverty—a 5% increase from 2019. It would not be unusual to find a large Haredi family with 8–10 children crowded into a three-bedroom apartment. Many Hasidic families require support from the community or government in order to survive. For example, in Williamsburg, about 50% of residents use food stamps.<sup>19</sup>

Scripture shows us God’s heart for the poor. The physical needs of many Haredim open the door for believers to demonstrate the love of God in practical ways.

The Spirit of the LORD GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

(Isaiah 61:1)

17. Shulem Deen, *All Who Go Do Not Return*, 264.

18. Yaffed, “Fight.”; Malach and Cahaner, “2019 Statistical Report on Ultra-Orthodox Society in Israel: Highlights,” The Israel Democracy Institute.

19. Stuart Winer, “Nearly a Third of Israel’s Children Live below the Poverty Line—Report,” *The Times of Israel*; Yaffed, “Why Does Yaffed Fight for the Education of Hasidic Boys and Not Girls?”; Alisa Partlan, *Non-Equivalent: The State of Education in New York City’s Hasidic Yeshivas*, Yaffed.



## Prayer Points

Pray for those in the Haredi community who are seeking employment to find the jobs they need in order to provide for their families. Pray that the cycle of poverty would break.

Pray for ministry groups seeking to meet needs within the Haredi community.

Pray that Haredim would find the truest riches: the gift of God in Yeshua.

# Community Services

**T**he Haredi community's beautiful network of self-sufficient structures has helped them maintain themselves throughout history.

Suppose you're a mother whose baby is screaming inconsolably at midnight. You do not have to navigate these challenges alone—there are people only a call away who will provide anything from pacifiers to baby formula to rocking chairs. This service is called *gemach* (lending).

Or you're an elderly widow who lives alone, and you have a bad fall. You wish to be cared for by people who will abide by Jewish law and speak to you in Yiddish.

There is a special ambulance, Hatzalah, that provides services to the community free of charge.

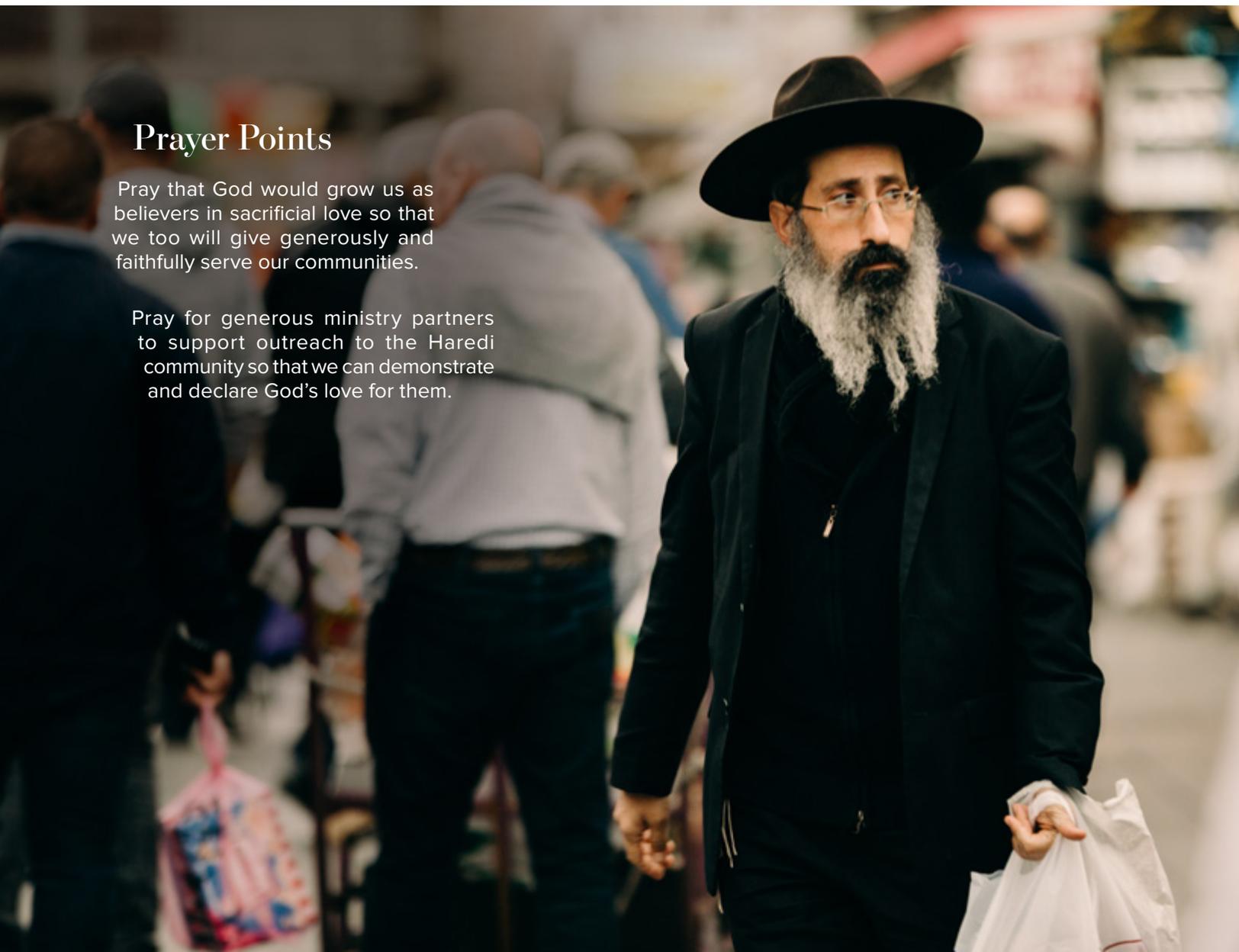
Or you're a man on the side of the highway with a flat tire, worried that you won't make it home in time for the Sabbath. You make a phone call to Chaveirim and within minutes, skilled roadside assistance (consisting of volunteers from the community) is on the scene to remedy the problem.

The Haredim set a wonderful example of what it looks like to care for the needy among us. Pray that they would come to know the greatest generosity and sacrificial love that is found in God's gift of His Son!

## Prayer Points

Pray that God would grow us as believers in sacrificial love so that we too will give generously and faithfully serve our communities.

Pray for generous ministry partners to support outreach to the Haredi community so that we can demonstrate and declare God's love for them.



# From the Yeshiva to the Messiah

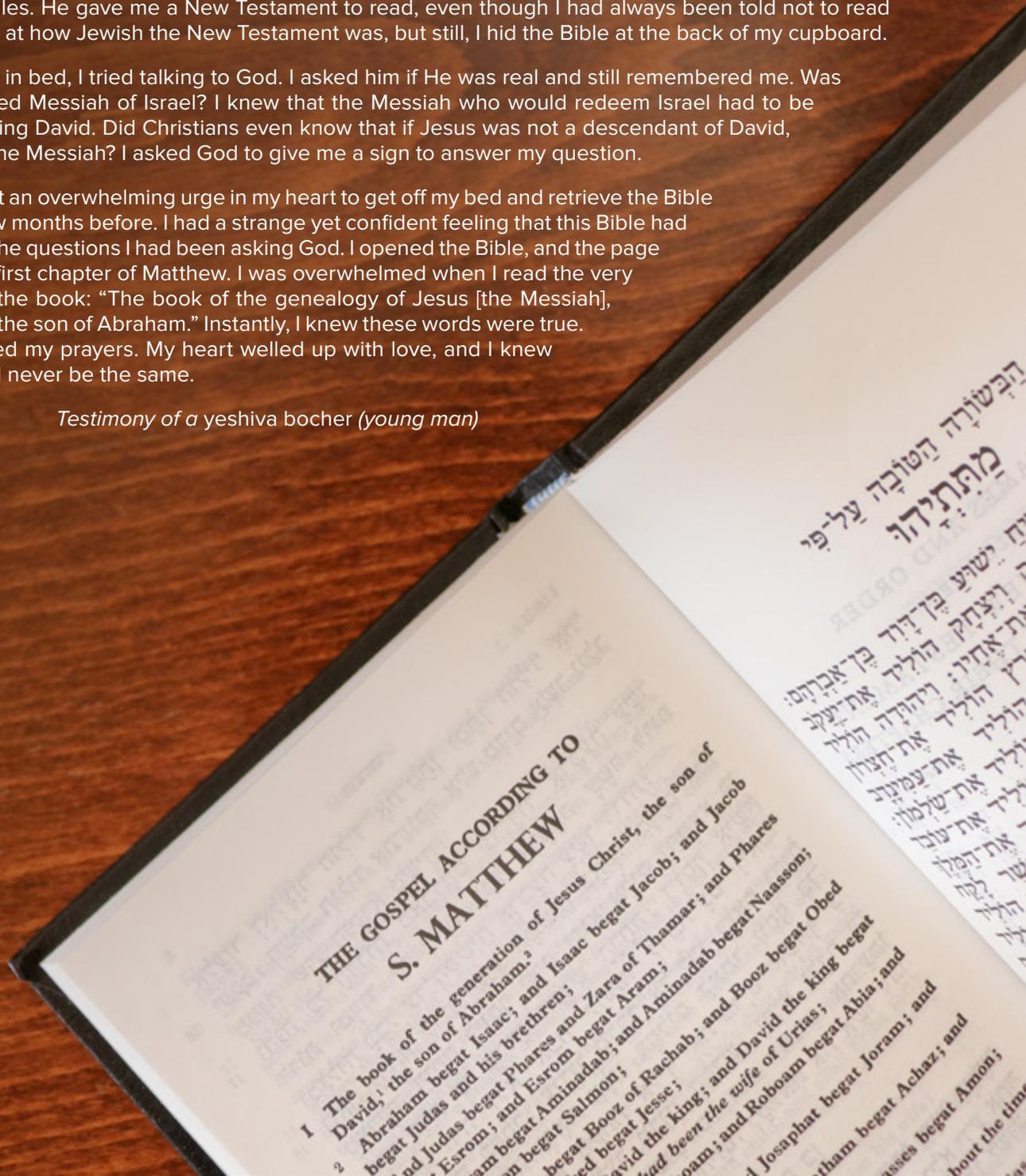
I was born into an Orthodox Jewish family, but by the time I became a teenager, my family had started attending an ultra-Orthodox Hasidic *shul* (synagogue). I learned Torah at various *yeshivot* (religious schools), working toward *smicha* (rabbinical ordination). But by the time I had graduated, I began to have a lot of questions about God. I stopped attending synagogue and gradually also stopped attending festival celebrations and Shabbat dinners. In my search for meaning, I moved out of my parents' house because I thought independence would be the answer. I began to hang out with the wrong crowd and thought that I was doing a good job managing the emptiness I felt inside me.

Then I met and fell in love with a girl named Angie.\* There was one problem—Angie and her family were Christians who believed that Jesus was the Messiah. I had always been told that this was a totally unacceptable idea for Jewish people. But Angie's father told me that Jesus was the Messiah for the whole world—for both Jewish people and Gentiles. He gave me a New Testament to read, even though I had always been told not to read it. I was surprised at how Jewish the New Testament was, but still, I hid the Bible at the back of my cupboard.

One night as I lay in bed, I tried talking to God. I asked him if He was real and still remembered me. Was Jesus the promised Messiah of Israel? I knew that the Messiah who would redeem Israel had to be from the line of King David. Did Christians even know that if Jesus was not a descendant of David, he could not be the Messiah? I asked God to give me a sign to answer my question.

After praying, I felt an overwhelming urge in my heart to get off my bed and retrieve the Bible I had hidden a few months before. I had a strange yet confident feeling that this Bible had the answer to all the questions I had been asking God. I opened the Bible, and the page it fell on was the first chapter of Matthew. I was overwhelmed when I read the very first sentence of the book: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus [the Messiah], the son of David, the son of Abraham." Instantly, I knew these words were true. God had answered my prayers. My heart welled up with love, and I knew that my life would never be the same.

*Testimony of a yeshiva bocher (young man)*



# Beliefs and Practice

## Halakah: Jewish Law

“The keeping of Shabbat was not perceived by the family, or by me, as a burden or hardship, but rather as a very beautiful and special time. As much as there are rules and regulations surrounding Shabbat, it is nevertheless a time of great rest. For *Erev Shabbat* (Friday evening), a wonderful meal was prepared, along with other food which would be cooked in crockpots, ready for a Saturday afternoon dinner. There was a sacred rhythm to the week. Once sundown came each Friday night, there was an immediate sensation of refreshment. Saturday morning we attended a service that we walked to, followed by an afternoon meal, and then time for reading, taking a nap or a walk, or playing with the children. Sometimes there was a gathering of a women’s spiritual discussion group at someone’s home in the neighborhood. Shabbat is done up as much as a holiday that comes only once a year, except that it comes every week!”

*Testimony from Esther,\* a believer whose brother is a Haredi rabbi*

Within Judaism in general, what you *do* is often more important than what you *believe*. From the moment a Haredi person wakes up to the moment they lie down to sleep, all of life is embedded with prayer, ritual, and regulations called *mitzvot*. Laws dictate the prayers to pray as well as how to wash your hands, dress, eat, bathe, raise children, and more!

For example, women only purchase food with a seal indicating that it has been deemed kosher by rabbinic authorities. When cooking, they must never mix meat and dairy. They may even have two refrigerators, two ovens, and two sets of dishes to keep meat and dairy foods separate.

Shabbat regulations also form a key part of Haredi life. In an effort to keep the Sabbath, the Haredi community avoids 39 categories of activities deemed “work.” Banned activities include carrying anything outside the house, spending money, driving a car, turning on a light switch, or ripping toilet paper.<sup>20</sup> Though these regulations can be burdensome, many Haredim find this set-apart day to be full of beauty and joy, like Esther\* and her family did.

While many *mitzvot* stem from biblical laws, the Haredim (as well as some other kinds of rabbinic Judaism) have added numerous additional regulations

over the years in an effort to pursue godly, set-apart lives. Unfortunately, many Haredim have become distracted by the minutiae of the law rather than the heart of it and believe they earn merit through keeping the commandments. God desires to fill them with His Spirit, who allows us to truly live righteously (Romans 8:1–4)!

**There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**

Romans 8:1

20. OU Staff, “The 39 Categories of Sabbath Work Prohibited by Law,” Orthodox Union.



## Prayer Points

Thank God for His love and His gift of salvation apart from works. Pray that the Haredim would know God loves them and that salvation comes not through what they do but through what Yeshua has done for them.

Pray that the Haredim will obey God not simply outwardly but from a heart near to Him (Isaiah 29:13).

Pray that this Shabbat, Haredim would experience true rest (Hebrews 4:9–10).

# The Bible and Rabbinic Tradition

**T**he bus ride to Jerusalem was long, so I struck up a conversation with Mendel,\* a young Haredi man who had sat down next to me. As we talked about the Bible, he showed me a picture of himself with his rebbe. A “rebbe” isn’t just your ordinary rabbi; instead, he is the dynastic spiritual leader of a Hasidic community, who is regarded as extremely righteous and who is revered by his followers.

“I went to a *tisch* (dinner) with the rebbe and paid extra so I could sit next to him!” Mendel exclaimed with excitement. “He has a special ‘in’ with God because he’s very holy, so I want to be near him.”

Mendel told me that at these dinners, the guests are eager to eat the leftovers of the rebbe’s food because it allows them to share in his special holiness.

*Fictional story, based upon a real discussion*

Haredim approach Scripture with reverence and as authoritative. But they rely heavily on Talmud and Midrash (ancient commentaries) to inform their analysis of the Scriptures. Each small passage of biblical text is surrounded by rabbinic interpretation, and Haredim are typically discouraged from reading the Hebrew Scriptures without this commentary. One Haredi contact was reprimanded for reading the Bible itself too much. Judaism invites inquiry in learning, but the

Haredim harshly oppose those who question the correctness or authority of the rabbis.

Haredim read the biblical text as prescriptive—they focus on what to do as outlined by Jewish law. This generates a different understanding from the Christian focus of all of Scripture as a unified story of redemption and faith.

I have more understanding  
than all my teachers, for your  
testimonies are my meditation. I  
understand more than the aged,  
for I keep your precepts.

(Psalm 119:99–100)

## Prayer Points

Pray that as Haredim study the Scriptures, they will hear the voice of God clearly and truly connect with Him.

Pray that the leaders of the Haredi community would lead their people in a truly godly manner.

Pray for the revelation of the gift of salvation, freely available through faith.



# Jewish Mysticism

According to kabbalah (a Jewish mystical tradition), the finite is infinite, the mundane is divine, and the answer to a yes or no question is likely both yes *and* no. This mysterious area of study is a fusion of Judaism with ancient Greek mystery philosophies. Haredim view kabbalah as the gateway to ultimate truth about God and reality, offering secret knowledge that is progressively revealed only to worthy Jewish people (generally excluding women).

Many Haredim value kabbalah as a source of meaning. Unfortunately, many of its tenets are not in line with biblical truths. For example, kabbalah teaches that the entire cosmos emanates from and is one with *Ein Sof*

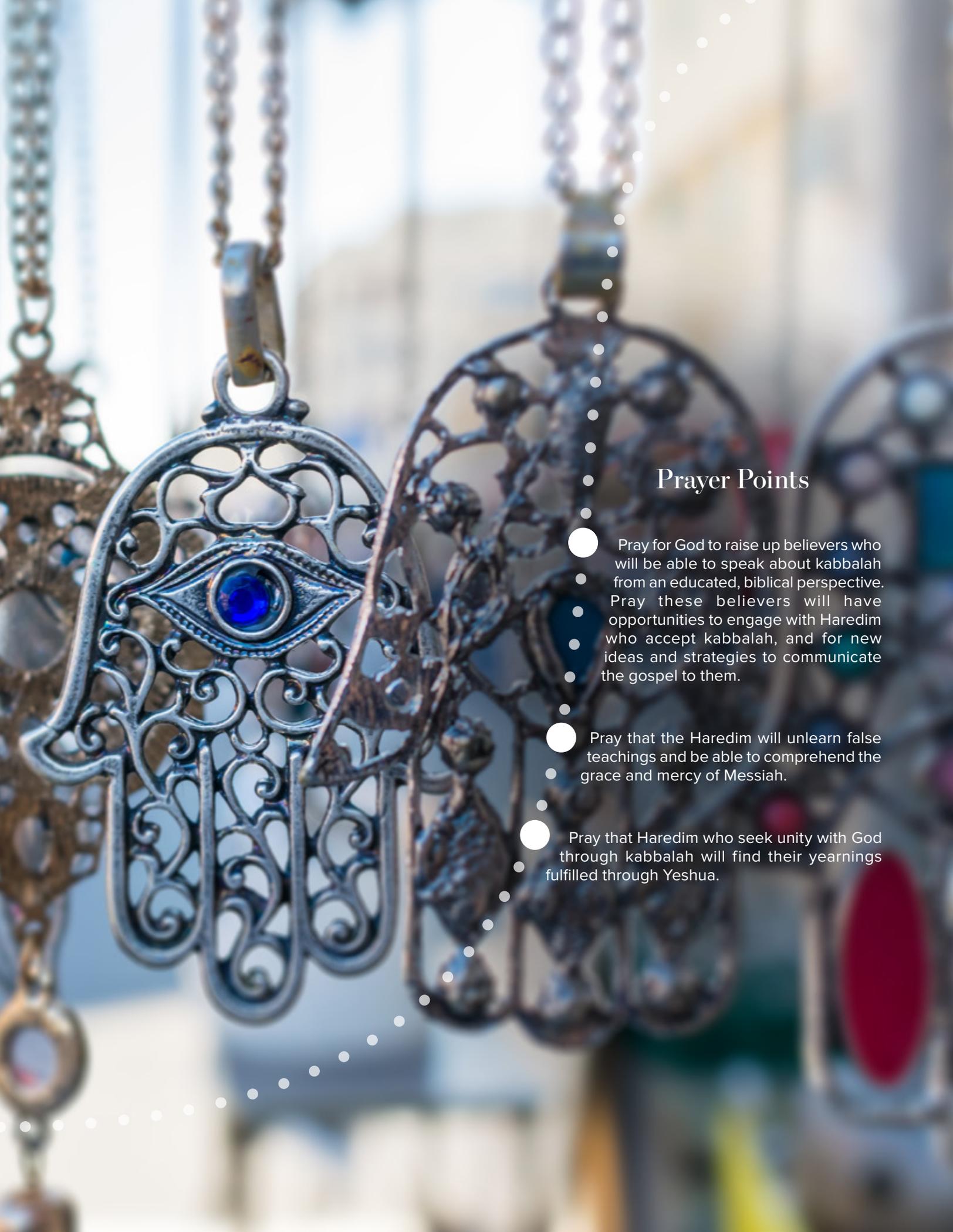
(the divine). We are all part of God through the divine spark that lives within us. Kabbalah teaches that as the Jewish people perform mitzvot (commandments, good works), one day the cosmos will be redeemed and all will become one with Ein Sof.

Proponents of kabbalah may also invoke the power of incantations and seek to interpret letters and words in Scripture according to mathematical formulas instead of focusing on the truth of God's words.

We must intercede for the Haredim to be freed from any unbiblical teachings and to know the true mystery of God found in Yeshua (Colossians 1:27; 2:2).

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory . . . that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ.

(Colossians 1:27; 2:2)



## Prayer Points

Pray for God to raise up believers who will be able to speak about kabbalah from an educated, biblical perspective. Pray these believers will have opportunities to engage with Haredim who accept kabbalah, and for new ideas and strategies to communicate the gospel to them.

Pray that the Haredim will unlearn false teachings and be able to comprehend the grace and mercy of Messiah.

Pray that Haredim who seek unity with God through kabbalah will find their yearnings fulfilled through Yeshua.

# Perceptions of Yeshua (Jesus)

One day, while waiting for a friend in the park, I struck up a conversation with two young Haredi moms, Chava and Leah. They were polite and curious about my faith.

“How religious of a Christian are you?” Chava asked.

“What do you mean?”

“What parts do you keep?”

It struck me that while we Christians think in terms of “What do you believe?”, the Jewish community thinks in terms of “What do you do? (Which laws do you keep?)”

Just then, my friend Rachel joined me. As soon as Rachel told them that she was Jewish but still believed in Yeshua, Leah became very upset: “He is okay for the *goyim* (non-Jews), but Jews don’t believe in Him!”

Chava, however, was more curious. A few weeks later, she ventured to the Messianic center near her home. However, her ultra-Orthodox clothing was easily identifiable as she entered and exited. She determined it was too risky to come again, and we never heard back from her.

*Fictional story, drawing from real encounters*

As Christians read the Bible, we may wonder, *Why don't the Jewish people recognize Yeshua as their promised Messiah?* The answer is complicated. Sadly, some Haredim only know the name of Yeshua as a curse. Others have a vague knowledge of Him; they believe He existed but consider Him to have been a wayward Jew. Moreover, Haredim read the Bible through very different lenses that may hinder them from recognizing Yeshua as Messiah.

**The Lens of Tradition:** In the Middle Ages, fanciful and derogatory stories about Yeshua called “Toledot Yeshu” were circulated, portraying Yeshua as an imposter who led Israel astray to idolatry. Due to their isolation, Haredim may not recognize the historical inaccuracies of these narratives or consider what the biblical text itself says about Yeshua. Many Haredim have not read Isaiah 53.

**The Lens of Halakah (Jewish law):** For the Haredi community, keeping the mitzvot is the way to connect with God and the remedy for sin. Most Haredim view the Messiah as a political-religious figure who will cause the Jewish people to keep the Torah, not as an atoning figure.

**The Lens of the Holocaust:** The worldview of the Haredi community is grounded in the experience of the Holocaust. Many Haredim equate the Holocaust

with Christian Europe, and they are taught the history of “Christian antisemitism.” As a result, many see Christianity as a religion of hatred. Because in the past Haredim were persecuted and forced to convert, they view *goyim* (“the nations,” non-Jews) as being on a mission to annihilate them.

Saul’s encounter with God on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) illustrates the essential nature of divine guidance to reach the Haredim. It took supernatural intervention to change an ardent enemy of The Way into an effective ambassador of the gospel of Messiah. We must pray that God’s supernatural power will once again be released to bring light to the Haredim.

He was pierced for our  
transgressions; he was crushed  
for our iniquities; upon him was  
the chastisement that brought  
us peace, and with his wounds  
we are healed.

Isaiah 53:5



## Prayer Points

● Pray that the Haredim will see the truth about Yeshua (2 Corinthians 3:14–16).

● Pray that Haredim encounter Yeshua themselves through Scripture, dreams, visions, literature, or other means.

● Pray against Satan's efforts to keep the gospel out of Haredi communities (2 Corinthians 4:4).

● Pray that the efforts to reach the Haredim with the gospel would be fruitful.

# Praying Through Jewish Holidays

The Jewish year includes a cycle of holidays that remember different moments of Jewish history and life. Many of these days were prescribed by God in Leviticus 23. They are appointed times to meet with God, and they provide a window into His redemptive plan and care for His people.



*September/October:*

## Rosh Hashanah

(Feast of Trumpets, considered the Jewish New Year)

Pray that the new year would cause many Haredim to recognize that the true King and Savior has come. In the ten “Days of Awe” leading up to Yom Kippur, pray for God’s Spirit to touch their hearts as they reflect on their lives.

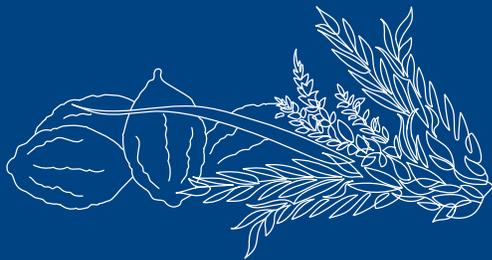


*September/October:*

## Yom Kippur

(Day of Atonement)

As the Haredim reflect on their past year, pray that they would feel their need for the forgiveness and mercy that comes only through Yeshua. Pray that they would receive the Messiah who came to reconcile them to God.

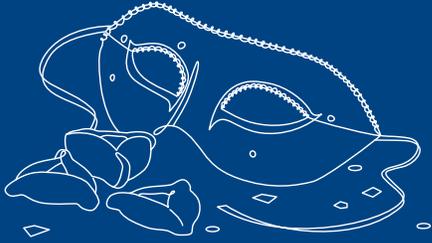


*September/October:*

## Sukkot

(Feast of Tabernacles)

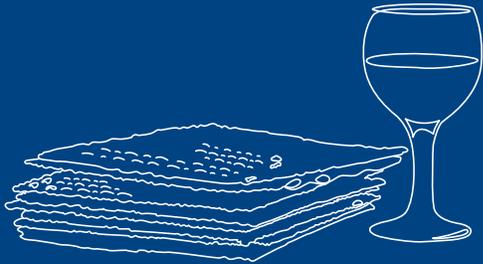
Pray that as the Haredim remember God’s presence and protection over them and their ancestors, God would draw them close to Himself in a new way. Pray that as the new Torah reading cycle begins, Haredim would see new glimpses of God’s love for them and His purposes for their salvation revealed in His Word.



*February/March:*

## Purim

Pray that Haredim would see God's careful, guiding, and protecting hand in their history and believe that He continues to work miracles for them to this day. Pray against continuing antisemitism.



*March/April:*

## Pesach

(Passover)

Pray that Haredim would come to know that God has delivered them from a much greater bondage to sin and death through His Son. Pray that the symbols of Passover would raise questions and point them to their Messiah.



*May/June:*

## Shavuot

(Feast of Weeks)

Pray that, through Yeshua, the Haredim would come to receive God's Spirit, who alone enables us to keep His law (Romans 8:3–4). Pray that those who are curious would have the ability to access a New Testament and read about how God has fulfilled His promises through Yeshua.



*July/August:*

## Tisha B'av

(Destruction of the Temple)

Pray that in a season of mourning, Haredim would turn to God in times of anxiety, uncertainty, or when faced with antisemitism. Pray that they wouldn't doubt God's goodness and care for them. Pray for the protection of the Jewish people.

# Encounters with the Outside World

## Antisemitism

In December 2019, a Hasidic rabbi was hosting a Hanukkah celebration at his house in Monsey, New York, when an attacker rushed in, brandishing a machete. He stabbed multiple people, one of whom (a visiting rabbi) was severely injured and died three months later. The incident took place among a spate of antisemitic attacks in New York, including a stabbing outside a synagogue and a shooting in a kosher supermarket.<sup>21</sup> Antisemitism is real and, unfortunately, it is in our own backyards.

Historically, antisemitism has developed as a response to exaggerated and unfounded fears of Jewish power and influence. Tragically, antisemitic theology and decrees from Christianity and Islam have led to centuries of Jewish persecution. Antisemitism is still faced continually by the global Jewish community, including the Haredim.

The customary clothing worn by the Haredim makes it obvious that they are Jewish, and they are often targeted more than the rest of the Jewish community.<sup>22</sup> In many cities, antisemitism is dramatically on the rise.<sup>23</sup>

Even among the non-Haredi Jewish populations, Haredim are met with distrust and persecution. In Israel, due to their zeal for tradition and ritual, most Haredim refuse army service and rely upon welfare to feed their large families while they study Torah instead of choosing to work. This has bred resentment among secular Israelis toward the Haredim.<sup>24</sup>

Antisemitism has spiritual roots, as the evil one fights against God's steadfast love for Israel. That is why prayer as well as standing with the Jewish people is key to confronting this hatred.

Pray for the peace  
of Jerusalem!  
“May they be secure  
who love you!”

(Psalm 122:6)

21. Azi Paybarah, “Rabbi Dies Three Months After Hanukkah Night Attack,” *The New York Times*.

22. See, for example, Pew Research Center, “Jewish Americans in 2020.”

23. Ethan Geringer-Sameth, “‘We Put Them in the Jewish Community to Protect Our People’: City and State Add Permanent Security Cameras to Combat Rise in Antisemitism,” *Gotham Gazette*; “‘New and Unique Wave of Antisemitism’: 20% of Brits Believe Jews Created Covid-19, Poll Shows,” God TV; Jonathan Greenblatt, “The UK Reports at Least 116 Incidents of Antisemitism over the Last 10 Days—a 600% Rise,” Twitter; Jordan Pike, “Antisemitic Content on TikTok Increases by 912%—Study,” *The Jerusalem Post*.

24. David M. Halbfinger, “Virus Soars Among Ultra-Orthodox Jews as Many Flout Israel’s Rules,” *The New York Times*.

## Prayer Points

Pray for the physical, spiritual, and mental protection of the Haredi community against antisemitic attacks.

Pray for the eyes of Christians to be opened to God's love for the Jewish people and the role they have in His plan. Pray we will stand up against antisemitism.

Pray that world governments and religious leaders would take public stands against antisemitism.



# Internet

**S**hulem Deen describes his conversation with his wife, Gitty, the first time he accessed the internet: “So . . . it’s like a phone, except you type instead of speak?” she asked.

Like a phone? For a second, I wondered: *Was that all it was? But of course it wasn’t.*

“This is a stranger! A random person!”

“Why would you want to speak to a random person?”

There was no way that Gitty would understand. She did not share my curiosity, did not care to learn about the world the way I did. All of a sudden, I was connected to millions with whom I could interact, and soon I discovered a world of people entirely different from anyone I knew. I encountered Jews who ate pork and drove on the Sabbath, Christians who did not appear to be anti-Semitic, Muslims who weren’t terrorists.”

. . .

Gitty, as was to be expected, was growing displeased about the internet in our home.

“The rabbis have banned it,” she took to reminding me.<sup>25</sup>

On May 20, 2012, Citi Field Stadium in New York was a sea of black hats and coats, not worn by baseball fans but by 40,000 Haredi men from all over the world, gathering to denounce the internet and illustrate its dangers. Haredi leaders view the internet as a threat to the community’s insularity and spirituality.

Yet, ironically, even the rally against the internet was broadcast online. With computers and phones becoming increasingly necessary for work, rabbis have made some exceptions, opening access to the internet within the community. Most Haredim have “kosher phones,” which restrict access to the outside world through filters. But secretly, many Haredim also have a regular phone, which they hide from their families and leaders.

The internet, phones, and apps (even those approved by rabbis) have allowed Haredim to engage with the secular world at a safe distance. Many Haredim lead double lives, using the internet with nicknames to explore alternative lifestyles in relative freedom.

The internet provides a unique opportunity to share the gospel. It is difficult to have a productive conversation with Haredim on the street because they fear being questioned by other community members. But the internet allows open-minded Haredim from all over the world to interact with Jesus-followers anonymously and secretly.

**So shall my word be that goes out  
from my mouth; it shall not return to  
me empty, but it shall accomplish that  
which I purpose, and shall succeed in  
the thing for which I sent it.**

(Isaiah 55:11)

25. Deen, *All Who Go Do Not Return*, 221, 223.



## Prayer Points

Pray for safety and protection for Haredim who are using the internet to explore alternative belief systems. Pray that the media content they encounter would challenge them to think. Pray for those who are secretly finding the New Testament online—that they would grow to love Yeshua's words and boldly follow Him.

Pray that efforts to reach Haredi communities online through articles and websites would arouse curiosity in their minds and hearts.

Pray that those of us seeking to reach and serve the Haredim would find new ways to engage with them online.

# Secret Seekers<sup>26</sup>

“When Dini enters the bar, she is dressed modestly: long dark skirt, long-sleeved sweater, ash-blond wig covering her hair. She bids me hello but doesn’t stop to sit down, heading straight to the bathroom instead. When she emerges several minutes later—in tight jeans and a tank top, her real hair jet black, curly, and flying—all eyes are trained in her direction. No one would ever guess she was a Hasidic Jew.

“For as long as she can remember, Dini, the oldest child in a family of ten, wanted information. She wanted to know about what went on in other people’s lives and heads, both in her community and outside of it. . . . For example, when Dini was a little girl, she always wanted to know whether married women in her community missed feeling the breeze in their hair, being stuck wearing scarves and wigs over their shaved heads all the time. . . . And, of course, she wanted to know all about the outside world: what seeing a movie was like, how it felt to wear pants, what went on inside non-Jewish homes, and if they were really so unclean, as she had been told.”<sup>27</sup>

When someone from the community expresses hidden doubts to rabbis, teachers, or parents, these doubts are seen as a problem that needs to be fixed. If the doubter persists in serious questioning or behaviors that stray from the norm, they may be diagnosed with a mental health problem and sent for professional help—or even expelled from the community.

Many Haredim choose to keep their doubts to themselves, remaining in the community but living double lives. These secret seekers’ shift away from ultra-Orthodoxy often begins by testing what they were taught through a small violation of the rules (e.g., eating an unkosher hamburger). When God doesn’t punish them with immediate death, they try another violation.

Many secret seekers eventually abandon their belief in God and some even leave the community. Many others, however, choose to remain in a hidden double life of doubt for the rest of their lives. Lacking education and basic life skills makes it hard for them to leave their close-knit community. Today, some estimate that 10 percent of (former) Haredim have already left the community, perhaps another 10 percent would like to leave, and many others are at the earlier stages of exploration.

A very small number of secret seekers have come to believe in Yeshua while still in the community.

You will seek me and find  
me, when you seek me with  
all your heart.

(Jeremiah 29:13)

26. This section draws upon Ayala Fader, *Hidden Heretics: Jewish Doubt in the Digital Age*.

27. Hella Winston, *Unchosen: The Hidden Lives of Hasidic Rebels*, 74–76.



## Prayer Points

Pray that we as believers would grow in love for the lost and doubting Jewish people. Pray that we would seek and find ways to break down the many barriers to faith among these Haredim. Many Haredim are taught to be cautious of Christians who only care about converting them.

Pray that Haredim who doubt rabbinic traditions would grow toward the truth of the gospel rather than toward the lies of atheism and secularism.

Pray for organizations and ministries that actively reach out to and support those transitioning out of the community. Pray for God to orchestrate divine appointments, allowing these individuals to cross paths with believers who will “see past the costume to the person underneath it.”<sup>28</sup>

# Datlashim/OTD

I met a young woman who had left the Haredi community only a few months prior. She had a friend helping her acclimate to life outside the only community she knew. She had to learn how to fill in the gaps of her education, how to navigate the nuances of the foreign culture around her and even how to drive. I've been amazed by the progress she made in such a short time, even though it will take many years to close the gaps in adapting to her new world. She has traversed the space from not having a high school diploma to earning a scholarship at a four-year university! She is gaining confidence in her intelligence and abilities. It's a long road to travel with challenges in the journey ahead but she is on a hopeful trajectory forward.

*Testimony from a ministry partner*

Every year, hundreds of Haredim choose to leave their community behind. Some desire greater knowledge or opportunity, while others are motivated by experiences of repression, oppression, or past pain.<sup>29</sup> In fact, a recent survey of Israeli Jews concluded that approximately 10% of those who grew up Haredi end up leaving their community.<sup>30</sup> In North America, these Jews are called "OTD," short for "Off the *Derech* (path)," while in Israel they are called *yotzim* or *datlashim*, designating people who have left religious life. Many become secular, while others see themselves as agnostic or culturally Jewish or choose to follow a less stringent form of Judaism.

The transition datlashim make is difficult. Often, they are rejected by family and may lose custody of any children. They also lack the skills and socialization required to thrive in the outside world. Consider Sarah, who began working in a women's clothing store. "She was unfamiliar with the little gestures and manners that smoothed everyday interactions between strangers," like how to greet strangers politely or the courtesy of opening the door for the next person.<sup>31</sup>

Coming from a close-knit community where one's needs are provided for, datlashim may find themselves impoverished, lonely, vulnerable, and experiencing severe mental strain. Some return to the Haredi community, some end up on drugs, and, tragically, there have been instances of suicide. Shulem Deen, who himself went OTD, believes, "Members of our ex-Haredi community are at an elevated risk for suicide."<sup>32</sup>

Since they live within wider society, OTD Jews are easier to reach. We long to see Christians come alongside them to provide practical support, training, and friendship.

**He heals the brokenhearted  
and binds up their wounds.**

(Psalm 147:3)

29. See "Who Are the Yotzim," Hillel.

30. Dan Ben-David, "Doing (Learning) the Math in Israel: Conflicting Demographic Trends and the Core Curriculum," Shores Institute.

31. Davidman, *Becoming Un-Orthodox: Stories of Ex-Hasidic Jews*, 173–4.

32. Shulem Deen, "What Drives Former Haredim to Suicide? And What Can We Do to Stop It?," *Haaretz*.



## Prayer Points

Pray that datlashim will receive the support they need, and that Christians will reach out and help those in the process of leaving.

Pray that the Christian community will become a welcoming new “home” for datlashim, who have lost their community.

Pray against the high rates of suicide among datlashim.

Pray for divine appointments to meet datlashim who are open to conversation, struggling with daily needs, or despairing.

# Challenges for Haredi Believers in Yeshua

**W**hen Natan\* told his wife that he believed in Yeshua, she kicked him out of the house and fought to remove his custody of their children. Natan hoped his parents might respond better, but they shouted that he was better off dead than a traitor.

Natan was only twenty-six, and in a moment his world was turned upside down. He couldn't see his family and had no salary or home. His Christian friend, Kevin, helped find him a place to stay and a job, but Natan's English was poor and he struggled to hold a job. Coming from a community where those in need were assisted by charity, Natan wondered why his new church friends didn't bring him groceries or help him with every need.

Natan did love Yeshua, but in his loneliness and isolation, he easily slipped into bad habits. Kevin explained that he didn't have to earn God's forgiveness, but Natan still felt like he had to do good deeds to win back God's favor.

*Based on a composite of true stories*

Haredim who come to faith in Yeshua face agonizing challenges. A Haredi person who admits such faith will likely be ostracized by the community, losing their support system, livelihood, close-knit community, and even family. They then face the daunting challenge of restarting their life in the outside world with limited employable skills, contacts, and language abilities.

Many Haredi parents have a funeral for the one who came to faith. There are even stories of Haredi believers who were subject to physical or psychological abuse, including deprogramming, kidnapping, or even an attempted murder by parents. As a result, Haredi believers have struggled with recurring night terrors, hallucinations, emotional breakdowns, self-harm, or thoughts of suicide. Some give up on their faith altogether.

Thankfully, such intense abuse is now less common than in previous generations. Now, the Haredi community sometimes seeks to leave the door open for those who have "left" to return.

Haredim who come to faith in Yeshua often choose to remain as hidden believers within the Haredi community. One believer hid his faith to avoid losing his close relationship with his children and his nearly 100 grandchildren. Yet this choice also comes with the risk and stress of leading a double life. Hidden believers often lack access to the New Testament, Christian community, or discipleship because they fear being found out or betrayed.

Haredi believers also speak of a kind of spiritual loss. One Hasidic believer used to question his faith in Yeshua every year at the High Holidays because the celebration of the festivals was so beautiful, and he didn't think anything in Christianity could replicate that sweetness. Haredi believers struggle with the transition from fellowship and deep study multiple times a day to one or two times a week.

**For my father and my  
mother have forsaken me,  
but the Lord will take me in.**

(Psalm 27:10)



## Prayer Points

Pray for the protection of Haredi believers in Yeshua—physically and spiritually. Pray that God will guard and sustain their faith under pressure, so that their “faith may not fail” (Luke 22:32). Pray that the Lord will use them to reach their people.

Pray for Christians to help Haredi believers who leave the community by providing practical support, provision, and friendship. Pray that Christians who are ministering to Haredi believers, especially hidden ones, will have sensitivity and wisdom.

Pray for Yiddish speakers who can share the gospel in the Haredim’s mother tongue.

Pray for hidden believers to find fellowship with other followers of Yeshua.



# A Courageous Believer in Yeshua

When I walked into Sarah's\* home, she was excited to meet me. She was an elderly woman in poor health, and I had come to help her. From our first visit, it felt like I was with family. After I tended to some of her immediate needs, she wanted to sit down and learn with me. And then she told me some of her story.

Sarah shared with me that several years ago, her husband would come home with forbidden books and literature about Yeshua. Whenever she would find these pamphlets, she tore them up into pieces, cursed and spit on them, and then threw them into the garbage. After a few years, overcome by curiosity, she peeked at the literature content before destroying it. She began to believe what she was reading! She told her husband what was happening, and he simply nodded his head.

**Sarah told me that she had a strong belief that Yeshua was the Messiah promised to Israel, but she knew very little about Him.** With 9 children, 53 grandchildren, and failing health, she was not able to read on her own or meet others who shared her faith. She was a hidden believer in Yeshua right in the middle of the Haredi community—surrounded by people, yet very much alone; surrounded by books, but too weak to read them.

As we read the Gospel of John together, Sarah nodded her head in agreement and smiled. She was hungry to learn and asked many questions. As we read Yeshua's first miracle of turning water into wine, Yeshua's response to his mother baffled Sarah. She exclaimed, "How could a good Jewish boy talk to his mother like that?" I was enlightened by her fresh perspective as she learned and benefitted from my Bible knowledge and education.

I wish that I could continue my studies with Sarah, but she passed away and is in eternity with her King. May her name and memory be a blessing—her heritage and legacy will live on.

*Testimony from a ministry partner*

# Ministry to the Haredi Community

## History of Ministry to the Haredi Community

**M**odern Jewish missions began in the 18th century and gained momentum during the 19th at a time when most Jewish people lived in Europe. Outreach to Jewish people, centered in the larger European cities, included Bible distribution, conversations, open-air preaching, the establishment of mission buildings, and the development of Yiddish literature. Jewish people did come to faith, though how many of these were Orthodox is not certain.

Tragically, the Holocaust decimated Jewish life in much of Europe. Those who survived regrouped in America and Israel.

Today, outreach is mainly conducted online or through personal one-on-one conversation. The Haredi community as a whole remains strongly opposed to the gospel, but new opportunities have arisen. It is incredibly exciting to see how the Lord is bringing together people from different ministries, cities, and countries with a shared heart and renewed commitment to reach the Haredim with the gospel. The harvest is plentiful, and we know that God remains exalted over all.

**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**

(Acts 1:8)



## Prayer Points

Pray for a fresh working of God within the Haredi community, opening doors that no one can shut (Revelation 3:7).

Pray that those reaching out to the Haredi community would have wisdom and insight into what God is doing. Pray for new and effective strategies to share the love of Messiah with Haredim.

Pray for more gospel engagement online and that Haredim who want to explore new ideas would be able and willing to engage with the gospel.

Pray for God to raise up more witnesses with a commitment to reach the the Haredim (Matthew 9:37–38).

# Yiddish Translation of the Bible

**L**evi\* is a young man who was raised in a very strict and insular Hasidic community. He stopped being observant several years ago yet still holds to belief in God and continues to follow many of the traditions he was raised with. Levi was given a New Testament in Yiddish, and he began to read it on the spot. He read from Matthew 11:28–30: “Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Levi said, “Wow, I didn’t know such a thing existed!” He was quite moved by what he read and was surprised to find Yeshua’s words in Yiddish.

*A true story from a ministry partner*

Several years ago, it became apparent that there were insufficient gospel materials in Yiddish, the everyday spoken language of the Haredim. One young man kept visiting a Messianic center asking if someone could explain the gospel to him in Yiddish. The growing community and growing interest strengthened our conviction that we must develop Yiddish gospel materials.

Since then, the Lord has opened doors and forged connections to make this vision come to life. For example, assistance has come from a young Jewish believer with an ultra-Orthodox background who is fluent in Yiddish. Faithful laborers have developed the following materials:

- A Yiddish version of the Jesus film
- A Hebrew-Yiddish edition of the book of Hebrews resembling an ultra-Orthodox prayer book, which can easily be put into a pocket without being noticed
- Two Hebrew-Yiddish websites (in progress)
- A digitized and searchable version of the Yiddish text of the New Testament
- A Yiddish edition of the Gospel of Matthew with several Messianic Psalms, which also resembles a prayer book

Today, ministry partners are in the process of revising the Yiddish text of the New Testament with updated language and explanatory footnotes. The Yiddish New Testament is essential for the Haredim to hear about the hope of Yeshua.

**Send out your light and your  
truth; let them lead me; let  
them bring me to your holy hill  
and to your dwelling!**

(Psalm 43:3)

## Prayer Points

Pray for the Jewish believer with a Haredi background who is revising the Yiddish text to have insight and accuracy in his translation.

Pray for God to work through the Yiddish New Testament website ([yiddishnewtestament.org](http://yiddishnewtestament.org)). Pray that many will be inclined to read and receive the life-changing message of the gospel.

Pray through the verse Romans 10:14: "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?"

Pray that Yiddish gospel materials would reach Haredi communities and pray for Yiddish-speaking witnesses.



# Praying for Spiritual Breakthrough with the Haredim: A Non-Jewish Perspective

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

(1 John 5:14–15)

J. O. Fraser of the China Inland Mission realized he was battling the forces of spiritual darkness and the battle could only be won through prayer. He enlisted groups of people back home in England to pray for him and for a spiritual breakthrough among the Lisu people.

After about three years of focused prayer, the Lord began to give the harvest as hundreds and then thousands of Lisu began to respond to the gospel. From Fraser's life and work, we realized that to reach the unreached, prayer *is* the work.

Over the years, I have been involved in praying for unreached people groups in the US, Canada, and overseas. A decade ago, God called me to begin praying for the Jewish people. I started researching

Jewish groups in the NYC area who had yet to be reached with the gospel, specifically the Haredim. As we prayed, we saw God working to open doors for the Haredim to hear the gospel.

A quote from Russell Elliott has encouraged me to pray for the Haredim: "There is a divine principle in regard to prayer which runs all through the Scriptures. It is that God is pleased to unite His people with Himself in whatever He is about to do. He first of all leads them to pray, and then does what He intends in answer to their prayers." When God stirs us up to pray for a specific group, it is because He is about to do something with that group.

*Written by a Christian*

## Prayer Points

Pray that the Holy Spirit would reveal the truth of the gospel to the Haredim (John 14:16–17; 16:13–14). Pray that this would lead the Haredim to worship the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:23–24).

Pray that the Haredim, even the rabbis and spiritual leaders in the community, would see that Yeshua is their Messiah (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18–19; 2 Corinthians 3:15–17).

Pray that Christians would have guidance in praying for the Haredim and that they would pray boldly (Romans 8:26–27; Hebrews 4:16). Pray for more laborers in the field to reap the harvest (Matthew 9:37–38).





# Conclusion

## The Journey Continues

**W**hile Haredim are often portrayed as uniform and isolated, our experience with the community has shown us that they are a diverse group of people who are gentle and humble. We have seen firsthand the zeal that the Haredim have for God and for obedience to the Law, and their commitment to family and community. All these characteristics have motivated us to share the good news of the gospel with them.

Although we identify with the Haredim's love of the Torah, we realize that we are still outsiders to their way of life. Yet we must remember that underneath their foreign exterior, Haredim are people like all of us, facing the same joys and troubles that we do and in need of the same Savior.

Many Haredim are looking for a deeper relationship with God and are constantly anticipating redemption. God longs to draw these individuals to Himself. It is our heart to provide safe opportunities for Haredim to discover Yeshua.

**We are incredibly thankful that you have chosen to partner with us in this important mission by participating in the foundational work of prayer. Your faith-filled prayers are key to unlocking the door to this closed community. Please continue to pray with us—the journey may be long, but it will be filled with grace.**

Lisa Weisbaum and the team

# Next Steps On Your Prayer Journey

Thank you for joining us on this prayer journey for the Haredim, taking the time to grow in your understanding and love. If you wish to continue the journey, here are some resources to aid you. Your prayers will continue to be critical in the days ahead!

## Books:

*Boychiks in the Hood: Travels in the Hasidic Underground* by Robert Eisenberg

*All Who Go Do Not Return: A Memoir* by Shulem Deen

*Becoming Un-Orthodox: Stories of Ex-Hasidic Jews* by Lynn Davidman

*The Pious Ones: The World of Hasidim and Their Battles with America* by Joseph Berger

*Defenders of the Faith: Inside Ultra-Orthodox Jewry* by Samuel Heilman

## Videos:

[A Life Apart: Hasidism in America](#) (1997)

[Shtisel](#) (2013)

[God Forbid](#) (2011)

Peter Santenello's YouTube series on Hasidic Jews (<https://rb.gy/mulllb>)

## Resources:

Footsteps Organization: <https://footstepsorg.org/>

Global Gates: <https://globalgates.info/unreached-people-groups-priority-matrix/>

UPG North America: <https://upgnorthamerica.com/people-group/haredim-in-north-america/>

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