

Excerpt from EndTheMadness Guide to the Shidduch World

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The EndTheMadness Label Lexicon

In recognition of the fact that labels are deeply entrenched in the collective psyche of our community and that many people will insist on using them no matter how cogent the reasons otherwise, we have created a lexicon to help label-users understand each other. We offer this lexicon as a service to the community and for the entertainment of those who know better.

At EndTheMadness we believe subtle sarcasm and exaggeration are wonderful tools for highlighting absurdity and challenging preconceived notions in ways corporate politeness cannot. In other words, don't think for one moment that we are serious about supporting the usage of labels. It's all a ruse.

Charedi

Literal definition is one who "trembles" before God. This label is meant to imply strict adherence to all details of the Torah. However, it is absolutely forbidden to apply this label to anyone who does not adhere to certain rigid social expectations, regardless of his level of piety. Hence, social expectations are more important to Charedim than piety.

For men this includes the following: Wearing a black hat as often as possible (the more often, the more Charedi), white dress shirt, black pants, and dress shoes. In Charedi communities that permit the wearing of ties, this is the main expression of individuality in dress (but don't get carried away with it). Black yarmulke only (a chic Charedi will have the yarmulke sliding out the back of his hat just to prove that he is wearing it, even though the yarmulke is normally worn on top of the head). Please note that every aspect of one's appearance down to the watch, cufflinks, and haircut is covered in the social code, but this is a lexicon, not an encyclopedia.

The main criteria for identifying with the Charedi community (which can be highly advantageous for purposes of shidduchim or marketing) is to wear a black hat. People who wish to enter this community officially cross the line when they perform this rite of passage. (It has therefore become customary for boys to begin wearing a black hat for the first time when they become Bar Mitzva, even if the hat looks like a spaceship swallowing up their tiny head.) A proper Charedi man would sooner enter shul without his Tallis and Tefillin than without his hat. (Some Chassidic sects distinguish themselves with non-black yarmulkes and unusual hats, but Chassidim can get away with lots of weird things that regular Charedim cannot.)

Of course, to be a true Charedi includes not just the hat, but the programming beneath it. A true Charedi believes that he is an authentic replica of a holy Jew from the shtetl, where the Torah was given. Those who do not dress and think like him are in the employ of Satan, or like a child who has been kidnapped by the *goyim* and doesn't know any better. They are to be pitied, feared, and scorned.

A true Charedi attaches himself to a rabbi who is presumed to be saintly and incapable of error. The rabbi is to be consulted for all matters, and his words considered prophecy. They refer to this as

“Da’as Torah.” In reality, “Da’as Torah” is a party line and a propaganda tool, for Charedim smoke without shame, surf the Internet, and pretty much do whatever they want in their private lives regardless of rabbinic proclamations. Charedim have no shortage of opinions and personal practices that they have not cleared with “Da’as Torah.” However, a true Charedi knows to say the right thing, fall into line at the right time, and always keep up the appearance of a holy, trembling Jew.

In matters of Jewish law a true Charedi considers any leniency, no matter how appropriate and well-supported, to be a compromise. Charedim do not compromise. Hence, Charedim will always take the strictest possible approach to everything, and find no greater joy than implementing a new way to be strict and telling others about it.

There are many splinter groups under the general umbrella of Charedim and they strive with one another for pre-eminence in the Charedi world. The groups distinguish themselves primarily by differences in how they wear their hat, hairstyles, and other modes of dress, and by rival kashrus organizations. These details may seem trivial to the uninitiated, but true Charedim understand that they make all the difference.

Other marks of distinction:

- Charedim typically scorn education and scientific knowledge as the domain of heretics, yet delight in picking up random bits of information that the secular world knew years ago.
- Charedim scorn working for a living as beneath holy protectors of the Torah such as them and profess to idealize a life of poverty. One who works for a living is derided as “not cut out for learning.” In spite of this, Charedim worship money, particularly when it comes to shidduchim.
- Charedim scorn the State of Israel because they cannot legitimize a Jewish State that is not controlled by them.
- Charedim have mastered the art of deriding and even entirely disqualifying non-Charedim without explicitly stating that Charedim are the only legitimate expression of Judaism (which they do believe). For example, they will say:
 - “All the Gedolim...” when they refer exclusively to Charedi rabbis, thus implying that only a Charedi can be a Gadol. (For example, if asked why he wears a black hat a Charedi will likely say “All the Gedolim wear a black hat,” when he would never accept as a Gadol anyone who doesn’t wear one.) Indeed, Charedim do not place any value on the Torah teachings or opinions of rabbis who do not identify as Charedi. A monk is just as significant.
 - “The Yeshiva world...” when they refer exclusively to Charedi yeshivas.
 - “The frum world...” when they refer exclusively to Charedi society.
 - “A frum Jew...” when they refer to exclusively to a Charedi Jew.
 - “A Torah home...” when they refer exclusively to a Charedi home.
- Charedim engage in censorship and historical revision to cover up any evidence that Charedim used to be more open-minded than they are today. Evidence that a Charedi Gadol is imperfect or ever said or did anything that is inconsistent with Charedi policy is given similar treatment. Charedi policy does not bend for truth; truth gives way to Charedi policy.

Modern Orthodox

An oxymoron. The Modern Orthodox believe that the Torah expects one to be “modern,” yet “Orthodox” alone does not suffice for them.

The Modern Orthodox are infatuated with trying to define what it means to be Modern Orthodox and why it is so virtuous. They write entire books on the subject, bring together panels of academics to discuss it, and obsess over “the future of Modern Orthodoxy.” It seems there is something greater here that they are trying to protect, greater than Judaism itself, than Torah itself. One can only hope they figure out what this *is* exactly.

We hear dire warnings that Modern Orthodoxy is “shifting to the right,” or “shifting to the left,” or that it is disappearing altogether. The Modern Orthodox struggle with a communal identity crisis, a dichotomy, a *weltanschauung* of its own *weltanschauung*, *mutatis mutandis*, or perhaps not. The Modern Orthodox are confused about who they are, and they wouldn’t have it any other way. It’s part of what it means to be Modern Orthodox.

They may struggle to define themselves, but we are happy to do it for them.

Whereas a Charedi man who “makes it” is a Gadol Hador with “Da’as Torah,” a Modern Orthodox man who “makes it” is a Rabbi Doctor who publishes scholarly articles in academic journals. When teaching Torah he must make reference to numerous secular sources to show that he is enlightened. Spiritual relevance is unnecessary and even discouraged. Modern Orthodox are leery of spirituality, favoring intellectualism, and indeed are comfortable with spirituality only when it comes to intellectualizing it. They believe scholarly analysis of Judaism is the same as Torah study, if not preferable.

Not surprisingly, the Modern Orthodox community tends to be short on spirituality. They create think tanks to publish scholarly articles on the topic as we would expect them to do.

But the truth is, as we noted before, that they are leery of spirituality. Spirituality threatens much of what the Modern Orthodox strive for in this world: the snooty educational credentials, the impressive career, the big bucks, the fancy home in the suburbs, the luxury car, expensive vacations. This is why Modern Orthodoxy is constantly shifting this way or that. Some become more spiritual —“shift to the right”—and ultimately become Charedi, who successfully promote themselves as spiritual even if it’s mostly for show. Many others do like the *goyim* do, retaining only marginal affiliation to a proper Torah lifestyle. It is common for Modern Orthodox people to swing back and forth, unable to find a clear path.

The Modern Orthodox believe their children should be saturated with television, movies, culture, and all the secular world has to offer. Filters are bad. That’s what the Charedim do, after all, they shut everything out. They believe their children should be saturated with the secular world because it will make them better Jews.

They believe constant entertainment is a good thing because, after all, the Torah allows for recreation to help one focus. Their children play sports on Shabbos and wear yarmulkes that demonstrate their allegiance to professional sports teams. Their educators have to be “cool” and “with it” to make Torah “interesting” and “relevant,” otherwise they don’t stand a chance. Modern Orthodox kids have no interest in things that aren’t constantly fun. (Interesting how all that recreation helps them focus.)

They believe in going on exotic vacations all over the world because Rabbi Hirsch wanted to see the Alps to admire the wonders of God’s creation. Most Modern Orthodox Jews never read anything by Rabbi Hirsch, but they consider themselves his followers because they want to have great careers and travel the world.

Modern Orthodox schools believe in mission statements, particularly ones that mention “excellence,” “supporting Zionism” (mainly by vacationing in Israel periodically and being buried there), and “the highest standards of Torah and secular education.” These schools feature all manner of sports teams and leagues, debate teams, model U.N., and numerous other clubs to facilitate entrance into the finest secular colleges and put students on the fast track to corporate success. But kids who want to immerse themselves in Torah study frighten their parents.

Some Modern Orthodox high schools even have a prom. Modern Orthodox parents figure their kids will fool around anyway, so best to have some supervision. The year in Israel will straighten them out.

Ah, the year in Israel. This has become a rite of passage in the Modern Orthodox world. The more intellectual Modern Orthodox go to intellectual yeshivas to fret over things on a high level. The more assimilated Modern Orthodox spend a year drinking, playing sports, hanging out with the opposite sex, and having assorted other adventures. At some point during the year they will “get serious” and learn some Torah to justify the year, before going back to college and resuming their merry path. Others will “frum out” and become pseudo-Charedim, quasi-Charedim, or all-out Charedim, in which case they will transfer to a Charedi yeshiva and no longer eat in their parents’ home.

The Modern Orthodox community has yet to decide if they are more afraid of their children becoming hedonists or Charedim. Ultimately they count on the first year in college straightening them out from the year in Israel, which was supposed to straighten them out from their high school years.

Modern Orthodox institutions are run like corporations, down to the jargon and press releases. Whereas Charedi politicians will openly attack one another, Modern Orthodox institutions engage in genteel acts of betrayal. Platitudes and a smile always accompany the knife in the back. Leaders of Modern Orthodox institutions earn status points by being photographed with famous people and articulately saying nothing of substance.

Modern Orthodox rabbis do not have “Da’as Torah.” Consequently, they are not allowed to tell anyone or the community what to do. They are best off speaking about problems elsewhere or giving vague moral messages that everyone can agree with and do not come across as threatening. Mussar is allowed no more than once or twice a year, and even that must be toned down. Modern Orthodox rabbis are best off being “one of the boys” with just enough distance (such as Charedi-style dress) to maintain a rabbinic posture. They basically serve as the shul’s version of a trophy wife.

Charedi rabbis can teach in Modern Orthodox institutions, but not vice versa. Charedim can promote Charedi stuff in Modern Orthodox communities and media, but not vice versa. Charedi rabbis can promise miraculous salvations for supporting their institutions, but Modern Orthodox rabbis are not endowed with these powers. Indeed, Modern Orthodox people give financial support to Charedi institutions as a way to buy their way into heaven—this is not reciprocated, of course. The Modern Orthodox talk a good game, but ultimately do not believe in themselves and their way of life.

Not surprisingly, Modern Orthodox rabbis often suffer from a severe inferiority complex, and defer to Charedi rabbis who do not recognize them as legitimate. Some Modern Orthodox rabbis overcompensate and try to turn the tables, but they do not get very far. This is because the Modern Orthodox community as a whole suffers from an inferiority complex, a lack of identity, a lack of direction, a lack of leadership, and a lack of substance.

They know all this and they fret over it, but they wouldn’t have it any other way. They see the only alternatives as abandoning religious observance altogether or becoming Charedi, and they aren’t prepared to go in either direction. So they just muddle along, enjoy their modernity, and try not to worry too much about it all.

Dati Leumi

This is Israel's version of Modern Orthodoxy, complete with oxymoron. They believe being "nationalistic" is part and parcel of being "Dati," yet calling themselves "Dati" alone doesn't suffice.

The Dati Leumi distinguish themselves by wearing big knitted yarmulkes and fully embracing everything Israel to overcompensate for the Charedi delegitimizing of everything Israel. The Dati Leumi do not suffer from the same inferiority complex toward Charedim as do the Modern Orthodox, and are often outspoken critics of Charedim. But they still suffer from a lack of organization, lack of unity, and a lack of direction. They are also not taken very seriously by secular Jews; secular Jews who want more religion go to the Charedim, and secular Jews who scorn religion take advantage of the Dati Leumi's fear of alienating them. The Dati Leumi want to be loved by everyone and wind up being used and discarded.

Chardal

A cute acronym for Charedi Dati Leumi, which is an oxymoron extraordinaire.

Chardal Jews believe themselves to be good Charedim without being tainted by the evils of Modern Orthodoxy. True Charedim don't buy it, so Chardal Jews have it pretty rough.

Modern Orthodox Machmir

This label was created only recently, and is also an oxymoron extraordinaire. For if Modern Orthodox is meant to imply "not so strict" and Machmir implies "taking the strict approach," we have quite a schizophrenic on our hands.

We think those who apply this label to themselves mean to say that they are worldly, educated, and open-minded, but also completely committed to halacha. If that is the case, this is a poor choice of labels. As soon as you put "modern" into the mix, you get implications of laxity, hedonism, and identity crisis, and "machmir" does not sufficiently balance this. In addition, the Torah scorns one who is categorically "machmir." Total commitment to halacha is not being "machmir"; it is the minimum expected of every Jew.

Consequently, instead of disassociating themselves from the "not so serious" aspects of Modern Orthodoxy, the Modern Orthodox Machmir confirm themselves as confused and desperate to be taken seriously without becoming Charedi.

Chardal Jews want to be considered open-minded without being considered "Modern," and Modern Orthodox Machmir Jews want to be considered serious without being considered "Charedi." Hence, while their ideologies and goals may appear strikingly similar, they cannot possibly marry one another.

Modern Orthodox Liberal

Jews who live like Goyim but want to be considered "religious." It is unclear who would actually refer to himself by this label. Modern Orthodox hedonists refer to themselves simply as Modern Orthodox. It seems this label was created as the opposite side of the coin for Modern Orthodox Machmir, presumably so the Machmir types can look down on the rest of the Modern Orthodox much as Charedim do to them.

Modern Orthodox Centrist

This is a popular new label among Modern Orthodox who don't want to be thought of as Machmir or liberal. The problem is that the people who use this label are the ones who struggle the most to define Modern Orthodoxy, without the "Centrist" further complicating things.

What does it mean to be in the center? Doesn't everyone believe himself to be in the center and those who don't resemble him to be an extremist one way or the other? If Modern Orthodoxy has shifted to the right, is the Centrist movement a breakaway from Modern Orthodoxy, or vice versa? Since "the center" is so subjective, does it even mean anything at all? If so, who gets to define where the center is, or where it should be?

If Modern Orthodox Centrist just sounds good but doesn't really mean anything, it is no wonder that it is a Modern Orthodox invention.

New Charedim

These Charedim wear blue shirts instead of white and work for a living. But they are still Charedim! And they are not Chardal! And they are definitely not Modern Orthodox! And they are New Charedim, not Old Charedim, even though Charedim used to wear blue shirts! And they are not like Charedim who wear white shirts and work for a living!

Got it? Good.

Yeshivish

Not yet Charedi but hopes to become Charedi someday. After all, Charedi yeshiva students are Charedim. So who are Yeshivish? People who don't come from Charedi families, but idealize Charedim and hope to become Charedi. What holds them back? They need to find someone to pay the bills. True Charedim already have a sponsor or have worked something out. Yeshivish people hedge their bets, though they would never admit it.

Yeshivish Modern

This label refers to Modern Orthodox people who are Charedi wannabes, typically yeshiva students who want to switch back and forth according to the needs of the moment. They will dress like Charedim, talk like Charedim, and pretend to think like Charedim, but when they are out with their friends they become Modern Orthodox. They believe they can be super frum and also have all the fun.

Yeshivish Modern should not be confused with Modern Orthodox Machmir. The former pretend to be Charedi and even believe themselves to be Charedi, whereas the latter forfeit the perks of pseudo-Charedi association in favor of slightly more integrity—as much as confused caricatures can have integrity.

Modern Yeshivish

This refers to Charedim who want to be normal, for God's sake. Bad move. They think that when they call themselves Modern the listener will take it in a positive vein, a Charedi who is cool, "up

with the times,” not a psycho-religious nut. But “Modern” is a loaded word in Charedi circles, a veritable kiss of death.

Hence, we can best define Modern Yeshivish as someone who is too reckless to be up with the times on labels, and that is neither Modern nor Yeshivish. They learn this soon enough and typically retreat back to full-fledged Charedi.

Carlebachian

A hippy. Someone who wants the benefits of being Chassidish without a Rebbe, religious distinctions, presumption of Torah scholarship, presumption of saintliness, or need to wear the *levush*. A little Kabbalah, something to drink or smoke, and some good jazz is all it takes. Dude!