

Faith Guides for Higher Education

Judaism



A Guide to Judaism

Lavinia Cohn-Sherbok



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PREFACE TO THE FAITH GUIDE SERIES

In the 2001 National Census, over 70% of the UK population identified themselves as belonging to a religious community; and the issue of religion is rarely out of the news, often being discussed in relation to highly-charged controversy and emotion. There is often a lack of understanding as to what a religion is, and what it means to be a member (or not) of a specific faith group. Confusion can result in all walks of life and higher education (HE) is not exempt from this. Indeed, institutions are increasingly, and with varying degrees and different levels of success, seeking to respond to and understand specific faith requirements, as they relate (or not) to particular areas of higher education, in continually changing contexts. This series of Faith Guides from the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies will not necessarily solve all the controversies or confusion, but may bring some answers to some of these basic questions, through providing individuals, departments, and institutions with resource information on issues relating to teaching people of faith in a higher education environment.

The introduction of the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 suggested a broader social commitment in the UK to the creation of culturally inclusive places of work. Following their introduction, not only is there an ethical and moral duty to consciously avoid discrimination on the basis of religion and belief, but there is now a statutory duty. Both the Home Office and the Department for International Development have expressed their commitment towards working more closely with faith communities and encouraging interfaith dialogue. All these developments suggest a need for staff in UK higher education institutions to develop the skills and knowledge that reflect this growing concern for cultural and religious literacy in British society. This series offers an accessible route into this area of knowledge. By providing concise guides, all those involved in the higher education academic process have an opportunity to quickly acquire a basic awareness of issues, in a format as free from jargon as possible.

The Subject Centre has brought together a broad range of subject specialists who can draw upon their personal experiences of and interactions with specific faith groups and individuals, acquired through their own academic work, and in some cases utilising personal experiences as members of a particular tradition. The guides detail students' feelings about modern life on campus; information obtained through the authors' longstanding teaching experience and, in some cases, informal focus groups set up to garner student opinion.

The rich variety of issues contained in this series of guides acknowledges substantial diversity within and between faith groups, in particular in relation to identity issues and ideas about what it means to be religious. The format for each guide has some stress on a commonality of themes, but has allowed authors the opportunity to explore themes that are individual and specific

to a particular world view. Editing this series has raised some interesting issues, and it is acknowledged that it is not possible to accommodate perspectives as varied as Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism in the same format—and that there are disparate (and occasionally conflicting) perspectives within diverse faiths, not all of which can be referred to within a series of concise guides. This series is not intended to be a ‘politically correct’ tool, but seeks instead to support the enrichment of the teaching and learning experience for all those engaged within the higher education sector. It is based on the idea of encouraging awareness and understanding of the cultural and religious dynamics of student experience in higher education, with a view to supporting the development and sharing of good practice.

In tackling these concerns, the guides seek to provide a basic introduction to religious world views, before tackling some general issues associated with students and staff from specific faith backgrounds, and their interactions in the higher education sector. It also provides advice on where to go for further information. The series will thereby save the reader time and effort in locating significant source material and advice on higher education issues associated with faith communities and individuals.

This series will be expanded to accommodate further religious (and other) world views, including some of those related to the religions contained in the initial set of titles, and updates to the present volumes will also be provided in due course—so feedback to the present series would be particularly welcomed. The editor is grateful for the input of all the authors in the evolution of this series, and to members of the Subject Centre and its Advisory Board who provided significant contributions at every stage of the production process.

All web links listed in this guide were correct and verified at the time of publication.

Further information and resources on issues relating to diversity can be found on our website at:

<http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/themes/diversity/index.html>

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NOTES ON THE AUTHOR

Lavinia Cohn-Sherbok is co-author of several books, including *The Encyclopedia of Judaism and Christianity*, (Abingdon Press, 2005), *A Short Introduction to Judaism* (Oneworld, 1997), and *A Popular Dictionary of Judaism* (NTC, 1997), and author of *A History of Jewish Civilization* (Booksales Inc., 1997). She was formerly headmistress of West Heath School.

I. INTRODUCING JUDAISM

JEWISH ORIGINS AND CORE BELIEFS

The Jewish people believe themselves to be descended from a Semitic tribe that originated in the land of Canaan. This is normally understood to be an extensive area in the Middle East encompassing most of modern Israel, Jordan and Syria. In particular they believe that their earliest ancestor was Abraham, the leader of a nomadic tribe who travelled as a herder and trader through the area. Their early history is enshrined in the stories and legends which are found in the Scriptures (known by Christians as the Old Testament). According to these, Abraham was promised that he would become the father of a great nation and that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth and the sand on the seashore. Considering that he was elderly at the time and had no children, it was a remarkable act of faith that Abraham believed in the promise. The Hebrew Scriptures are understood by the Jewish people as a record (possibly mythical, possibly historical) of how the promise came true and how God guided the Jews to their destiny.

It must also be remembered that the Scriptures promise that the Jews would be a great people and the rightful owners of the Land of Canaan. The Book of Genesis records that Abraham's grandson, Jacob, also known as Israel, had twelve sons who were to become the ancestors of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. They were enslaved in Egypt, and the Book of Exodus records how they were liberated under the leadership of Moses. For many years they wandered in the wilderness and it was during this time that God is said to have given Moses the Torah. (Moses is regarded as the most divinely inspired of all the prophets. God is said to have spoken to him face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.) Then, after Moses's death, the tribes were eventually to conquer the Promised Land with God's help. These stories are all enshrined in the Scriptures, in the Word of God. So for the vast majority of religious Jews, both loyalty to the Zionist cause and to the political state of Israel is a definite religious duty.

These Scriptures, particularly the first five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) also contain the laws which are the basis of the Jewish way of life. Every week a section from these five books (known collectively as the **Torah** or **Pentateuch**) is read in the Jewish place of worship, the synagogue. The whole cycle of readings takes a year. The Scroll of the Torah, which is always hand-written by a scribe and which must be perfect, is the most sacred object in the synagogue. This is because the message enshrined in the Pentateuch is regarded as the foundation of the entire religion. Great ceremony is made of the taking of the sacred scroll from its resting place, uncovering it, reading from it, winding it up and putting it away again.

Judaism

Over the years, these texts have been discussed, developed and interpreted. Because the text is so sacred, its meaning must be teased out precisely. This is a never-ending task. Thus, debate and study remains an integral part of Jewish life. The stories have been explained and interpreted in countless ways. They are the source and inspiration for a myriad of sermons, commentaries and discourses. Similarly, the laws have been refined and catalogued, rehearsed and applied to endlessly differing situations.

The entire Torah is thought to be inspired by God. It must be emphasised that Jewish law does not merely consist of the Ten Commandments (to be found in the Book of Exodus, Chapter 20). These are certainly important, because they have such a clear and universal application. However, every single law (and it has been calculated that there are six hundred and thirteen of them) is equally valid. Some laws are concerned with ritual in the Temple (which was destroyed in 70 CE). Others are concerned with festivals that are still celebrated today. They cover family relationships, social interaction and good commercial practice. Every element of life is included. Because the texts are regarded as divinely inspired, they must always be relevant in some way. For religious Jews, the Torah must always be the ultimate guide to human conduct and devotion to it is an essential mark of a committed Jew.



The Sacred Scroll of the Torah

KEY DIVISIONS WITHIN JUDAISM

Despite these core beliefs, there is no uniformity of opinion among Jews. There is an old Jewish joke that when three Jews come together, you can be sure they will have four opinions.

In the modern world, the vast majority of Jews are less than fully observant. Opinion ranges from the strictly Orthodox, who believe that the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures were directly dictated by God and must be obeyed in every particular, to the completely secular, who live exactly like their non-Jewish neighbours.

The strictly Orthodox are the most visible. The men wear a uniform of black hat and black jacket; the women are modestly dressed and often either wear a wig or cover their hair with a scarf. Their lives are entirely ruled by the demands of Jewish law; they tend to have big families and they live near their particular synagogue (place of worship) because they do not use any mechanised form of transport on the Sabbath day.

The modern Orthodox (whose spiritual leader in the United Kingdom is the Chief Rabbi) are less obvious in their appearance although the men wear small skull caps to cover their heads. They too regard Jewish law as authoritative, but they may be slightly more liberal in their interpretation of it in their everyday life.



A young Orthodox Jewish man prays by the Western Wall in Jerusalem

Then there are the non-Orthodox groups. They have accepted the findings of modern biblical scholarship and acknowledge that the Scriptures are documents written by a succession of human beings. This is not to say that the Scriptures are not divinely inspired, but they admit the possibility of human error and cultural relativism. In the United Kingdom, there are two main non-Orthodox groups—the fairly traditional Reform movement and the more radical Liberals. Both have their own synagogues and organisations.

The non-Orthodox are strongly disapproved of by the Orthodox and there are constant battles within the Jewish community between the various groups. In addition, many Jews have no synagogue affiliation. They are Jewish because their families are Jewish. They may observe little or no Jewish law and their knowledge and loyalty to the whole system may be very tenuous.

UK CALENDAR OF JEWISH FESTIVALS

The Jewish calendar is lunar. There are thirteen months in the religious year and festivals occur on particular days on these months. Because the secular calendar is solar, with only twelve months, the Jewish festivals (unlike those of Christianity) do not occur on the same date every year. However the dates of the festivals are printed in most secular diaries sold in Britain so it is not difficult to plan ahead.

There are five festivals which may affect timetables because they are days on which Jews are forbidden to work. The **New Year** (*Rosh Hashanah*) occurs in the autumn and ten days later, the most solemn day of the year, the **Day of Atonement** (*Yom Kippur*) is observed. On both days, religious Jews spend the day in the synagogue, praying, repenting of sin and getting their lives in order. On the Day of Atonement, religious Jews fast completely from sunset to sunset to atone for past wrongdoing. These solemn days are observed throughout the community, from the most Orthodox to the very liberal. Anyone with any connection to Judaism is likely to be away so it may not be fair to schedule an important test then without making alternative arrangements.



Apples and honey are eaten on Rosh Hashanah to signify the wish for a sweet new year.

The other major festivals on which Jews are likely to be absent are what are known as the three pilgrim festivals (because in ancient times Jews used to go to Jerusalem for them). These are **Passover** (*Pesah*) in the spring, **Pentecost** (*Shavuot*) which occurs seven weeks later and **Tabernacles** (*Succoth*) which takes place in the autumn. All these festivals are agricultural in origin, but they also commemorate important events in Jewish history. There are ancient rituals connected with them and Passover, in particular, is almost universally celebrated at home as a large family occasion.

Although many Jews will absent themselves for the day for some or all of these five festivals (and it must be stressed that observance varies widely), among the strictly Orthodox the situation is more complicated. It is the practice, outside Israel, to observe each festival, except for the Day of Atonement, for two days. This practice goes back to ancient times and is the result of the difficulties in a pre-scientific age of being exactly sure when a lunar month began. In addition both Passover and Tabernacles are seasons lasting seven days. Both the first day of the season and the last are regarded

as major festivals on which no work is done. This means that among the Orthodox, two days will be taken off for the New Year, one day for the Day of Atonement, two days for the beginning and end of Passover, two days for Pentecost and two days for the start and finish of Tabernacles—a total of thirteen days in all. Sometimes these will fall on weekends, in which case no special arrangements need be made, but, particularly in the autumn term, careful planning may be necessary. This may be highly inconvenient and disruptive, but among the Orthodox, observing the festivals (like observing the Sabbath) is an important religious obligation.

There are many other Jewish fasts and feasts besides the above, such as the **Feast of Esther** (*Purim*), the **Feast of Lights** (*Hanukkah*) and the **Fast of Av**, but none of these necessitates time off work.



The Menorah and a spinning dreidel, symbols of Hanukkah

UK PRESENCE AND DIVERSITY

A few Jews settled in Britain in the early Middle Ages, but they were expelled by Edward I in 1290. Allowed to return by Oliver Cromwell in the seventeenth century, the Jewish population of the UK is now estimated to be slightly less than 300,000 individuals. Most are descended from Eastern European Jews who fled from Polish and Russian pogroms at the end of the 19th century or whose ancestors were refugees from Hitler's Germany. Although numbers are small (less than 1% of the general population), they are prominent in many fields of British life. Jews have traditionally encouraged ambition. In the community, educational achievement is greatly encouraged and is the source of much parental pride.

The vast majority of Jews live in London, although there are also sizeable communities in Leeds, Manchester, Glasgow and Brighton. The Orthodox are anxious to live within a Jewish community where kosher (ritually acceptable) food is readily available and the synagogue is within easy walking distance. Although they are willing to send their children away to university and for vocational training, their choice will be limited to places where they can mix with other Jewish students and continue in the traditional way of life. Non-Orthodox Jews are less worried by such considerations and Jewish students can be found in almost all British higher educational institutions.

ANTI-SEMITISM AND DEBUNKING COMMON STEREOTYPES

Anti-Semitism remains an ever-present threat for most Jews. There is a long history of Christian anti-Semitism in Europe and the Nazi Holocaust of the 1930s and 40s is a recent and bitter reminder of the evil consequences of racial prejudice.

Although the United Kingdom is an open and liberal society, pockets of anti-Semitism do remain. The British National Party is quite open in its dislike of the community and Nazi graffiti, vandalism and desecration, particularly in Jewish cemeteries, is a continuing problem. The tensions in the Middle East have not helped the situation. Military success and the conflict with Palestine have encouraged a dislike and distrust of the Jews, particularly in the Islamic community and amongst those to the left of the political spectrum. (This is not to say that reasoned criticism of Israeli policies is by definition anti-Semitic.)

There is also a long tradition of 'polite' anti-Semitism in Britain. The characters of Shylock in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and Fagin in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* are obvious stereotypes of the avaricious Jew. Despite the long history of excellent Jewish business practice, generous Jewish philanthropy

and devoted Jewish public service, stereotypes such as miserliness are hard to shake. They even survive in the everyday language; such expressions as 'to Jew someone down' (meaning to drive a hard bargain), for example, are still in current use and are highly offensive to the community.

2. SPECIFIC ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

KEY SENSITIVITIES

Although there is a huge spectrum of religious belief within the community, a general support for the State of Israel and a fear of anti-Semitism is almost universal. The two are of course connected.

The Jewish community is still traumatised by the loss of six million of their members in the ghettos and death camps of Nazi Europe. Many British Jews have parents or grandparents who fled to the United Kingdom to escape fascist persecution and many were forced to leave relatives behind to be murdered in the Final Solution. The Second World War is still sufficiently recent to be a present reality for many Jews and the Holocaust remains an important source of identification for the Jewish people, even for those who have completely lapsed in their religious observance. As the poet Dannie Abse remarked, 'Hitler was far more successful in making me a Jew than Moses ever was'.



Unmarked Jewish graves in the Vienna Central Cemetery

After the Nazi Holocaust of the Second World War, the United Nations accepted the argument that the Jews must have a safe place to which they could retreat without question should such a catastrophe occur again. Therefore in 1948 the State of Israel, the Jewish state, was created. The losers, of course, were the Palestinians, the inhabitants of the land before Jewish immigration. Despite the unsettled situation and the constant terrorist threat, most Jews in Britain see Israel as their guarantee of safety—their ultimate bolt-hole. They follow Middle Eastern politics with real concern. Although many are sympathetic to the plight of the Palestinians, nonetheless almost all remain loyal to Israel and will do whatever they can to support what they perceive as their ancient homeland.

Emphatically this does not mean they are any less loyal to the United Kingdom. The vast majority of Jews living here regard this as their home and their country. They are British and would be very offended by the suggestion that there is no place for the Jewish community here. There is a long tradition of Jewish philanthropy, public service and a great sense of patriotism.

Despite this, in a university context, the Palestinian/Israeli situation has raised difficulties. Some non-Jewish academics are incensed by the activities of the Likud party in Israel and there have been ugly instances of professors refusing to take on Israeli research students for political reasons. Jewish students are well aware that most British people do not share their feelings for Israel and this can raise defensiveness about both their concern for Israel and their British identity. All too easily, legitimate criticism of Israeli policy can be interpreted as anti-Semitism. At the same time, there is no doubt that prejudice against Jews is behind some anti-Israeli feeling and all academics should be aware of this.

Among Jews themselves, the State of Israel is a source of great pride. Israel remains the only fully democratic state in the Middle East. The community itself is split over such questions as the necessity of a Palestinian state, reasonable boundaries and Israeli security. Nonetheless there is a universal desire for peace.

It has to be said, however, that the military and political success of the State of Israel has given an opportunity to those who are instinctively anti-Semitic to express their dislike of the Jewish people while arguing that they merely disapprove of Israeli militarism. The Jewish people are very sensitive to this and it is important to be aware, when discussing the Middle East situation, of all the sensitivities involved.

MORAL, ETHICAL AND SPIRITUAL ISSUES

THE SABBATH

Jews gave the idea of a regular, weekly day off to the world. Previously in ancient times, there were irregular holidays throughout the year. According to the Book of Exodus in the Hebrew Scriptures:

Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days shall you labour, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work.

The Jewish Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, Saturday. It begins on Friday evening at sunset and it ends a little more than 24 hours later on Saturday evening when it is dark.

The reason why many Jewish immigrants to Great Britain and the United States started their own businesses was because they were not prepared to work (as was customary in the 19th Century) on Saturdays. Among Orthodox Jews the Sabbath is still observed very strictly. They do not drive cars (which means they have to live within walking distance of a synagogue). Domestic chores are done in advance, the family spends the day together, sharing meals, entertaining guests, talking, reading, attending services and enjoying each others' company.

The sun sets early in the United Kingdom in the winter. Orthodox Jews will want to be home, or with their host family, by four o'clock in the afternoon. Although the Sabbath occurs every week, it is the most important of all Jewish festivals and is regarded within the community as the crucial test of strict observance. If someone is *shomer shabbos* (Sabbath observant) then they are part of the Orthodox community. Therefore any institution which has a number of Orthodox students (such as colleges in London, Glasgow, Leeds or Manchester) should avoid scheduling lectures, examinations or laboratory sessions on Friday afternoons or Saturday. If this is impossible, at the very least, this difficulty should be made clear in the prospectus so that Orthodox students can look for another course.

In fact, the majority of British Jews are not strictly Orthodox. Observance may vary from what is described above down to an unwillingness to accept dinner invitations on Friday evening coupled with very occasional attendance at synagogue services. Many Jews go still further and take no notice of the Sabbath at all; they have Saturday jobs, they use their cars, go shopping and are barely aware of the customs of their ancestors. Nonetheless educational institutions should know that some Jews still take the Sabbath very seriously and classes and other obligations may have to be scheduled accordingly.

FOOD

If there is a single factor which has kept the Jewish people separate from the other nations of the world, it is the food laws. In Shakespeare's *The Merchant Of Venice*, the character Shylock says:

I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you and so following; but I will not eat with you, drink with you or pray with you.

The Jewish food laws, based on the Hebrew Scriptures, are highly complicated. Very briefly, only certain birds, fish and animals are acceptable as food. All birds of prey, shellfish and animals which do not both chew the cud and have a cloven hoof are forbidden. Even the acceptable animals must be slaughtered in a particular way by specially qualified slaughterers. In addition meat foods may not in any way be mixed with milk foods.

The practical effect of this is that Orthodox Jews will only eat food which has been inspected and prepared within their own community. They will not eat out in cafeterias or in the houses of non-Orthodox people (even Jews). In a higher education context, they will bring their own food into the institution and will not expect to share in the student facilities.

Among the non-Orthodox, the situation is more complicated. In the modern world, all individuals makes their own accommodation with the situation. Some Jews keep *kosher* (follow the Jewish food laws) at home, but eat anything out. Some will only eat fish and vegetarian food. Still others will seem to eat anything, but will avoid pork products and/or any form of shellfish. Other ignore the rules completely. If a Jewish person accepts an invitation to a non-Jewish person's house, it is probably safe to assume that they eat most foods, but it would be sensible to avoid pork and shellfish.

A final point to remember is that according to the laws of the Festival of Passover in the Spring, no leaven should be eaten. During the days of the festival, Orthodox Jews will not eat bread or anything made with flour. Again observance of this varies widely in the community, but it is not unusual to find even non-Orthodox Jews avoiding all forms of bread during the seven days of the festival.

DRESS

In a higher education context, the vast majority of Jewish students will be indistinguishable from their non-Jewish counterparts. Their clothes will be the same; they will enjoy the same music; see the same films and watch the same television programmes. However, the strictly Orthodox may be distinguished by their dress. The men will wear skull caps at all times and the women may be dressed a little more modestly than their classmates (for example sleeves which cover the elbow and skirts which cover the knee).

ISSUES OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Traditionally Judaism is a patriarchal religion with clearly defined roles for men and women. Girls and boys are educated separately and follow a different religious curriculum. Women are not expected to take an active part in the ritual of the synagogue and are not encouraged to spend their time studying the ancient texts. In the past, marriage and motherhood was the only acceptable destiny for a girl from an Orthodox family.

Among the strictly Orthodox, little has changed. Early marriage is encouraged; the parents expect to help the young couple for the first few years and a large family is regarded as a blessing. Generally, Orthodox women's lives revolve around domesticity and child-rearing.

However the vast majority of British Jews no longer live like this. Among the non-Orthodox movements, girls and boys have the benefit of identical religious education and since 1972 there have been female as well as male rabbis. In the secular world, in practice, Jews are every bit as ambitious for their daughters as for their sons. At least as many young Jewish women as young Jewish men are qualifying for the professions or going to business school and, in these contexts, they expect complete equality of opportunity.

For most Jewish students, no special arrangements need to be made for seating or class organisation.

However, strictly Orthodox Jews may be slightly less familiar with the extremes of youth culture than their secular contemporaries. For reasons of modesty the girls may be reluctant to shake hands with any man and both young men and women may prefer to sit next to someone of their own gender in lectures. Similarly, when working in pairs, very Orthodox Jewish male students may choose to work with another man and a young woman with another woman. However, these precautions only apply to a very small group within the Jewish community and young people will probably make their own arrangements quite discreetly.

Traditionally, throughout the community, there has been a strong disapproval of inter-marriage. A Jewish marriage can only be performed when both bride and groom are Jews. Until very recently, when a Jewish man or woman 'married out' it was regarded as a tragedy for the family. It was felt that the children of the marriage would be lost to Judaism and that the new family would rapidly assimilate into the general population. Today in the United Kingdom, more than 50% of young Jews do choose non-Jews as marriage partners, but nonetheless there is still pressure to marry within the community. This is one reason why Jewish parents are anxious that their children should go to higher education institutions with a sizeable Jewish student body and an active Jewish Society. Among the Orthodox, young people, particularly girls, are often encouraged to live at home and go to their local university so there is some control over their social life.

Since inter-marriage has become so common, there has been a considerable

softening of attitudes in recent years, but teachers and counsellors should be aware that there is potential for considerable stress and unhappiness in this area.

Of course not all Jews are heterosexual. Traditional Jewish law, as laid down in the Book of Leviticus, makes it clear that homosexual relationships are an abomination. However, the non-Orthodox movements and the vast majority of Jewish young people reject this teaching and are as tolerant of gay relationships as are their non-Jewish contemporaries. The older generation feels differently and there remains a strong desire for Jewish grandchildren. However, in general, most Jewish parents do come to terms with, and accept, their children's sexual orientation. This may not always be the case among the strictly Orthodox, who adhere to the traditional precepts. A gay, lesbian or bisexual strictly Orthodox Jew often has the stark choice of accepting a semi-arranged marriage or breaking away from the community. However this trauma is unlikely to emerge in the context of a secular university or college.



A Jewish couple get married

PARTICIPATION

CURRICULUM ISSUES

Although the Book of Genesis teaches that the universe was created in six days, this is only interpreted literally by the most Orthodox. Any Jewish student who enrolls for a science course in a secular university or college will expect to learn about evolution and natural selection. The only curriculum issue which could perhaps cause a problem is that of modesty and good taste. Orthodox young men and women may be offended by crassly pornographic literature or visual images. However, if they are sufficiently liberal to enrol themselves in a literature or art course, they will know what to expect and will probably accept whatever is on offer. If they do not approve of the curriculum, they will not apply for the course, and increasingly the strictly Orthodox are not sending their children to secular institutions for this reason.

ACCESS, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

The majority of Jewish children in the United Kingdom go to secular schools, either state or private, and apply to institutions of higher education in exactly the same way as their non-Jewish counterparts. Many of the minority who go to Jewish schools also expect to go on to secular higher education. However, Jews who are in any way observant do want to be in an environment in which they will meet other Jewish students. They often prefer to be in a town or city where there is a sizeable Jewish population or where there is an active Jewish society for the students. In addition, the Orthodox need to be able to walk to a synagogue on the Sabbath and to be able to buy kosher food. For these reasons it is difficult to recruit Jewish students to a remote or rural area, where there is no established Jewish population.

Because of the sensitivity of the situation in the Middle East, it is important that lecturers and tutors are even-handed in their approach. In an institution which recruits a large number of Muslim students, Jews should not feel beleaguered or in any way under threat. Any excessive or offensive behaviour either by individuals or by particular university societies should be nipped in the bud. It goes without saying that any evidence of anti-Semitism, whether expressed by staff or by students, should be immediately repudiated by the institution at the highest level and disciplinary measures should be taken to prevent any further recurrence in the future.

In order to retain Jewish students, it is important to be aware of the laws of the Sabbath and festivals when organising the timetable and when scheduling examinations and practicals. In addition, lecturers should accept without question that some strictly Orthodox Jews will be unwilling to work closely with someone of the opposite sex.

In the majority of cases, such precautions will not be necessary and Jewish students will be fully assimilated into the group.

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

In general, Jewish students have done very well at British institutions of higher education. Nowadays there are few, if any, barriers to success. Jewish men and women have found employment at the highest level of the professions, in business and commerce and in the media and arts. Such anti-Semitism which is formally expressed is mainly found in the world of football hooligans rather than in the polite common-rooms, laboratories and lecture theatres of our colleges and universities.

Nonetheless, Jews still do feel themselves to be victims of stereotyping and prejudice. The Holocaust is still within living memory of their parents and grandparents and the community continues to retain its suspicions of the Gentile world. Inevitably, the situation in Israel combined with the presence of large numbers of Muslim students on campus does not help this situation. In addition, there are many quarrels within the Jewish world itself. The Orthodox do not approve of the non-Orthodox; the secularists are mystified by all Jewish religious practice and the Likud supporters are impatient with those who are prepared to compromise with the Palestinians in the Middle East. All tutors and lecturers should be aware of these tensions. In addition they must be vigilant in their own attitudes. No one should be judged on the basis of pre-conceived stereotypes.

If Jewish students are to derive the maximum benefit from their higher education and make their best contribution to the institution, it is vital that they feel fully accepted, appreciated and accommodated on their own terms and in all their diversity.

3. RESOURCES

APPROPRIATE ORGANISATIONS

In addition to the organisations detailed here, the local synagogue (listed in the local Yellow Pages) will provide help and information.

THE BOARD OF DEPUTIES OF BRITISH JEWS

Postal address: The Board of Deputies,
6 Bloomsbury Square,
London, WC1A 2LP

Telephone: 020 7543 5421/5422

Email address: info@bod.org.uk

Website: <http://www.bod.org.uk>

The Board plays a coordinating role in key issues affecting the Jewish community. They also provide the Jewish Community Information service, an information resource and enquiries service providing religious advice and local information on where, for example, to find Jewish products or services.

THE COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

Postal address: CCJ, 1st Floor
Camelford House
89 Albert Embankment
London, SE1 7TP

Telephone: 020 7820 0090

UK local rate number: 0845 1662 205

Email address: cjrelations@ccj.org.uk

Website: <http://www.ccj.org.uk>

The Council brings together the Christian and Jewish communities in a common effort to fight prejudice, intolerance and discrimination. It is a primarily educational organisation, working in schools and other educational establishments, and organising conferences. It also advises journalists, politicians and educational and religious bodies.

ZIONIST FEDERATION OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

Postal address: Balfour House
741 High Road
London N12 0BQ

Telephone: 020 8343 9756

Website: <http://www.zionist.org.uk>

The Federation is an umbrella organisation encompassing most of the Zionist organisations in the country and aims to encourage participation in Zionist activities in the UK and worldwide.

HOLOCAUST EDUCATIONAL TRUST

Postal address: Holocaust Educational Trust
BCM Box 7892
London, WC1N 3XX

Telephone: 020 7222 6822

Email: info@het.org.uk

Website: <http://www.het.org.uk>

The Trust promotes research into the Holocaust and assists individuals and organisations involved in Holocaust education.

JEWISH BOOK COUNCIL

Postal address: Jewish Book Council
POB 38247
London NW3 5YQ

Telephone: 020 7446 8771

Email: info@jewishbookweek.com

Website: <http://www.jewishbookweek.com/>

The Council stimulates and encourages the reading of books on Judaism and organises the annual Jewish book week.

UNION OF JEWISH STUDENTS

Postal Address: Hillel House
1 & 2 Endsleigh Street
London, WC1H 0DS

Telephone: 020 7387 4644/020 7380 0111

Email: ujjs@ujjs.org.uk

Website: <http://www.ujjs-online.co.uk>

The UJS coordinates the activities of the Jewish and Israel societies in the universities and colleges of Great Britain.

JEWISH CHRONICLE

<http://www.jchron.co.uk>

The Jewish Chronicle is the main Jewish weekly newspaper read throughout the community.

THE JEWISH MUSEUM—LONDON'S MUSEUM OF JEWISH LIFE

<http://www.jewishmuseum.org.uk>

The Jewish Museum exists to increase knowledge and understanding of Jewish life and history in Great Britain through its programme of education and exhibitions.

BOOKS

INTRODUCTORY READING

Cohn-Sherbok, Dan, *A Concise Encyclopaedia of Judaism*, (Oxford: OneWorld 1999)

Cohn-Sherbok, Dan, *Judaism*, (London: Routledge 2003)

De Lange, Nicholas, *Atlas of the Jewish World*, (Oxford: Andre Deutsch 1984)

Pilkington, Christine, *Teach Yourself Judaism*, (London: TeachYourself: 1993)

ANTI-SEMITISM

Maccoby, Hyam, *Judas Iscariot and the Myth of Jewish Evil*, (New York: MacMillan 1992)

Wistrich, Robert, *Anti-Semitism: The Longest Hatred*, (London: Schocken 1991)

THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

Gilbert, Martin, *Israel: A History*, (London: Black Swan 1999)

Cohn-Sherbok, Dan and El-Alami, Darwoud Sudqi, *The Palestine-Israeli Conflict*, (Oxford: One World 2001)

THE BRITISH JEWISH COMMUNITY

The Jewish Yearbook, (London: Valentine Mitchell, Published annually)