



BEIS YAAKOV JEWISH HIGH SCHOOL ACADEMY

A GUIDE TO CHAREIDI JEWISH ETHOS AND CULTURAL SENSITIVITY AT BYJHS

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INTRODUCTION

The Jewish people have always placed education at the forefront of communal life, and the establishment of a school has always been viewed as a sacred task. The challenge of the Orthodox Jewish school is to marry the requirements of the Jewish faith with the principles and legislation set out by the government and the Local Education Authority. Many schools have succeeded in creating a coexistence of both these requirements, and this Guide outlines some of the factors to consider when working with Orthodox Jewish schools.

THE CHAREIDI COMMUNITY

BYJHS describes its religious ethos as “Chareidi” and it is important to understand a little about what this term means.

The term Chareidi is a self-referential term used by a large section of local, national and world Jewry. “Chareidi” is not a separate religious denomination to Orthodox, but rather refers to individuals or communities who practice their Orthodox Judaism in particular way. The school’s admission’s policy defines Chareidi in the following way:

The definition of Charedi is as follows: A distinct group within the Jewish community distinguished by cultural differences and strict adherence to and practice of Orthodox Judaism. Members of this community lead an extremely modest way of life dictated by the highest moral and ethical values. Every aspect of their life is governed by the codes of Torah observance, and is based on the three tenets of Judaism “Torah, Prayer and Acts of loving kindness”.

JUDAISM 101

The information below is intended to give a better understanding of the school community and some insight into school events that are built around the Jewish calendar and life-cycle events.

THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Judaism is the belief in one eternal, omnipotent G-d. The Jewish people have a highly moral lifestyle in which they regard the Bible, its commandments and its teachings, as a way of life as well as a religion.

The values that have been handed down from grandparent to parent and from parent to child are called "*Mesorah*", tradition. In an Orthodox community, *Mesorah* is upheld above all else and does not fluctuate with fashion or society trends. This standard is prevalent throughout the Orthodox school, and is reflected both in its ethos and in its implementation of the National Curriculum.

THE BIBLE – *Torah*

Jewish laws and customs are derived from the Torah. The Torah has two distinct elements:

- The Written Law, which consists of the Five Books of Moses, The Prophets and the other books of the Old Testament.
- The Transmitted (or Oral) Law. This consists of the teachings of the Rabbis from earliest history to modern day, and includes the Talmud and the Code of Jewish Law.

The New Testament, the Koran, and any works belonging to other religions are not taught in Jewish schools, and festivals or holidays associated with other faiths are not observed. Textbooks and storybooks are carefully chosen to ensure that only appropriate material forms part of the resources of the school.

The curriculum taught to children in Nursery and Reception class is usually about the Festivals and customs, and stories from the Written Law. As the children grow older, the curriculum expands to encompass much of the Oral Law.

THE JEWISH YEAR

The Jewish calendar is a lunar-solar one. This means that it is governed by the phases of the moon but adjusted to keep seasonally timed with the solar year.

Because the lunar year is shorter than the solar year, 354 days instead of 365 days, the Jewish calendar adds an extra month periodically in order to adjust it to the solar year. For this reason, although dates of Jewish holidays vary from year to year in relation to the secular calendar, they tend to fall within the same seasonal time. The Jewish year runs roughly from September to September.

By contrast, Islam follows a truly lunar calendar. Therefore Ramadan, for example, is observed at a *different* time of the year each year, always according to the lunar calendar.

Time

Judaism counts time in a different way to the 24 hour clock system. The day of the week begins at sunset on the previous day and ends at sunset. This is explained in more detail in the next section.

THE SABBATH – *Shabbos*

The Sabbath, known as “Shabbos”, is generally regarded as Saturday but actually begins at sunset on **Friday** until after nightfall on **Saturday**. Saturday **night** is no longer Shabbos. The timings of Shabbos, therefore depends on the time of the year, and this has a great bearing on the working and recreational habits of the Jewish people. They usually spend Friday shopping, cooking and preparing the home for Shabbos. The family attends services at the Synagogue on a Friday evening and on Saturday.

A Day of Rest

Shabbos is a family time when all members of the family will talk and eat special Shabbos meals together. The day is devoted to prayer, study of the Torah and relaxation. Shabbos meals all have to be prepared in advance because Jewish people may not do anything which is considered work on Shabbos.

"Work" describes any act, or its modern-day derivative, that was performed in the construction of the Jewish temple in biblical times. They include but are not limited to: cooking, driving a car, writing (written homework and marking papers), using the telephone, and operating electrical equipment.

With this in mind, in-service training at weekends would not be suitable for religiously observant teachers. Similarly, children can use only a part of the weekend for written schoolwork.

Orthodox Jews are extremely particular about observing all the laws of Shabbos, and there are no exemptions for extreme circumstances, with the exception of when there is risk to human life. The value of life is upheld above all, and one must do whatever is necessary to

save lives, and even disregard the normal laws of Shabbos in order to do so. Once the emergency is over, however, one would obey the laws of Shabbos again.

THE JEWISH FESTIVALS

There are several religious holidays in the Jewish year. Major festivals are treated the same as the Shabbos. The only difference is that the holidays usually last more than a day and can fall any day of the week.

The term "holiday" should not imply parties and festivities; rather a Shabbos-like day that commemorates an historical event in Jewish history or a landmark in the Jewish calendar. The best example of this is the Jewish New Year, during which the entire Jewish community comes together to pray. It is a solemn occasion with the emphasis on repentance and self-improvement.

There are six days of Fasting and four Minor Festivals each year.

Five of the fasts recall sad times in Jewish history, most of which relate to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Only males over thirteen and females over twelve are required to fast. Some schools shorten the school day or give the staff and pupils the day off.

Minor Festivals are a time of celebration. Work is permitted, and extra-curricular activities are scheduled if the school has not already designated a holiday over the festival period.

THE MAJOR FESTIVALS IN DETAIL

Rosh Hashono – The Jewish New Year

Rosh Hashono lasts for two days and falls during September or early October. It is a solemn occasion, part of 10 days of introspection and penitence, and a time of resolution to lead a better life in the year ahead.

Yom Kippur – The Day of Atonement

The tenth day is called Yom Kippur. It is the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. It is a day of fasting, confession, and forgiveness. Most of Yom Kippur is spent in prayer and contemplation in the Synagogue.

Sukkos – Tabernacles

Sukkos falls five days after the Day of Atonement. This is a seven-day festival of joy. The following week there are two final days of Sukkos with further celebration. Without a doubt September and October are the busiest periods in the Jewish calendar.

Pesach – Passover

Pesach, which lasts for eight days, falls near Easter time and commemorates the biblical story of the freedom of the Jewish people from Egypt. One of the main features of this holiday is the abstention from bread and other leaven products, and from any manufactured food not especially prepared for Pesach.

The weeks leading up to Pesach are spent cleaning the home extensively in preparation for the holiday, a kind of spring cleaning involving both children and adults. This is in keeping with the theme of abstention from having leaven products in one's possession. Schools arrange their holidays to include this period.

Shavuos – Pentecost

This falls six weeks after Pesach, usually in late May or early June. It celebrates the receiving of the Bible in the Sinai Desert.

THE MINOR FESTIVALS AND FASTS IN DETAIL

Tzom Gedaliah, the fast of Gedaliah falls on the day after Rosh Hashono, the New Year. It recalls the death of Gedaliah, the last Jewish Governor of Israel, after the destruction of the Temple.

Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, falls in December and lasts for eight days. It commemorates the victory of the Greeks during Temple times, and the miracle of the Temple Candelabra, which burned for eight days instead of one, without needing extra oil. Families light small candelabra, called menorahs, at home each night of Chanukah, and the children are given gifts and pocket money. Foods cooked with oil are eaten to commemorate the miracle of the oil.

Asoroh B'Teves, the Fast of Teves, usually falls in January. It recalls the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem before the Temple was destroyed.

Ta'anis Esther, the Fast of Esther, usually falls on the day before Purim. It is symbolic of the fasting undertaken by the Jewish people during the Persian reign.

Purim, falls in February or March. It is a day of great festivity commemorating the salvation of the Jews from total destruction during the Persian reign. It is celebrated with many forms of merry-making, such as fancy dress, parties, gifts of food between friends, a special synagogue service, and extra charity.

The Omer Period, falls between Passover and Pentecost and is a time of partial mourning for adults and children, symbolized by the abstention from haircuts and listening to music. It honours the memory of 24,000 scholars who died during part of this six week period.

Lag B'Omer, is the 33rd day of the Omer period and contrasts mourning with great celebration, because the plague which took the lives of the aforementioned scholars subsided on this day. Additionally, one of the greatest leaders of the Jews asked that this day, the day of his death, be marked with joy and not grief. It is celebrated in the form of communal outings and group gatherings.

Shivah Assar B'Tammuz, the Fast of Tammuz, falls in June or July. It recalls how the Romans plundered Jerusalem after a siege lasting one and a half years.

Tishah B'Av, the Fast of Av, falls three weeks after the Fast of Tammuz. It marks the destruction of the first and second Temples and the exile of the Jews. The period between these two Fasts is a time of partial mourning for adults and children, symbolized by abstention from haircuts and listening to music.

Rosh Chodesh, The New Moon, is marked each month with additional prayers asking for a month of blessing and joy, expressing thanks for the past and hope for the future. Prayers in school take longer on a Rosh Chodesh and include communal singing.

DIETARY REQUIREMENTS

Jewish people are required to eat "kosher" food. This means food that has been sourced and prepared according to the strict requirements of Jewish law. The laws of Kashrus, kosher food

preparation, are exceedingly complex and a detailed analysis falls beyond the scope of this guide. However, here is an overview of the key rules:

- Not all types of animal are kosher. Kosher breeds of animals require ritual slaughter, preparation and fully supervised processing
- Not all types of fish are kosher. Those types that are Kosher require supervised processing.
- Meat and dairy foods must be separate and a kosher kitchen will have a different set of dishes and cutlery for each.
- Vegetables and fruit are almost always kosher, but some require special preparation and cleaning.
- Bread, cakes, dairy products and wine need rabbinical supervision.

Many families will obtain most of their food from specialist stores that stock kosher products. Schools will prepare food on site or set out guidelines to parents specifying food permitted for packed lunches.

Field trips for the pupils and residentials present logistic challenges in terms of food provision. Pupils will bring packed lunches for field trips and residentials will either prepare food in the school kitchen or buy from a licensed kosher caterer. Note, that due to the many complexities of kosher food and preparation, vegetarian food is not synonymous with Kosher food.

JEWISH TRADITIONS

Prayers and Blessings

A Jew prays three times a day. The morning prayers may last close to an hour. Afternoon and evening prayers last a quarter of an hour. Festival or Sabbath prayers are much longer.

Blessings take the form of thanks, praise and request. In the course of the daily routine, Orthodox Jews recite blessings before and after eating, drinking, when perceiving the wonders of nature like thunder and lightning, or a rainbow, and on numerous other occasions.

The commonly used term for prayer is either the Yiddish word “davening” or the Hebrew word “Tefillah”.

Cappel, or Yarmulkeh – Head covering

Jewish males have the custom to keep their heads covered, even indoors. This demonstrates the faith that G-d is ever-present. It is a sign of great respect for a Jew to maintain a covered head, and differs from Western traditions of marking respect by removing one's head covering.

Language

Yiddish is a Judaic Middle German language. It was the mother tongue of the Jews of Eastern Europe, and is still used when Jewish people of different countries meet. Some Jewish families speak Yiddish in their homes as a first language. For the most part, the student body at BYJHS speak English at home as their first language, but will likely also use a number of words or phrases in either Yiddish or Modern Hebrew.

The Hebrew Language

Hebrew is written from right to left. Like all Semitic alphabets, it consists solely of consonants. The vowels appear as separate symbols, usually under the consonants.

DEATH AND MOURNING

Death

The death of a loved one is a sad and difficult time. All faiths have their own ways of dealing with a burial, the grieving family, and the mourning process. There are a number of religious laws and practices that are unique to the Jewish community.

Burial

Jewish people bury their dead as soon as possible, preferably before sundown on the same day, except on the Sabbath or on a Festival when the arrangements for the funeral will not begin until its conclusion, after nightfall.

Mourning

Immediate family members have a period of mourning for seven days including the day of burial. During this period, called "Shiva", the principal mourners must not leave the house and the Synagogue arranges prayers at the home of the mourner.

Young people who sadly lose a loved one would be required to observe all the above mourning rites. This would mean that they would not be permitted to do any schoolwork until the week of the Shiva is complete. Sympathetic consideration would be appropriate for students facing examinations such as GCSE or A-level, so that they might be permitted to sit their examinations at a different time.

Teaching staff who are in mourning would be unable to fulfil their duties at school and would be granted compassionate leave under all circumstances. Since the burial is expedited and Shiva follows immediately, it is understood that there is often very little notice given to the school.

PROTOCOL

When meeting a Jewish colleague for the first time, bear in mind that physical contact between a man and woman is reserved for immediate family only. It would be inappropriate for a man to offer to shake a woman's hand or a woman to offer to shake a man's hand.

THE JEWISH DAY SCHOOL

Purpose

The orthodox Jewish school exists to:

- Implement the National Curriculum as prescribed
- Provide for the religious and cultural needs of the Orthodox Jewish child by applying a curriculum based on Torah Law, and "*Mesorah*", Jewish tradition. Even things that appear to be secular in nature are likely to be subject to a faith perspective and this perspective will be positively reinforced in the Jewish Day School curriculum.

The Study of the Torah

The study of Torah forms the basis of Judaism. Knowledge of the Torah enables a Jewish person to practice its laws and traditions, to value his or her heritage and understand the religious responsibilities that heritage entails. Torah study is also a vehicle for his intellectual training because the methods of study and reasoning employed by the sages in the Talmud are highly logical and analytical.

The Bible and the Talmud are studied in their original languages: Classical Hebrew and Aramaic. This facilitates the acquisition of extra languages at a young age. At the end of their school career, it is reasonable to expect the Orthodox Jewish student to have a good command of Classical Hebrew, Aramaic, and possibly Yiddish, in addition to any other European or Classical languages that he may have studied.

This study also provides the student with the skills necessary to think logically and coherently, and with a vast amount of general knowledge, teaching over 5000 years of Jewish history and tradition.

THE JEWISH STUDIES (KODESH) SYLLABUS

Religious studies or “Jewish Studies” accounts for a round one third of the formal taught curriculum at BYJHS.

In most Orthodox school, Jewish studies is referred to simply as “Kodesh”. The word “Kodesh is commonly translated as “holy”, but in a pedagogical context it implies “transcendent” – knowledge that the Jewish people received from G-d and whose study enables us to transcend the material world and connect to our Creator.

An Overview

The Hebrew syllabus is wide ranging, covering these topics:

- Jewish religious ethics and practices
- Jewish history and culture
- Social and political knowledge from the pages of the Talmud and its commentaries
- Skills in: mathematics, geography, logic, philosophy, literary appreciation and poetry.
- Textual skills: translation, reading, writing, grammar and comprehension, textual analysis.

The intellectual faculties of the pupils are being constantly stimulated by the parry and thrust of hyper-logical debate found within Talmudic style discussion.

The Jewish Studies staff concentrate on creating a strong Jewish ethos that permeates the school. Orthodox Judaism provides a strongly study-oriented culture, with joint study between parents and their children. Furthermore, it recognizes Judaism as a way of life that encompasses all activities of a Jewish person.

THE ORTHODOX SCHOOL IN GREAT BRITAIN

Day to Day

Most Orthodox Jewish Schools are not Co-Ed, and there is no intermingling of the sexes. In the Chareidi Orthodox world, young people do not mix socially with the opposite sex, other than with close family, such as siblings, parents and grandparents etc. This is part of a value system that the Orthodox School will seek to instil at an early age.

Challenges facing Jewish Schools

The Jewish School population in Great Britain is not yet large enough to justify the provision of textbooks designed for the Jewish Day School. This can sometimes make choosing suitable resource material a challenge.

Here are some examples:

- A number of seemingly neutral textbooks or story books refer to the religious festivals of the wider population
- Some encyclopaedias, science and geography books, speak in definite terms about the evolution of the Universe; terms that contradict the belief in the Creation of the Universe by a single, supreme Creator.
- The subject matter of illustrations found in some books may be alien to children brought up in an Orthodox Jewish environment. This applies especially to the study of literature in High School.

GUIDANCE TO TEACHERS

The Challenges of Integration

A national curriculum studies teacher facing his or her first group of children of another faith may at first feel insecure. This guide should help to identify those areas that a teacher needs to be aware of, and aid his or her integration into an Orthodox Jewish School.

The Jewish staff and the Head teacher should assume responsibility for briefing teachers on any customs, upcoming festivals, or events that might impact the class. This will ensure that the teacher's position is not compromised in any way. Similarly, the teacher should be responsible for referring questions relating to religious matters solely to colleagues and not to the children.

Sensitive Areas

The following is a non-exhaustive list of areas that all teachers need to be sensitive to when teaching in BYJHS. They relate to sensitive topics, language and demeanour and boundaries in interpersonal relationships:

- 1) Any reference or comparison to other religions, their churches, festivals or icons and idols, present or past, as well as 'special days' of the calendar such as Saints' days.
- 2) Stories or poems of a magical or superstitious nature. This includes witches, ghosts and horror stories, and any folk stories about magic or reincarnation.
- 3) Reference to evolution and the opinion that matter took millions of years to develop. This applies also to oil or coal and pre-historic animals. Jewish teachings state that the

world is less than 6,000 years old, and that scientific evidence merely observes its apparent age. It could well be that they were created in an advanced stage. In the same way, we accept that man was created in his present advanced form and did not evolve from primates.

- 4) Songs, stories and poetry that refer to love and marriage, and texts that focus on romance or relationships between the sexes are not suitable. Sexuality and gender are topics that may only be discussed by Jewish Studies teacher, who will be instructed on how and when these topics may be addressed.
- 5) References to the process of human reproduction are not suitable. Sex education is not to be discussed in school at all. Parents have all chosen to opt out of sex education, which means that the responsibility for this area of education now lies solely with parents.
- 6) Fashion trends and clothes that promote a liberal or promiscuous attitude towards dressing are not suitable, and a refined and modest approach should be encouraged.
- 7) Books that glorify any undesirable characteristics displayed by the heroes or heroines, such as acts of violence, are not recommended.
- 8) The highly refined and modest language employed throughout Judaism has remained constant, unaltered through the trends of society. Thus, books with unrefined or unsuitable language are not acceptable, even if considered inoffensive by today's standards.
- 9) There should be no discussion about characters or programmes currently on radio or television, or at the theatre or pantomime.
- 10) The use of audio or audio-visual material not in-keeping with the ethos that has been outlined above. As it may be difficult in many cases for a teacher to know what is and is not suitable, all audio-visual material needs to be downloaded in advance of lessons and referred to your line manager/ head of department who will ensure that it is checked.
- 11) Any material that has not been approved must not be shown to the class.
- 12) Teachers may never go online during lesson, even for the purpose of accessing pre-approved material.
- 13) Only Jewish Studies teachers should deal with festivals, the Sabbath and stories of Biblical origin, like the story of Noah's Ark, as they have specialist knowledge in this area, and an approach specific to the ethos of the school.
- 14) Reference to Bible programmes on radio or television should not be made, as these are often not in keeping with the school's ethos.
- 15) In Geography, for example, seek advice regarding drawing of other religious symbols in Map Skills, or teaching one-child policy in China

- 16) In History, dates must be given as BCE or CE, rather than BC or AD.
- 17) Research on the internet is not allowed for homework or projects and the teachers must ensure that the pupils have all the necessary resources.
- 18) Language used in school is not harsh or personal but formal and dignified. For example, the phrase “shut up” is not considered appropriate.
- 19) Behaviour is best managed by building relationship. Focus on good behaviour choices pupils make and do not make personal comments or single out pupils who are making the ‘wrong’ choices.
- 20) Notwithstanding the above, teachers must not share aspects of their personal lives/ details of their family. Relationships and rapport are built through engaging the pupils in the learning and consistently supporting them on their learning journey.
- 21) While the parents body puts huge emphasis on an all-round secular education in the national curriculum subjects, the school’s (and parents’) chareidi ethos views spiritual development and religious learning as the highest value. Teachers must be extremely careful not to say anything that may imply a negative view of the school’s curriculum priorities, such as suggesting that extra-curricular programmes or Kodesh lessons are less important or should be pushed aside for GCSE subjects.
- 22) Any criticism or implied criticism of any segment of the Jewish community is wholly inappropriate and liable to cause significant offence.
- 23) Teachers should not express a view publicly or privately on the State of Israel, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israeli foreign policy, “Zionism” or any related issues.
- 24) The above list is not exhaustive and teachers should be prepared to pick up the sensitivity to what is and is not appropriate with time. The general rule is that you should always take advice if you are unsure.

Teachers' Dress

Jewish schools have an established tradition that teachers are expected to dress as modestly as any Orthodox Jewish man or woman. Ladies may not wear trousers or slacks. Skirts should cover the knees. Sleeves should be at least three-quarter length and only high necklines are allowed. No transparent clothing should be worn. Teachers should refrain from displaying jewellery with religious symbols.

Resource Materials

When considering resource material for the school, as a general guide, illustrations depicting people not properly dressed may be considered unsuitable. In any area of doubt, speak to your line manager or to the Head of (Kodesh) Jewish studies.

CONCLUSIONS

Each Orthodox school has an ethos that reflects the attitudes of its founding governors and its parent body.

Although there may be differences in approach, several common goals exist. All Orthodox schools want to uphold the *Mesorah* – the chain of Jewish traditions. While open to the outside world and encouraging their pupils to learn about communities outside their own, they will nonetheless want to ensure that every aspect of the pupil experience represents the ethos and worldview of the school's foundation body, rather than the worldview of particular elements of contemporary society or pop culture, or the view of an individual member of staff.

Above all, they will strive to empower their students with a thorough knowledge of, and pride in, their heritage, which, coupled with the knowledge and competence in National Curriculum subjects will improve their life chances.