

Key concepts



The requirements of kashrut can create problems for many Jews who are living in Britain today as keeping kashrut has the potential to isolate and separate them from the wider secular society. This is because foods must be certified by a trained rabbi; meat must be slaughtered according to the laws of shechitah; blood must be removed; certain foodstuffs are forbidden; food must be prepared according to the laws of kashrut. It becomes difficult, if not impossible for Orthodox Jews to eat out in non-Jewish restaurants or in the homes of non-Jews.

Hasidic Jews are immediately recognisable by their personal appearance. As a result of this they stand out as being different and this has made them a source of ridicule as well as the victims of discriminatory anti-Semitic action. Assimilation for this particular group has become impossible and has led to segregation.

Challenges relating to the practice of the Jewish faith can be seen in relation to Shabbat observance. British society doesn't cater for Jewish people, and the holiness of Shabbat for instance isn't reflected in the busy nature of a typical Saturday. Jewish children can also be put under pressure if they live in a non-Jewish area and can't meet up with friends on a Saturday. Other considerations such as it being difficult to get to the synagogue without the use of a car, and the requirement to be at home before sundown on a Friday night can be especially problematic during the winter months. A request to leave work early could lead to discriminatory behaviour from other colleagues.

Education can also be a source of tension, with the provision of Jewish faith schools representing a reluctance to assimilate into mainstream society.

The Jewish Leadership Council exists in order to support and ensure continuity in the UK of a mainstream Jewish community, so that Judaism is assured of its place within British society.

Key quotes

'... the dietary laws have the incidental consequence that Jews who wish to keep them need to live in Jewish communities where the supporting institutions of kashrut are to be found.' (Unterman)

'To the Hasid, this mode of dress proclaims him a servant of God. His clothing is a constant reminder to the outside world and to himself of his chosen religious discipline, his separateness.' (Robinson)

'The (UK) law affords various types of aid to Jews who wish to adhere to their beliefs without suffering discrimination because of their ethnicity or religion.' (The Employer's Guide to Judaism)



Key words

kashrut

kosher

shechitah

kashering

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key questions, arguments, and debates

The possibility of assimilation into a secular society for Jews.

What aspects of Judaism make assimilation impractical or even impossible? How are some Jewish groups more successful than others in assimilating? For some Jewish groups, the need to assimilate is not an issue at all. It is evident that many Jews are able to maintain their religious devotional lifestyle without it having any detrimental effect upon their ability to function fully in mainstream society.

How does British society embrace Jewish religious identity?

The extent to which assimilation equates to a loss of identity.

Some Jewish groups have achieved assimilation whilst still retaining their own particular form of Jewish identity. It could well be argued that is impossible to live faithfully according to the mitzvot as well as achieving assimilation into secular society. The lack of clarity regarding what constitutes Jewish identity hampers discussion about this issue.