



KALEIDOSCOPE

Finding My Feet in Judaism



Name: **Talia KG K**

Gender: **Female**

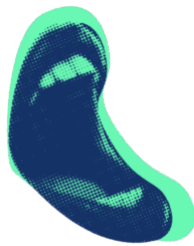
Country of residence: **United Kingdom**

Writing language: **English**

I grew up going to synagogue most weeks and attended a Jewish primary school. Reflecting I see now that Judaism and tradition was always important in my family's life. My parents and grandparents have taught me the value of community and how important it is to care for those around me.



This is the story of my life and my Jewish identity and how they intertwine so much . However, it has taken me a long time to realise this. Let's begin with my childhood. I grew up going to synagogue most weeks and attended a Jewish primary school, Kerem. I grew up modern orthodox ,however I don't feel that I ever truly fitted into this type of Judaism. Although my mum tells me I used to love my siddur and learning I find this pretty difficult to believe. But I guess we all change. I did in fact love synagogue and school , learning all the stories, engrossed in the songs. Shabbat was the best, always going to a different family friend. Although I preferred meals at our house as I do know for a fact my mum is the best cook. Reflecting I see now that Judaism and tradition was always important in my family's life. We may not be religious, but we are heimishe as my dad puts it. My parents and grandparents have taught me the value of community and how important it is to care for those around me. As well as this I have always learnt a lot about Israel from my whole family from a range of different perspectives, for this I am very grateful. I am grateful to have learnt amazing values and morals from my family and to have been exposed to so many diverse experiences. Including traditional cousins , my savta who goes to a liberal synagogue and has a strong Jewish European heritage and her husband my saba who is atheist yet loves community and his Israeli roots , being born there. I believe it has truly shaped me into the person I am today!

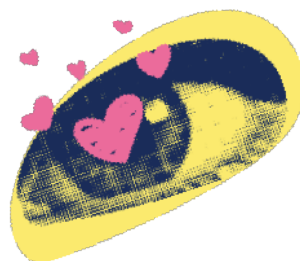


Many of my closest friends from my Jewish primary school went on to non-Jewish secondary schools, whilst I had a short stint at Jewish Free school (JFS) and ultimately ended up at Immanuel College from year 7 (December) to year 13. I loved Immanuel, however in comparison to my primary school friends who looked forward to their Sunday Jewish learning, I felt trapped by so much Judaism.

This makes me ponder if constantly making children learn about their religion causes them to eventually disconnect from it? I feel this was the case for me and I began to have a lack of care for learning about Judaism. It felt repetitive, it felt compulsory (all things which it was) and orthodox Judaism, didn't seem to relate to my life anymore. Within a few years I became disconnected from Judaism just listening instead of engaging with the subject. As well as it becoming a daily part of school life, it also became something I didn't seem to agree with anymore. I'm unsure if in school I felt atheist, but I definitely felt very detached from Judaism.

Overall, it began to be something which I couldn't seem to reconcile with my values and beliefs. For example, in school I was becoming a feminist, and this didn't align in my eyes to the way women are treated in Orthodox Judaism. My progressive politics also didn't seem to line up to Orthodox Judaism. Although it may seem that in school I had no connection to Judaism, this couldn't be further from the truth.

This is because I was a part of a youth movement called Bnai Brith Youth Organisation (BBYO). This Jewish youth group met every Sunday in JW3 and ran programmes. It is a pluralist youth movement which meant that every programme and space BBYO created allowed for space for diversity in terms of celebrating it and using it as a form of education. I would like to use this essay to highlight some core memories from BBYO. Although simply going every week to JW3 and having programmes about insightful topics such as interfaith work and the environment made me feel more connected to my Judaism. How may you ask? It was because the programmes didn't overtly explicitly relate to Judaism.



Maybe they would have an implicit message about being a good person or helping others , but most of the time it was a social way to meet other young Jewish teens and enjoy our Sunday nights. It made me realise that Judaism does not have to be solely reading the torah, it can be more of a community atmosphere.

Another amazing memory from BBYO was going on summer camp in America with BBYO. It was called Kallah, and it was a camp centred around your Jewish identity. Through this camp I explored many different aspects of Judaism, I loved learning about Israeli politics from someone who worked at Haaretz which began to spark my interest in left wing politics and how that relates to my Judaism. However, the most meaningful part of the summer camp was when on one shabbat a few Holocaust survivors came to visit from New York. I was lucky enough to be picked to be one of their grandchildren for the weekend. Having this opportunity has really shaped me and I still stay in touch with Hannah. Learning her story was so incredible and she really taught me to always enjoy life!

Through BBYO I also went to America to a conference called International Convention. It was a weekend in Florida with 5,000 Jewish teens from around the world who were all a part of BBYO! It was an incredible experience. From sharing a room and learning about life from girls from Uruguay BBYO to educational programmes about being transgender and Jewish to day trips to a range of different Shabbat experiences it felt like the inclusive Jewish space I had always yearned for. I took this love of BBYO to the next level when I became a madricha leading camps , trips , winter conventions, all of which I adored. However, the most meaningful experience was leading Israel Tour for BBYO last summer. Specifically leading a shabbat service in the egalitarian part of the Kotel was a core memory as it allowed myself and my co leaders to create that special inclusive environment for the teens that wanted it. So many of these teens expressed the desire for an environment like this instead of gender binary ones. To be a leader in this experience is one I will always cherish.



Choosing to be part of the Jewish Community is a major factor in my life.

I feel that BBYO had a major impact in this, showing me that my Judaism can relate more to what I do for the world instead of how much Jewish learning I partake in. Hence, keeping me wanting to be part of the Jewish Community. Significantly I feel that my Jewish family and friends makes me want to stay connected and part of the community. I enjoy the shared culture and experiences I have with them. For example, being able to go on Israel tour and dress up for Purim together. However, I would

not say I feel a part of one Jewish community. I enjoyed going to the reform synagogue on the high holy days, but because I identify as not believing in G-D it didn't feel like my Jewish community. I describe my Jewish identity as being culturally involved with Judaism. I am very proud of my ancestors and family, however connecting to G-D is something I struggle with. This poses the question how can Jewish community be such an important factor in my life? The answer is I am not sure, but I feel it is because I see Judaism being linked to my friends, family, way of life, therefore it would be a very difficult thing to part ways with, nor do I want to.



Today I am a young Jewish female adult who has just left University. There are things I like and simultaneously dislike about this identity. Let's begin with the things that I like. I like that I have supportive Jewish friends and family to share this journey with. I like that I have had many Jewish experiences so that I have a better understanding of what I do and don't enjoy. I like that I am not chained to learning Judaism in a specific way and it feels as if it is more my choice regarding how I conduct my life as a Jewish person. I have the ability to explore what Judaism means to me. It is a time of experimentation. However, on the flipside I have things I dislike and fear. I dislike the cliquiness of the Jewish community, which I believe is a reason why people remove themselves from the community. I personally do not feel Jewish guilt or pressure to a large extent; however, I dislike that there is so much pressure within the Jewish young adult community to be dating someone Jewish.



In the future I see myself having a Jewish life. However, this Jewish life is one that is unique to me. I would like to join a liberal synagogue despite my lack of connection to G-d. That is because I want that sense of community. I yearn for my left-wing values to be intertwined with my Jewish life. I believe a liberal Jewish community will provide me with this. I can envision myself having a connection with Judaism through a life of fighting social injustice. Specifically, a life working in social housing. My Judaism centres around helping people and being a kind person. Therefore, I believe my career will allow me to live the Jewish life I desire, making change for the community. Although I am not religious, I can appreciate how what I have learnt from my Jewish upbringings has shaped the person I want to become. Most clearly creating positive change for those around me through charity work, social housing and activism. Activism is what I envision at the forefront of my future Jewish life. Activism for what I feel is the correct thing, what is just and what is important to help as many people as possible.

Future me hopes to find ways to reconnect with my Jewish history, culture, traditions and love of

helping people and tikkun olam. I also hope to continue my love of fighting for justice and being a part of interfaith spaces which I feel are so important!

I look forward to my Jewish future , whatever it entails...

