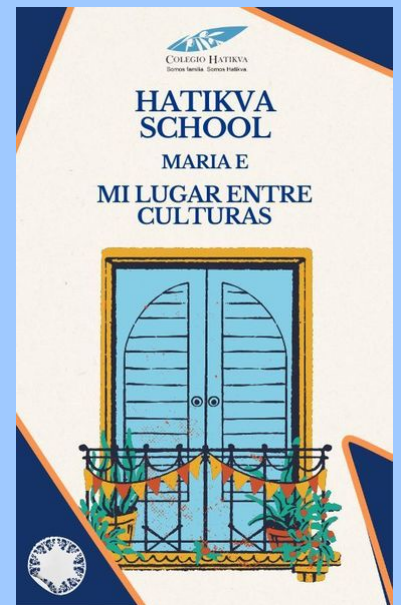




My Place Between Cultures



Name: **María E**

Gender: **Woman**

Country of residence: **Spain**

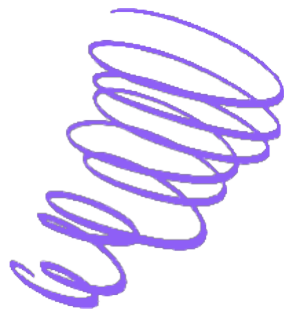
Writing language: **Spanish**

Although I am not part of Judaism myself, growing up so close to this community has allowed me to understand and deeply respect how important that sense of belonging can be



My name is María, and at 16 years old, I am still studying at Hatikva School, the school where I have spent practically my entire life. Even though I am not Jewish, growing up surrounded by this religion has shaped the way I see the world and the person I am today.

I was born in Barcelona, Spain; however, I have dual nationality. I am Mexican on my mother's side and Spanish on my father's side. I have two siblings: Pablo, who is 17, and Frida, who is 12. My brother and I are only 15 months apart, so we have grown up side by side. But now that he has finished ESO, he no longer attends Hatikva, so this year is probably the most time we have ever spent apart. With my sister, on the other hand, I am the oldest, and she sees me as someone who can guide her, as well as someone with whom she can share experiences. Our dog is called Brisa, and she has been with us since I was four years old, meaning she has been by my side for practically my entire life.



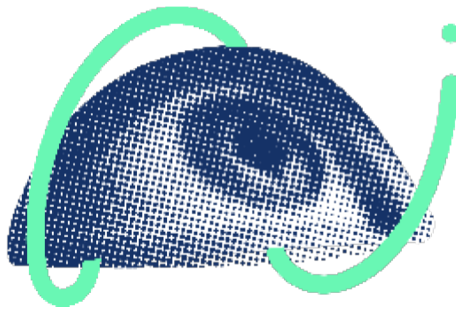
Although I am Christian, Judaism has been part of my life since childhood. When my mother arrived in Spain as a foreigner, she wanted her children to attend an international and diverse school so that we could grow up surrounded by different cultures and ways of thinking. Whether by coincidence or fate, the first friends she made after arriving sent their children to Hatikva, and she eventually decided to enroll me there when I was two years old.

As I mentioned before, I have studied at this school my entire life, with the exception of one year when I moved to Mexico at the age of six. Despite not being Jewish, I have always been made to feel welcome. Ever since I was little, my friends have invited me to share important moments connected to their faith and religion: Shabbat dinners, Purim celebrations, Rosh Hashanah and Passover seders, and many other traditions. They have always included me with warmth and affection.



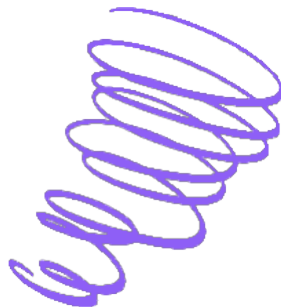
My best friends are Jewish, some more observant than others, but honestly, it has never been something that makes us feel different from one another. We care about each other deeply, and I have never felt that religion, nationality, or any other factor separated us. The same is true with my classmates. Since we have grown up together since preschool, we have created an unbreakable bond. Now, in our fourth year of ESO, there are only fourteen people in our class, and we are like siblings. This year we are graduating, and for the first time in fifteen years, we will not see each other every day. To be honest, that is a little scary.

I believe that growing up in a Jewish school has made me much more open-minded. Constantly being surrounded by people with different cultures, traditions, and beliefs has taught me to be very respectful and not to form prejudices too quickly. I enjoy learning about other religions and understanding different ways of seeing life. In fact, I feel that this has made me more open and tolerant than many other people.



Interestingly, I also have a distant family connection to Judaism, completely unrelated to the fact that I ended up attending Hatikva. My maternal surname is Véjar, which comes from Béjar, a town in Salamanca that had a Jewish community before the Inquisition. After the expulsion of Jews from Spain, many families from the area adopted this surname, with slight variations. My ancestors probably came from there and later emigrated to Mexico. According to what we know, there was Jewish ancestry in my family up until my great-great-grandfather, who married a non-Jewish woman, and that is where the Jewish lineage ended.

However, my grandfather has always been a very spiritual person. Over the years, partly influenced by the fact that my siblings and I attended a Jewish school, he gradually became closer to some Jewish customs. Today, he is Christian and believes in Jesus, but he maintains certain Jewish practices, such as eating kosher food, observing Shabbat, and even fasting on Yom Kippur.



At the moment, I am at an important point in my life. I graduate in a month and will begin a new stage, gradually entering the adult world. I now think more about my future, about the kind of person I want to become, and the principles I want to live by. One of the greatest advantages I see in having grown up at Hatikva is the opportunity I have had to connect with people who are different from me and to learn from each of them, regardless of our different religions.

To conclude, I want to emphasize the following: being Jewish can be a very important part of everyday life. Belonging to an identity, remembering where you come from, and representing your people can be a source of pride, especially if you live in the diaspora. In the face of the strong antisemitism being experienced today, maintaining that identity can feel more important than ever. Although I am not part of Judaism myself, growing up so close to this community has allowed me to understand and deeply respect how important that sense of belonging can be.

