

3 Being Jewish: practice and observance

Current religious practice and outlook

How does current religious practice relate to current self-defined outlook? It would be incorrect to suggest, for example, that those describing themselves as currently 'Reform' were Somewhat Secular, or that those currently 'Traditional' were all Somewhat Religious. Certainly those who saw themselves as being currently 'just Jewish' (22 per cent) were more likely to be Secular. However, as already seen, 16 per cent of this group were Somewhat Religious. Marriage may provide a possible explanation for this.

Two out of five people in the sample saw themselves as being currently 'Traditional' (41 per cent) and, as expected, the majority of them were Somewhat Religious. However, over 40 per cent of these 'Traditionals' fell into the combined Secular/Somewhat Secular (SSS) grouping, highlighting further the lack of a straightforward correlation. A similar, but opposite, pattern was evident in the case of those describing themselves as currently 'Reform/Progressive'; over a third described their outlook as being in the combined Somewhat Religious/Religious grouping (SRR) (36 per cent; note that only 17 per cent of the sample identified themselves as 'Reform').

Jewish consciousness

The survey of the Jews of Greater London investigates 'Jewish consciousness' in a manner that explicitly ignores the issue of *observance* (discussed separately below). It found that the SSS had a very high level of Jewish consciousness, with 80 per cent stating that they were either 'quite strongly' or 'extremely' conscious of being Jewish. This sits uncomfortably with the fact that only 9 per cent of the sample described their outlook as Religious.

There are many possible explanations as to why the level of Jewish consciousness was so high while that of religiosity was so low. Perhaps the label 'Religious' was associated with actual *practice* (as opposed to *outlook*). For example, the Religious 9 per cent is similar to the proportion who did not travel on the Sabbath (11 per cent) and the proportion who would not turn on a light on the Sabbath (7 per

cent). These might be defined as 'religious practice markers' breaking down the perceived smoothness of the outlook continuum.

Religious observance and practice

The survey examined four 'markers' of religious Jewish practice. These were: lighting candles on Friday night; attending a *seder* at Passover; fasting on Yom Kippur; and keeping kosher. These four will now be analysed with regard to outlook.

Lighting candles

Eighty-two per cent of respondents said that they lit candles on Friday night either 'occasionally' or 'every Friday'; as expected, the more religious tended to light candles more frequently. For those with a Secular outlook, almost half 'never' lit candles; this is a considerably higher proportion than either of the other three outlook groups. However, this obscures the fact that 73 per cent of the SSS group lit candles either 'occasionally' or 'every Friday'. In fact, 12 per cent of those who lit candles 'every Friday' considered themselves to be Secular. Clearly, those with a Secular outlook considered it important to carry out this ritual.

The frequency of candle lighting appears to be a good indicator of which side of the Somewhat divide a person might fall into. In other words, the Somewhat Secular, as a rule, lit candles 'occasionally' (46 per cent of all 'occasionally' responses) while the Somewhat Religious lit them 'every Friday' (46 per cent of all 'every Friday' responses).

Attending a Passover seder

A similar picture emerged when it came to attending a Passover *seder*. Three-quarters of the entire sample said that they attended a *seder* 'every year'. Again, the more religious people were the more likely to select 'every year'. But here the results were surprising: almost half of those who considered themselves to be Secular selected 'every year' as well (47 per cent), and 82 per cent said they attended a *seder* 'some', 'most' or 'every' year. This trend continued with three-quarters of the Somewhat Secular attending a *seder* 'every year'.

So, once more, significant secular Jewish religious practice is evident. As to why this is the case, the

answer probably lies in the family-oriented nature of the activity. That attending a *seder* is even more pervasive than candle lighting suggests that there might be an issue regarding commitment: less time needs to be invested in attending a meal once a year than in lighting candles every week. That said, the Somewhat Secular had much more in common with the Somewhat Religious than with the Secular regarding this activity. Of those that said they 'never' attended a *seder* (admittedly only 6 per cent of the sample), almost three-quarters were Secular (71 per cent).

Fasting on Yom Kippur

In each of the outlook groups the propensity to fast on Yom Kippur was lower than that to attend a *seder*. Almost a quarter of the SSS 'never' fasted (23 per cent) and, significantly, those with a Secular outlook were 2.5 times more likely 'never' to fast than those with a Somewhat Secular outlook. This is another religious practice marker that tangibly separates the Secular group from the others. Even so, 30 per cent of the Secular fasted 'every' year, as did a significant 56 per cent of the Somewhat Secular. Thus, over three-quarters (78 per cent) of the SSS fasted or, if health permitted, would fast at least 'some years'. Incidentally, twice as many Somewhat Religious as Religious would refrain from fasting for 'health reasons'.

Keeping kosher

The final indicator of religious practice examined by the survey was keeping kosher. As one might expect, the less religious the outlook the greater the likelihood that non-kosher meat would be eaten outside of the home. This factor is another key variable in distinguishing the Somewhat Secular from the Somewhat Religious. Almost three-quarters of the Somewhat Religious either 'never' or 'occasionally' ate non-kosher meat outside the home (72 per cent). The equivalent proportion of the Somewhat Secular was half that: about one in three (38 per cent), as shown in Table 6.

As for those who 'occasionally' ate non-kosher meat outside of the home, the two Somewhat outlook groups were roughly similar, with one-quarter of each (24 per cent of the Somewhat Secular and 28 per cent of the Somewhat Religious) doing so, although the Somewhat Religious were three times more likely than the Somewhat Secular 'never' to eat non-kosher meat outside the home. Conversely, the Somewhat Secular were twice as likely as the Somewhat Religious to eat non-kosher meat 'frequently'.

Only half (52 per cent) of the sample bought meat solely from a kosher butcher, and of these 37 per cent were among the SSS grouping. This is

Table 6: Response to question, 'Do you ever eat non-kosher meat outside of the home?', by outlook

Response	Secular (%)	Somewhat Secular (%)	Somewhat Religious (%)	Religious (%)	Base
Never	8	15	45	84	830
Occasionally	18	24	27	8	630
Frequently	74	61	28	8	1,383
Total	100	100	100	100	2,843

Table 7: Keeping kosher at home and outside the home, by outlook

	Secular	Somewhat Secular	Somewhat Religious	Religious
Outside of the home %	8	15	45	84
At home %	22	43	74	89
Number of times more likely to eat kosher meat at home than outside the home	2.6	2.9	1.6	1.1

surprisingly high, given how relatively low the overall proportion was. Even more peculiar was the fact that one out of five of the Secular group said that they only ate kosher meat at home (22 per cent). Eating kosher meat at home appears to be less of an indicator of the secular-religious divide than eating non-kosher meat outside of the home.

Table 7 highlights a key difference between the SSS and SRR outlook categories regarding the consumption of non-kosher meat in general. An SSS respondent was up to three times more likely to eat kosher meat at home than outside the home, whereas the SRR were only 1.5 times more likely to do so. In other words, those who describe their outlook as being secular are considerably more likely than the religious to eat non-kosher meat outside the home, even if they only eat kosher meat at home.

Synagogue activity

Synagogue attendance

The survey showed that attending synagogue services was almost the exclusive realm of the SRR (see Table 8). One out of five (19 per cent) did not attend any synagogue services at all and 89 per cent of these were among the SSS. That said, almost three-quarters of the SSS (71 per cent) attended at least once a year, and, of these, two out of five attended 'three times a year', i.e. the High Holy Days only (40 per cent). But the clearest division emerged in those selecting the response 'most Sabbaths or more often': the Somewhat Religious were 5.5 times more likely to select this response than the Somewhat Secular (56 per cent against 10 per cent). The difference is also stark when the 'not at all' response is analysed. The Secular were 2.5 times more likely 'never' to attend services than the Somewhat Secular (49 per cent against 15 per

Table 8: Attendance of synagogue services, by outlook

Frequency of synagogue attendance	Secular (%)	Somewhat Secular (%)	Somewhat Religious (%)	Religious (%)	Base
Not at all	49	15	5	4	535
High Holy Days	33	46	19	5	851
Some other festivals	9	19	17	3	405
Monthly	6	13	23	10	407
Weekly or more often	3	7	36	78	609
Total	100	100	100	100	2,807

Table 9: Synagogue membership, by outlook

Denomination	Secular (%)	Somewhat Secular (%)	Somewhat Religious (%)	Religious (%)	Base
None	40	14	5	3	468
Haredi/Independent Orthodox	1	1	2	20	83
Federation	4	4	6	7	138
Mainstream Orthodox/United Synagogue	28	47	64	60	1,390
Masorti	2	6	5	2	116
Reform	23	26	16	7	567
Other	2	2	2	1	58
Total	100	100	100	100	2,820

cent). Eighty-five per cent of the Somewhat Secular attended at least some services in the year. The equivalent Secular proportion was 50 per cent.

Synagogue membership

Actual membership of synagogues was even more complex. Of those that responded, half belonged to a 'mainstream Orthodox/United Synagogue', and a substantial proportion of these described themselves as being SSS (46 per cent). However, the SSS were clearly a diverse group since a quarter

were not members of any synagogue at all. This contrasts with the findings of the AJIS study, in which a secular outlook was associated with a relatively low level of affiliation.¹³ One out of five respondents were members of 'Liberal/Reform' synagogues (20 per cent), almost 30 per cent of whom described themselves as being SRR in outlook. In other words, many who identified themselves as 'Reform' were more likely to be Religious than the Somewhat Secular were to have no membership at all.