

Commonwealth
Jewish Council



Shared values Common causes

The Commonwealth Charter of Principles
and the Commonwealth Jewish Council



Charter of the Commonwealth 2013

We the people of the Commonwealth:

Recognising that in an era of changing economic circumstances ... , unprecedented threats to peace and security, and a surge in popular demands for democracy, human rights and broadened economic opportunities, the potential of and need for the Commonwealth ... has never been greater,

Recalling that the Commonwealth is a voluntary association of independent and equal sovereign states..., consulting and co-operating in the common interests of our peoples and in the promotion of ... world peace, and influencing international society to the benefit of all through the pursuit of common principles and values,

Affirming that the special strength of the Commonwealth lies in the combination of our diversity and our shared inheritance in language, culture and the rule of law; and bound together by shared history and tradition; by respect for all states and peoples ... and by concern for the vulnerable,

Affirming that the Commonwealth way is to seek consensus... the sharing of experience, especially through practical co-operation, and further affirming that the Commonwealth is uniquely placed to serve as a model ... for new forms of friendship and co-operation in the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations,

Affirming the role of the Commonwealth as a recognised intergovernmental champion of small states, advocating for their special needs; providing policy advice on political, economic and social development issues; and delivering technical assistance,

Welcoming the valuable contribution of the network of the many intergovernmental, parliamentary, professional and civil society bodies which ... subscribe and adhere to (the Commonwealth's) values and principles,

Affirming the validity of and our commitment to the values and principles of the Commonwealth as defined and strengthened over the years,

Affirming our core Commonwealth principles of consensus and common action, mutual respect, inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, legitimacy, and responsiveness,

Reaffirming the core values and principles of the Commonwealth as declared by this Charter:

1. **Democracy**
2. **Human rights**
3. **International peace and security**
4. **Tolerance, respect and understanding**
5. **Freedom of Expression**
6. **Separation of Powers**
7. **Rule of Law**
8. **Good Governance**
9. **Sustainable Development**
10. **Protecting the Environment**
11. **Access to Health, Education, Food and Shelter**
12. **Gender Equality**
13. **Importance of Young People in the Commonwealth**
14. **Recognition of the Needs of Small States**
15. **Recognition of the Needs of Vulnerable States**
16. **The Role of Civil Society**

We are committed to ensuring that the Commonwealth is an effective association, responsive to members' needs, and capable of addressing the significant global challenges of the future.

We aspire to a Commonwealth that is a strong and respected voice in the world, speaking out on major issues; that strengthens and enlarges its networks; that has a global relevance and profile; and that is devoted to improving the lives of all peoples of the Commonwealth.

This booklet explores why the Commonwealth Jewish Council finds the Commonwealth Principles so palatable, drawing on the rich heritage of Jewish tradition and teaching as well as the long experience of the Jewish People across the globe and, in particular, in Commonwealth countries. Furthermore, it will indicate how the CJC will work to progress these values and ideals.

Not surprisingly, many of our smallest communities have their work cut out simply to survive as Jewish communities or service their own needs and it would be unrealistic to expect that they might have played too significant a part in contributing to the wider society as formal communities – though we have been, even so, impressed by and proud of how many Jews in different places have made their own individual contributions to the upbuilding of just societies where they live, whatever their formal community structures can demonstrate.

However this booklet is not primarily about the work that has been done by Jews across the globe. A glance at any historical record or contemporary reality will demonstrate that. We are going to concentrate on the principles and values as stated and the way in which they so comfortably gel with Jewish thought – or where there are nuances of difference, the way in which the Jewish voice can contribute to a more subtle and sensitive approach to the application of these principles.

We have arranged these values into four groups which in turn look towards a fair world, a sustainable world, a redistributive world and an ideal world.

Clive Lawton

Chief Executive, Commonwealth Jewish Council

November 2015

A fair world – a world of equal rights and opportunities

This group of values expresses the rich interplay between a healthy society and individual rights and freedoms. Society can't work if people simply do whatever they like, but similarly people can't be free if they are utterly controlled by their rulers. The Jewish world richly manifests the strong individuality characteristic of Jews while also never avoiding the need to identify with, and contribute to, the wider community both Jewish and general.

1. DEMOCRACY
2. HUMAN RIGHTS
5. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION
6. SEPARATION OF POWERS
7. RULE OF LAW
8. GOOD GOVERNANCE
12. GENDER EQUALITY

Democracy In biblical times, not only did the people determine the political arrangements of their polity – they demanded and got a king despite the opposition of the leading prophet of the time, Samuel – but Jewish Law also insisted that the king was subject to, not above, the law. Indeed in the book of Deuteronomy, a king is required to carry with him at all times a book of the Torah which he has written himself. At no time could a king ignore the rules under which he operated. Even more remarkably, both Abraham in Genesis and Moses in Exodus demand of God Himself that He abides by His own standards as expressed! Equally remarkably, God seems to accept that they're right!

Rule of Law Judaism does not require of everyone that they become Jewish. Indeed, Jewish teaching is clear that non-Jews are not benefitted by becoming Jewish. As a result, Judaism has to decide what constitutes a good person even if they are not Jewish. The result is the '7 Laws to the Sons of Noah' – basically, 'The 10 Commandments' less a few. But there are one or two notable differences. One is a law forbidding eating meat torn from a living animal. Kindness to animals is

basic human morality. But the other is the requirement to abide by a proper system of law courts. People, including rulers, must not take the law into their own hands. Thus the rule of law has long been understood by Jews to be fundamental to a civilised society. Not surprisingly too, then, it is also a fundamental dynamic of Jewish life, intensified by the long established principle – *dina d'malkhuta dina* – the law of the land is the law, binding Jews to observe the laws of the countries in which they have found themselves over the years.

Separation of Powers The seeds of the separation of powers are evident in the rule that those eligible for Priesthood were not eligible for kingship and vice-versa. Further, both were subject to the critical voice of the 'free commentator', the prophet.

The Parliamentarians who fought the English Civil War and ruled Britain as a republic for some years in the 17th century looked to the Jewish Bible for guidance as to how to organize government, since they recognised that it gave rich advice about the interplay between the people and authority, popular desires and the rule of law.

Freedom of Expression Had they known more about the Talmud, (the primary encyclopaedia of rabbinic discussion, debate and teaching, drawn together in the 6th century) those 17th century thinkers might have been struck by the rich acceptability, indeed centrality, of argument. Dissenting voices were recorded and honoured, even if their view was not finally followed.

Within Jewish communities, leaders and officiants have long been elected and thus know the precariousness of popular approval. Furthermore, the argumentative nature of Jewish community life manages somehow to combine a level of respect for leaders, hierarchy and traditional roles with a healthy scepticism about false status and unacceptable appeals to those same hierarchies, traditions and roles.

Human Rights Judaism enshrines perhaps the most ancient assertion of this principle. In Genesis, as Mankind is created, it says that Humanity – each human being – is created in God's image – *b'tzelem Elohim* – which must mean that each person has the right to a certain inalienable dignity simply because they are human. It is no coincidence therefore that the leading Israeli Human Rights organisation is called 'B'Tzelem'.

Gender Equality The creation of Humanity – 'male and female created He them' – in the image of God as the Torah tells us in Genesis incontrovertably confirms that women and men are deserving of the same respect and intrinsic infinite value.

Different denominations of Judaism have taken differing views on the roles that men and women can play in ritual activities, synagogue services and suchlike and this field, under the pressure of modern feminism, remains in some state of flux. But at no point in Jewish teaching did a woman become a chattel of her



The right to peaceful protest is fundamental to democracy. Here, a demonstration outside the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa reasserts the principle. February 2011
iStock.com/RyersonClark



An Indian woman casts her vote in the world's largest democratic elections

iStock.com/EdStock

husband, her property did not become his, nor was it ever considered unacceptable for her to engage in trade in her own right.

The Talmud says 'If your wife is short, bend down to listen to her'. After all, God tells Abraham to do all that his wife Sarah told him to do.

The Bible allows polygamy, but rapidly the ideal became monogamy and various hedges were erected to ensure that women were not easily cast aside. In the 10th century, the leading rabbi of German lands at that time issued an edict which put on hold any polygamy for the Jews of Europe for a millennium. Though that edict has now run its course, no-one is suggesting a return to polygamy since it's become the almost universal practice of Jews to stick to monogamous marriages. (A few Jews from Muslim countries, for example, the Jews of Yemen, have continued with polygamy but it is becoming increasingly rare, not least as Jews living in Muslim lands have become a rapidly diminishing group.)

Similarly, divorce in Torah legislation is fairly straightforward, giving all the power and control to the man, but the rabbis rapidly ensured that divorce could not be wielded in a cavalier manner, that at marriage the contract between the couple committed the husband to a kind of divorce settlement should the marriage break down and that a man could not divorce his wife against her will except in the most extreme and unlikely combination of circumstances. Wonderfully too, the rabbis early agreed that, though no-one ever rejoiced at a divorce, neither the husband nor the wife would have to explain to anyone else their grounds for seeking a divorce. The breakdown of their marriage was no-one else's business. All that was required (not so easy in practice of course!) was that both sides agree to the divorce.

THE CJC

The CJC notes proudly that Jewish communities round the Commonwealth observe the law, participate in democratic processes and support human rights. Building on this strong base, we will share ideas by which Jewish communities can further contribute to the upbuilding of such ideals.

The CJC will support local communities (where they would like such support) in challenging any erosion of Jewish rights and equality before the law in any country where that might arise.

In all of our structures, we commit to including women in all deliberations and will seek to avoid male-only meetings, speaker panels, decision-making groups and so on.

Jewish communities already know how foolish it would be not to call upon the remarkable resource of energy, ideas and understanding that our women bring to community activities, but should we discover that some community somehow failed to recognise this or build upon it, we would be ready to explore why they were doing this and encourage them to allow all to contribute equally to the development and governance of the community and its work for the good of all.

Different religious communities, including Jews, have a variety of ritual and traditional approaches to the roles of men and women – for example, Roman Catholic priesthood being reserved for men, the separation of Muslim men and women in prayer at the mosque. These traditions often add to the rich diversity of human culture and life and we advocate the maximum amount of toleration and acceptance of such diversity. Humanity is not served by seeking that all people behave in the same way or that they pattern their communities in some single form. But the CJC does not countenance the exclusion of women or men from civic life and equality before the law on the basis of gender nor could it countenance discrimination against people simply because of their sexual orientation.

We are particularly pleased to note the growing number of women to women initiatives being engaged in by Jewish women around the world, creating dialogue and understanding between, for example, Muslim and Jewish women. In this regard, we note, for example, the recent establishment of Nisa-Nashim ('Women' in Arabic and Hebrew) in the UK.

A sustainable world for our grandchildren

The Jewish default position – that the world is here for humanity’s use – does not prevent the existence of, for example, Jewish vegetarians. It has long been recognised that with great power comes great responsibility and the Torah, for example, makes it clear that people cannot just treat natural resources any way they like. They must conserve and hand on. Equally important, all the bounty that God gives us should be reasonably shared and the rights of all to benefit from the world and its resources has resulted in rich traditions of helping everyone stand on their own feet and achieve a good quality of life.

9. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

10. PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

11. ACCESS TO HEALTH, EDUCATION, FOOD AND SHELTER

Jewish tradition is unashamed about the right of humanity to manipulate the world for its advantage. Rather shockingly to the modern ear, for example, the medieval commentator Rashi (11th century Rhineland) comments that the reason why it was fine for almost all animals to die in Noah’s Flood in the Biblical Book of Genesis was because without many human beings surviving, there was no use for them!

Jews note that the world was put into the care and power of human beings but stewardship also requires responsible management. In the Medieval mystical book ‘The Zohar’, God shows Adam around the world and warns him that if he spoils it for future generations there will be no other world to turn to. This world – which God repeatedly sees as ‘good’ when He creates it – is all we’ve got.

Of course, Judaism sees the ideal world with Jews settled in the Land of Israel and there are many pieces of Bible teaching that relate directly to that land but give indications of Jewish lessons for all. Firstly, there is the requirement that the land should be allowed to lie fallow every seventh year and that no-one should make a profit from its produce in that year. Interestingly, there are many who still abide by this biblical rule in the modern State of Israel every seventh year.

Furthermore, there is an injunction not to destroy fruit trees when besieging a city in war. As the Torah says in Deuteronomy ‘After all, you are not at war with the trees’. From this rule comes a whole swathe of Jewish rules about not wasting or destroying anything unnecessarily.

Equally, while Judaism readily allows for the killing of animals for food, the only animals to be kosher i.e. permitted, are domestically farmed animals so that the horrific trade in wild animals and the hunting of animals for sport is effectively unknown in Jewish circles through history. Furthermore, if you are going to kill an animal for food, you must be sure to do it as swiftly and painlessly as possible. In Jewish teaching there can be no conveyor belt of animals killed by machine.

Just a glance at Jewish history though will tell us that in the last two millennia, Jews have often been forced off the land into urban situations, sometimes even shut up in small sections of towns (ghettos) in appallingly overcrowded conditions. Remarkably, despite centuries of such treatment, Jews continued to look out onto the natural world, note the seasons, the source of different foods, avoid the seventh year produce of the Land of Israel and so on.



“This world is all we’ve got”

All of this has resulted in a ready embrace of contemporary global concerns about the environment, though most Jews are not as suspicious as some of the attempt to think our way out of the problems that have arisen as a result of growing overcrowding. For example, many of the most strict rabbis have felt that GM foods are a good use of human ingenuity which will help to feed more people and most Jews will almost always prioritise providing for people over concern for the natural environment – though obviously many recognise that they have also to think about future generations in that equation.

Many remarkable scientific developments, not least drip irrigation, systems for the production of safe clean water and so on, have been the product of Jewish ingenuity in agriculture and the conservation of natural resources, and in this areas the State of Israel is a beacon of valuable development and good practice.

Despite this readiness to celebrate and utilise science and technology and generally to see such developments as positive for human

benefit, there is one important countervailing tradition – *Shabbat*, the weekly day of rest, from which the world has learnt the idea of the weekend, the right to strike, the need, indeed the right, to balance work with leisure, and thus the idea that working people should have paid holidays, retirement, sick leave and such built in to the fact of being a working person. The idea of *Shabbat*, that everyone has a right to work and not work, is not obvious and indeed still does not exist for far too many people on the planet.

Shabbat then is central to the Jewish idea of a just and well regulated society. According to Orthodox practice, on one day a week no-one can make you work. Every individual has a right to a day off and on this day too one should stop trying to manipulate the world and rather live within it as we find it. This is not some requirement to live ‘primitively’ – we can enjoy all the creature comforts we can organise and indeed the day should be one of pleasure and leisure – but we should learn that we do not have to be *doing* all the time and for a day a week we should rather enjoy





Children from Morning Star School Tamale, Ghana – a Tzedek partner school

what we have rather than devote all our time to trying to organise more. Such an experience is salutary whether a Jew lives in luxurious conditions or in deep deprivation. In the former, Jews have to stop their constant activity and the spurious feeling that the world will not turn without us, and in the latter, Jews in sometimes grinding poverty are given a chance to set aside their worries and concerns for a day, and enjoy what little they've been able to conserve for this special occasion and be kings and queens in their own homes – even hovels – for a day every week. Anyone who has seen the musical *Fiddler on the Roof* will gain some insight into how Shabbat can work for even the poorest.

But none of this can or will stand for long if the third principle in this section is not strongly prioritised i.e. access to education, health care, decent food and shelter.

All that has been written above about human dignity and rights become empty words if all people do not have access to the basic building blocks of sustainable life.

Without good health care, a good general education, sufficient food and adequate shelter talk of human rights and dignity, decent systems of governance, free speech, concern for the environment and so on fade into meaningless posturing.

Healthcare has long been a high Jewish priority and Jewish doctors have often led the field throughout the ages. At a time when many Jews were prevented from participating in the ancient trades and skills, unable to own land, excluded from civic life, fortunately the field of medicine mostly remained open to them. Occasional accusations from ignorant and superstitious people distrusted Jewish skills in medicine from time to time but that did not prevent Jewish engagement in the

“Jews have long recognised education as a way out of poverty”

field so that, for example, one of the most famous and respected rabbis of all time, Moses Maimonides (12th century Egypt) was a physician who served in the court of Saladin. Education has proved an equally important value for Jews. Jews have been dubbed ‘The People of the Book’ and so it is not surprising that literacy, at first for all boys and men and then for all, became a watchword for Jewish communities around the world.

As is well known, Jews have suffered from persecution in many places over the centuries and have often been driven from their homes and countries. Jews have often thought that one of the ways in which we have somehow survived that continuous displacement has been the most portable form of wealth – an education.

The central Jewish prayer – the *Shema* – enjoins parents ‘to teach their children’ and a universal system of elementary education (for boys) was established as early as Roman times.

Even in the most closed Jewish societies, education will eventually lead young students to read at least two scripts and three languages, to study abstruse and complicated arguments of logic and explore teachings covering history, science, ethics, literary analysis and so on. Equipped with such an educational experience, adding and including general learning becomes easy.

Oddly perhaps, in the traditional Jewish communities of Eastern Europe before the Holocaust, it was often true that boys were encouraged to devote more time to Jewish study and so girls ended up with a better general education than their male peers. In some sections of the Jewish world that appears to remain true, resulting in women having greater earning power than men.

Generally, though, there has been ready interest in general, not just Jewish, learning. Jews are disproportionately represented in university faculties, in the arts and sciences, amongst Nobel Prize winners, writers and thinkers. Jewish schools the world over are recognized by local people as some of the highest achieving and most successful in the neighbourhood.

Jews have long recognised education as a way out of poverty as well. While a newly immigrant Jew to a country might be able to only engage in simple trading or peddling, it did not take long for him to aspire to his child getting a good education. Jewish families famously have submitted to many material sacrifices to enable their children to gain an education and the world over that appears still to be the common case amongst Jews.

THE CJC

The CJC will promote the ideas of sustainable development and care for the environment amongst Jewish communities in the Commonwealth as well as encouraging them to work with other sectors of their local societies to promote the issue more generally in their various countries.

From a Jewish perspective, the value of promoting access to the basic building blocks of a decent human existence, enabling each individual to live a life of dignity and capacity resonates extremely deeply. The CJC has no doubt that this might well be one of the

most important commitments of the Commonwealth and warmly endorses this value of all.

We already know of several projects around the Commonwealth where Jewish communities have tried to expand access to healthcare, education, food and shelter at various levels and we mention here, for example, the scholarships funded by the Sydney Jewish community in Australia, enabling Aboriginal young men and women to study medicine and become doctors.

Equity and Equality

Jews are a tiny proportion of the world's population and always have been. This has not stopped Jews both individually and as communities from contributing richly to world civilisation. Clearly Jews know better than anyone else both the vulnerability of being small but also the potential of small groups to make huge differences.

If this is true about small groups and nations it is also true of small people – children. Young people are often the most vulnerable to manipulation, neglect, lack of resources and all the other ills manifest in the modern world. Jews have always valued children and young people and devoted disproportionate resources to nurturing their potential. The old English saying ‘Children should be seen but not heard’ just sounds like a weird joke to any Jewish family!

13. IMPORTANCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE COMMONWEALTH

14. RECOGNITION OF THE NEEDS OF SMALL STATES

15. RECOGNITION OF THE NEEDS OF VULNERABLE STATES

The heroic Holocaust martyr Janusz Korczak pioneered the approach that recognised that children had rights and should be treated as far as possible with the same respect as adults expect of themselves. The Declaration on the Rights of the Child owes a huge debt to Korczak's groundbreaking thought and work.

Back in ancient times, while Romans gave the power of life and death to fathers over their children and Greeks left weak infants out on the hillside to die, amongst Jews and in Jewish law the life and prospects of a child were as sacrosanct as that of any other human being.

Enabling young people to thrive is the mark of a civilised and sustainable society. Of course, like all classical societies, the Jews also honour elders and wish to accentuate the balance to be struck between the generations. Sometimes it seems that the importance of competence in the new economic circumstances and technologies might lead us to discard or disparage the wisdom gained with age. Grandparents are easily as important as grandchildren – but not more important.

What has been written earlier about the priority

of education is pertinent here and the rabbis in the Talmud comment that he who does not teach his child a trade teaches him to steal. The Talmud also suggests that parents have a responsibility to teach their children to swim because simple economic capacity is not sufficient. Safety also matters. And alongside that of course is a proper moral and social education.

All this investment in children indicates their importance. It is unimaginable to the Jewish mind that a society might not strive to educate its young people to the highest, nor that it would not treat them with proper respect. Indeed, from the age of Bat/Barmitzvah (12 for girls, 13 for boys) young people are expected to make the right moral and social decisions and to take responsibility for themselves as fully autonomous moral beings.

But Judaism is as much interested in equity as equality. While it sees young people as having to take their part and step up, we do not think that it is ideal for young people to sacrifice their education for the sake of earning a living too early. Making proper adjustments so that society is fair, in line with people's differences



Fishermen in Kovalam,
Kerala, South India
Matt Paish

of need and current state, is as important as imposing some uniform condition on all. Young people need to be nurtured and the longer the better.

Such concerns for equity are evident in the Jewish rules of how one gives charity.

Strictly speaking, the idea of ‘charity’ – a virtuous act of giving to the less fortunate – does not really exist in Jewish thought. Jews have the concept of *Tzedaka* which relates more to the concept of fairness. *Tzedaka* is not a virtue. It's a duty. We *have* to share, and do so in such a manner that has regard to the other's needs and feelings.

This is pertinent when thinking about the needs of those weaker or more vulnerable than we are. In Commonwealth terms, this may relate

to these states as opposed to those. In Judaic terms it relates to anyone whose needs or circumstances we think might be different from our own.

It is not good enough to say, I'm giving them something and that's generous enough.

“Tzedaka is not a virtue.
It's a duty”



Small and large nations compete as equals
Commonwealth Games 2006
Jimmy Harris

THE CJC

The CJC is committed to sharing with all the Jewish communities in its network the very best practice and information about opportunities to develop Jewish young people round the world.

Already, the four largest Jewish communities in the Commonwealth – Australia, Canada, South Africa and the UK – run programmes offering or supporting education and/or economic development to non-Jewish people in one context or another. All four of those communities have at least one dedicated organisation set up to enable and encourage Jews to help people outside the Jewish world, whether it's MaAfrika Tikkun in South Africa, Ve'ahavta in Canada, Jewish Australia Aid (JAA) in Australia or Tzedek in the UK. The CJC will encourage those organisations and others like

them to share their best practice and encourage participation in their work, where possible, amongst those in the smaller communities.

The community of communities that makes up the Commonwealth Jewish Council is formally and constitutionally structured to have regard to the latter two principles in this section.

The four large communities listed above, through the CJC, are devoting resources to help the sometimes very small and sometimes very vulnerable communities in the Jewish family in the other countries of the Commonwealth. We want not only to recognise their needs, but respond to them as best we can.

“Grandparents are easily as important as grandchildren – but not more important”

We have to have regard to their dignity and feelings. We have to manage the situation with a sense of equity, not just equality, giving rise to the teaching that one may give a rich person who has fallen on hard times more than one might give a poor person in the same situation, because the rich person may be feeling the loss more severely having been used to more in the past.

This is indeed a challenging position to take but it gives important pointers for considering how to help a country, for example, on the front line of some conflict or subject to poor agricultural traditions. It is not sufficient to say that they've had the same chances as everyone else or that it's their choice that they are so small – they could have simply sacrificed their independence and gone in with another neighbouring state. But fairness is not just a matter of superficial material equality. Fairness is about the dignity of others too.

Adjusting our responses in similar circumstances to differing perceptions of need is a time honoured Jewish approach.



Mitzvah Day in a Jewish Care home
London 2014

Practical steps towards the Messianic dream

The Biblical prophets were the first to dream of an ideal world of peace and kindness. Jewish teaching has long suggested that such an age will come about when we all try to bring it about through living good lives. Such a 'good life' consists not only of looking after oneself but looking after others too, and not just those within one's family. In this ideal future world, the distinctions between people will not disappear but they will no longer cause conflict, contempt or discrimination, but all humanity will recognise the essential equality of all while accommodating their differences. Without doubt, even moving towards such a dream will not be achieved by governments and laws alone. It will need the collective effort and commitment of ordinary people all around the world.

3. INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

4. TOLERANCE, RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING

16. THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The well-known Jewish/Hebrew greeting is 'Shalom' which means 'peace' and the first articulation of peace being an ideal to aim for comes from the Hebrew bible and its prophets, like Isaiah. Until that time, no-one thought peace was anything other than the suppression of dissent, maintaining control or the simple absence of war.

But Jews are not 'pacifist' despite – or perhaps because of – our commitment to peace. It would seem, from these principles, that neither is the Commonwealth. Security sometimes needs robust defending. Sometimes, principles need to be fought for. Arguably, the reason the Nazis were able to do so much harm was because people did not confront them more assertively earlier. It seems unlikely now that anyone would argue that the Allies should not have fought the 2nd World War, nor that we are not all luckier for the Allies having won it. We take sides and, sometimes, we must fight.

There are laws of warfare in the Torah and rules seek to avoid the kind of total war without mercy or control which has developed. The first Hebrew – Abraham – fights a battle but refuses to take any booty which his allies consider their right. He will not profit from the fight. He readily fought

when the need arose, but he only fought because he had to.

We might also learn a pertinent lesson from a common Jewish practice. There is a line in Jewish prayer which talks about God making peace in Heaven and praying that He will make peace for us here on Earth too. The tradition is, when saying this line, to take three steps back and to bow three times, both acts of concession and humility. But note – only three times and only three bows. It would be wrong to endlessly give ground to bullies or to endlessly humble oneself before aggression.

Jews have had centuries to learn this. Nearly two millennia of helplessness, at the mercy of often unsympathetic powers, have taught us that peace and security paradoxically need fighting for.

Those negative experiences through the ages have also shown Jews the graded values of tolerance, respect and understanding. As a minimum, tolerance is already less than many can expect across the world. Whether it is the discrimination or worse that some face because of their beliefs, colour, sexual orientation, gender or whatever, the world is far from a tolerant place. Jews know that to our cost.

To get to a point where everyone was merely tolerated would mean we have advanced considerably towards that ideal state which Jews call 'The Messianic Age'.

Better than tolerance of course is respect. This requires not just that I put up with the other but that I actually learn to give him/her some space and a decent standing within my world. Just a moment's thought will reveal that, while tolerance can be achieved through legislation alone, respect can only be achieved through good interaction and education. Better still – and the highest ideal – would be understanding. If this were achieved, we still don't have to all agree with each other but we can gain insight into why others feel the way they do and value the things they do. Sometimes we will still vehemently disagree but gaining that understanding is a demonstration that we have really taken the other one seriously.

And in all of this, civil society is key. It is a proud fact that the minute any country or ruler allowed Jews to play a part in the society in which they live, Jews have stepped up to the mark. Sometimes this has rebounded on Jews, finding ourselves being accused of 'taking over' or being 'found everywhere'. All of those bitter accusations are just the twisted record of Jews getting involved.

“The world is far from a tolerant place. Jews know that to our cost”



Pope Francis with Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, September 2015



Nisa-Nashim Jewish Muslim women's network, London 2015

“The seeds of the messianic dream are deeply planted.”

From the first expression of Jeremiah's advice in the Bible to the Exiles in Babylon 26 centuries ago – to pray for the welfare and peace of the country in which they find themselves because, not least, therein lies their welfare – Jews have sought to contribute constructively to their neighbours. Standing for local council office, for national parliamentary roles, getting involved in political parties of (nearly!) every stripe has appealed to many many Jews through the years, raised as they are on community action and politics within their own communities.

At the same time though, Jews, as everyone else must, recognise that by no means everything – and some might argue, none of the really important things – can be settled or achieved by political fiat or legislative action. Some things are best achieved through neighbourly relations, charitable organisations, citizen action, pressure groups, media exposure and so on. In these fields too Jews have played their part – probably it is arguable that Jews have punched well above their weight on such fronts over the last century or so as the barriers to Jewish involvement have fallen.

Some have noted how, at the end of the 19th century, a large proportion of the poorest Jews in central and Eastern Europe embraced socialism and communism. It is not surprising. The dream and ideals of fairness and freedom at the heart of those political doctrines echoed readily in the hearts and minds of even entirely secular Jews. The seeds of the messianic dream are deeply planted.

THE CJC

Civil society is especially where the CJC come into its own. As an NGO, the CJC recognises that its best chances of making a difference are in the fields of inter-community relations, the networking of organisations and communities, both Jewish and general, and the seeking out of common causes which we might be able to progress or support.

Furthermore, as a people which has suffered more than many due to the lack of tolerance, respect and understanding in the world, Jews are particularly concerned to try to diminish this problem and promote tolerance, respect and understanding between communities and peoples.

We recall that the former Chief Rabbi of the Commonwealth, Lord Sacks, often argued that while many saw religions as a

cause of conflict and thus 'part of the problem', he wished to assert – and we agree with him – that religions must necessarily be 'part of the solution' to the world's continuing tendency to find division and discord instead of the harmony that all claim to desire.

The out-of-date 20th century presumption that religions were no longer relevant to the development of the world has been roundly exposed as false. The CJC is committed to playing its part in making sure that the involvement of religious communities in world affairs will be a force for good.

Thus, the CJC, above all, pledges itself to work towards enhancing these last three goals.

THE COMMONWEALTH JEWISH COUNCIL

The Commonwealth Jewish Council has three principal purposes:

- to help represent the views, concerns and needs of the Jewish communities in the Commonwealth to relevant governments, agencies and interested bodies
- to create a supportive network of Jewish communities in the Commonwealth
- to help Jewish communities in their work to contribute to the wider society in which they live

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Turks and Caicos	Robert & Daniel Press

Europe

Cyprus	Ami Yeshurun
Gibraltar	James Levy
Jersey	Anita Regal
Malta	Abraham Ohayon
UK	Jonathan Arkush

Hong Kong has observer status

Personnel

Clive Lawton	CEO
Maureen Gold	Director

Regional Directors

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Chaya Singer and Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft	(Africa) From the South African Board of Deputies and the African Jewish Congress
Peter Wertheim	(Australasia) From the Executive Council of Australian Jewry
TBC	(Western Hemisphere)

In 2013, the Commonwealth of Nations agreed an expression of its values and principles which is now enshrined in its Charter.

This booklet is a short demonstration of how those values are resonant with Jewish values and teachings through the millennia.

The Commonwealth Jewish Council is gratified at how easy it has been to demonstrate how its work fits so comfortably with the expressed ideals of the Commonwealth overall. This bodes well for the CJC's work into the future, bringing together the Jewish communities of the Commonwealth, representing Jewish concerns in the light of these ideals and helping Jews the world over contribute to the diminishing of the ills that beset our world and enhancing the values and ideals we share.

Clive Lawton is the Chief Executive of the Commonwealth Jewish Council and has been long involved in both Jewish and general educational work all over the world. He also works in the fields of diversity and community development. He was the first Chair of the UK Jewish development charity, Tzedek, and has been associated with the CJC since its inception.

Commonwealth
Jewish Council

BCM Box 6871, London, WC1N 3XX, UK

+44 (0)20 3369 9369
communities@cjc.org.uk
cjc.org.uk

Registered Charity in England and Wales
Number: 287564

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