

Editorial

The illustration on the cover poses the question . . . "Have the Jewish people lost their way?" In the last Issue, I wrote about the relations between Jews from different religious traditions and backgrounds in the UK and in Israel and argued that, until and unless the various denominations within the Jewish community start to talk to each other on the basis of mutual tolerance and respect, our future as a single religious community was at serious risk. In this Issue, I want to switch the focus of attention from the religious to the secular.

Thirty years ago, Israel astounded the rest of the world when its army defeated the Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian forces in the Six Day War. As a result, Israel virtually tripled in size to include Sinai, Gaza, the Golan Heights, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. However, the Israeli government was not able to dictate the terms of peace and today, peace and security remain elusive. It is, of course true, that there has been some real progress. The Camp David Agreement led to the return of the Sinai Peninsula, recognition by and the establishment of diplomatic relations with Egypt. More recently, the Oslo Agreement has resulted in the giving up of Gaza and parts of the West Bank, the establishment of a Palestinian Authority and the resumption of diplomatic relations with the Palestinians and with Jordan. However, the progress towards peace with security, which at one time looked so hopeful, came to an abrupt end with the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the rejection of Shimon Peres by the voters and election of Binyamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister. This editorial is not intended as a party political broadcast but his persistent denigration of the Oslo Peace Accords and his seeming reluctance to act in pursuit of peace have been a source of great disappointment, not only to many Israelis but also to Jews in the diaspora and other friends of Israel and the Jewish community throughout the world. There is a widespread feeling that the Israeli government no longer knows where it is going and that it has lost its way.

Here at home, a report due to be published next month by the Institute of Jewish Public Policy Research (JPR) in association with the Joint Israel Appeal and Jewish Continuity gives further grounds for concern. A year ago, **The Edinburgh Star** carried two articles which summarised and commented on the JPR's important survey of the social and political attitudes of British Jews. The new report on the social attitudes of unmarried young Jews in contemporary Britain is based on a sub-sample of 193 young adults aged between 22 and 39. They can be divided into three groups which are roughly equal in size: the "close" group (38 per cent) who have mostly Jewish friends, the "distant" group (32 per cent) who have few or no Jewish friends and the "halfway" group (31 per cent) around half, or less than half, of whose friends are Jewish. I suspect that most young Jews in Edinburgh, indeed most Jews in Edinburgh, fall into this middle group. Overall, over one third of the sample actually favoured intermarriage, 51 per cent found it difficult to find a Jewish partner; and 56 per cent believed that rabbis should be more helpful in welcoming non-Jewish partners. While 86 per cent thought that Jewish survival was important, their attitudes and behaviour are such as to make this increasingly unlikely. Are we in danger of losing our way too?

One indication that we are is reflected in our nostalgia for the past and the difficulties we experience in thinking constructively about the future. This is, sadly, reflected in the pages of **The Edinburgh Star**. Although the Editorial Board is very pleased to carry retrospective articles where these are of sufficient quality and considered to be of interest to our readers, it aims to achieve a balance between past, present and future. But, on this criterion, the journal has not been conspicuously successful. In the current issue, we carry a fascinating article by Berl Osborne on "Dona Gracia", a quite remarkable 16th-century Jewess who made her mark in Lisbon, Antwerp, Venice and Constantinople; Part 2 of Aubrey Newman's very interesting account (continued from the last Issue) of "The Poor Jews' Temporary Shelter" in London at the turn of this century; and Rocky Levey's wonderful reminiscences of the Winter Gardens in Rothesay – as well as a profile of Betty Franklin, a stalwart member of the Edinburgh Jewish Community. It is, of course, true that we are an ageing community but there is much truth in the old adage that "you are only as old as you feel". We might well feel younger if we could shift the focus of our attention from the past to the present and the future.

One exception to the emphasis on matters past is the article by Nick Cosgrove on the recent general election. Jews appear to have been no different from the rest of the population in their rejection of the Conservatives and their enthusiasm for "new" Labour. Constituencies with significant numbers of Jewish voters, including Finchley (held for many years by Margaret Thatcher), Hendon, Ilford North, Bury South and Leeds North-East (formerly held by the late Sir Keith Joseph), were all captured by Labour and there are now twice as many Jewish Labour MPs as Jewish Conservative MPs. As Nick Cosgrove points out, it looks as if the Jewish community has "come home" to Labour, the party to which most Jews have traditionally supported. How much this is due to the apparent endorsement of Tony Blair by the Chief Rabbi is unclear but there is clearly much common ground between their "communitarian" ideas and their views about the relationship between the state and civil society. Although it is very much to be hoped that the Jewish community will succeed in capitalising on this common ground and in forging a constructive relationship with the government, there are limits beyond which this probably should not go. Just as the very close relationship between Lord Jakobovitz and Margaret Thatcher was probably not in the long-term interests of those they represented, a similar relationship between Dr Sacks and Tony Blair, if such were to develop, would really be no better. Religion and politics don't mix very well and are best kept separate.

Although the electorate seems to know where it wants to go, or at least where it does not want to go, it is not clear that we can say the same for our own community. In this Issue, we are pleased to carry an article by Rabbi David Sedley in which he explains why, in his view, it was so important to raise the height of the *Mechitza* in the Synagogue. He has a clear sense of where he wants to go but it is by no means clear that all members of the community have the same destination in mind. **The Edinburgh Star** does not wish to undermine the Rabbi's position but, as the journal of the Edinburgh Jewish community, it does wish to encourage free and frank discussion of issues which are clearly of concern to the community and affect its future. In this spirit, comments on and responses to Rabbi Sedley's article would be particularly welcome.

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