

## The Law in the Looking-Glass

### *Thought for the Day*

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Being here casts an interesting light on a decision by the Court of Appeal in London last week, about the right of schools to give preference to pupils of a particular religion. Since the judges were interpreting equality law that applies in Scotland too, their ruling means that although our Catholic schools can prefer Catholic pupils, and Muslim schools Muslim pupils, Jewish schools aren't allowed to give preference to Jewish pupils.

The reason for this bizarre judgment is that the law treats Jews as an ethnic group, and not only as a religious one, and the court therefore held that in this *one* case, religious preference constitutes racial discrimination.

But a quick glance at any Jewish community shows how wrong this is. That's obvious even in our small Jewish community in Scotland – amongst the European majority, there are Jews who are ethnically Arabs and Indians and Africans.

Here in Israel, it is even more obvious that there is no Jewish ethnic type:

- almost a million Jewish Arabs, from Libya through to Iraq, sought refuge here from persecution;
- the chap at the gate here is one of more than 130 000 Ethiopian Jews who were airlifted in the 1980s and 90s, to escape famine and civil war;
- you hear Russian everywhere, because millions of Jewish Slavs took the first opportunity to escape the collapsing communist regimes in Eastern Europe;
- to say nothing of converts of all other ethnic groups – such as Michelle Obama's first cousin, Rabbi Capers Funnye.

*(no, I didn't make that up, and anyway, it's rude to laugh at funny names!)*

In fact the ethnic mix is one of the things I find most fascinating here.

The Jewish melting-pot aside, 20% of Israelis are Muslim or Christian Arabs, mixing in the shops, clinics, buses, and streets. It's the headgear that is most obvious: as the kaffiyehs and hijabs mix with the yarmulkes and head-scarfs, I am reminded of the words of the Book of Psalms,

“How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together”.

Looking around me on the beach in Haifa last week, or the markets of Jerusalem yesterday, I can say the same for Jewish and Arab cousins too.

*Ephraim Borowski*

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