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# MASTER'S THESIS

*How Do They Jew?  
Identity and Religiosity in the Jewish Community of  
Helsinki*

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| Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract<br><p>The conditions of social life that are leading to the formation of the individuals' identity may be changing due to the influences of postmodernity. In Finland today, Jews form a small minority group within the borders of secularized Lutheranism. How does the Finnish Jewry cope with the constant transformation of social values in this context? How does Jewishness appear in their self-perception and in their daily lives? The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how members of the Jewish Community of Helsinki view Judaism in their own lives and in their community and how do they observe the rules of the <i>Halakhab</i> – the Jewish law. This work provides an introduction to traditional perspectives of the questions that are often topics of debates in postmodern Jewish communities. In one sentence: How do they Jew in public and private life in modern Finland?</p> <p>The research was put into practice by combining quantitative and qualitative methods, including a quantitative questionnaire that was distributed to all 777 adult members of the community and personal interviews with 8 individuals among them. Both the qualitative and the quantitative research questions explored issues of Jewish life and traditions as well as attitudes towards the most common Jewish issues in contemporary Finland.</p> <p>The results showed that the vast majority of the respondents strongly identify as Jews. They have loyalty towards their Jewish heritage, but also feel a strong sense of belonging to Finland. They are generally lenient towards <i>Halakhab</i>, and despite being members of the Modern-Orthodox community, they do not necessarily live orthodox Jewish lifestyles according to the traditional – orthodox – perspective.</p> |  |   |   |
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## GLOSSARY

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Aliyah          | “Going up” (Immigration of the Jews from the Diaspora to Israel, or going up to the <i>bimah</i> , for example for reading from the Torah) |
| Babe            | “Grandmother”  |
| Bar/Bat Mitzvah | “Son / daughter of the commandments”<br>(Jewish ritual of coming of age)   |
| Bimah           | An elevated platform in the synagogue, holding the reading table used when chanting or reading from the Torah                              |
| Birkhat haMazon | Grace after meals  |
| Birkhat Kohanim | “Priestly Benediction” (A biblical passage: Numbers 6:23-27)   |
| Brit Milah      | Circumcision   |
| Challah         | Braided bread eaten on <i>Shabbat</i> and some other Jewish holidays   |
| Chalutzah       | The widow of a childless man released from the obligation of levirate marriage by a ceremony performed by her brother-in-law               |
| Conservadox     | The Conservadox religious practice is considered to be between Conservative and Orthodox   |
| Ezrat Nashim    | “Women’s Court” (in the Second Temple)   |

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Giyur, Giyurim          | Conversion to Judaism   |
| Halakhah                | “The Way” (Jewish law)  |
| Hannukkah               | “Dedication” (A holiday commemorating the rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem)  |
| Haredi, Haredim         | A stream of Orthodox Judaism that rejects the modern secular culture.   |
| Hashem                  | “The Name” (A term that is often used when referring to God)  |
| Hasid, Hasidism         | “Pious Ones” (A Jewish religious movement that arose in 18th century Eastern Europe, the subgroup of Haredi Judaism.)                             |
| Haskalah                | “Wisdom” or “understanding” (Jewish Enlightenment in Europe)  |
| Hekhsher                | Rabbinical product certification, which qualifies items – usually foods – that are <i>kosher</i> according to the requirements of <i>Halakhah</i> |
| Karaites, Karaism       | A Jewish movement that only recognises the canon of the <i>Tanakh</i> alone as its supreme legal authority in the <i>Halakhah</i> .               |
| Kasher, Kosher, Kashrut | “Fit” (Ritually clean, especially to be eaten)  |
| Kavannah                | “Intention” (which is required for Jewish prayers and rituals)  |

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Kippah            | A brimless cap, usually made of cloth, worn by Jewish men  |
| Kohen, Kohanim    | “Priest” (Descendant of Aaron, the high priest in the Temple of Jerusalem)   |
| Kohen Gadol       | High Priest  |
| Levi, Leviim      | Descendant of Levi in the Temple of Jerusalem. <i>Leviim</i> accompanied the <i>Kobanim</i> as they offered the sacrifices in the Temple                             |
| Leshon Hakodesh   | “Holy Tongue” (A term that refers to Hebrew and Aramaic in which religious texts were written. serving liturgical purposes)  |
| Mapah             | Tablecloth   |
| Mamzer            | The female offspring of certain prohibited relationships   |
| Matzah            | Unleavened bread traditionally during the <i>Pesach</i> (Passover)   |
| Mikdash           | “Sanctuary”  |
| Mikveh            | Ritual bath  |
| Melacha, Melachot | Usually translated as “work” which refers to the “work” God was doing during the creation. (Deuteronomy 2:2-3)<br><i>Melachot</i> are prohibited on <i>Shabbat</i> . |



|                  |  |
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| Mezuzah          | A parchment scroll within a container affixed to the doorpost on which the <i>Shema</i> is handwritten by an expert scribe |
| Mechitzah        | Partition that is used to separate man and women   |
| Midrash          | “Exposition” (The body of exegesis of Torah texts along with homiletic stories)  |
| Minhag           | Tradition, accepted group of traditions  |
| Minyan, Minyanim | “Number” (The quorum of ten adult Jews, traditionally of ten adult Jewish men)   |
| Minyanot         | The quorum of ten adult female Jews, the feminine equivalent of <i>minyanim</i> .  |
| Mishnah          | The first major reduction of the Jewish oral tradition redacted by Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi                                     |
| Mitzvah, Mitzvot | “Commandments”; “praiseworthy action” (law, religious observance, good deed)   |
| Mohel            | The person trained in the practice of circumcision ( <i>brit milah</i> )   |
| Netina           | Female Gibeonite   |
| Parsah           | One hoof   |
| Pasul            | Not valid  |
| Rav              | Rabbi  |

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Rosh Hashanah     | New Year   |
| Reconstructionism | Reconstructionist Judaism is a movement that views Judaism as a progressively evolving civilization. Its concepts were developed by Mordechai Kaplan (1881–1983) |
| Shabbat, Shabes   | The seventh day of the week, the day of rest   |
| Shema             | A central prayer of Judaism (A biblical passage: Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Deuteronomy 11:13-21)  |
| Shlichot          | Female Emissaries  |
| Shoah             | “Catastrophe” (It refers to the Holocaust)   |
| Shomrei Shabbat   | A person who observes the commandments of <i>Shabbat</i>   |
| Shomrei Kashrut   | A person who observes the commandments of <i>kosher</i> dietary restrictions   |
| Shulchan Aruch    | A 16th century legal code of Judaism, edited by Yosef Karo, considered authoritative in issues related to <i>Halakhab</i>  |
| Shul              | “Synagogue”  |
| Siddur            | Prayer book  |
| Simchat Torah     | “Rejoicing of Torah” (A holiday that celebrates and marks the conclusion of the annual cycle of public Torah readings and the beginning of a new cycle)          |

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Talmud     | A central text of Rabbinic Judaism, the term usually refers to the collection of writings named specifically the <i>Babylonian Talmud</i> ( <i>Talmud Bavli</i> ).                       |
| Tanakh     | An acronym of the first Hebrew letter of each of the Masoretic text's three traditional subdivisions: Torah (the five books of Moses), Neviim (Prophets) and Ketuvim (Writings) – TaNaKh |
| Tefillah   | Prayer   |
| Treif      | Non- <i>kosher</i> (to be eaten)   |
| Yom Kippur | Day of Atonement   |
| Yeshiva    | Jewish institution that focuses on the study of traditional religious texts  |
| Zayda      | “Grandfather”  |

## INTRODUCTION

The process of social transformation and modernization has brought several changes into societies. The accelerated globalization of culture, the increase of “intercultural encounters” and new innovations has a significant part in our era, both in the social and religious life. Needless to mention, the globalization in societies, the technical innovations and the reconsideration of traditions cause fundamental changes to the individuals as well as to certain communities.

Judaism, a religion based on traditions, faces the issues of societal and technical modernization all the time. Jewish people are in constant negotiation, contestation and transgression with each other and with their surroundings. They face the challenges of interpretation of ancient traditions and laws in a world that is in a constant change.

In the case of Finland, a country that has a majority of Lutheran citizens and the smallest number of Jewish population among the other Scandinavian or Nordic countries – except for Iceland – the position of Judaism is rather special. In most European societies – including Finland – there is a continuous transition in values, in which the significance of religions is reconsidered. The disputes on the reinterpretation of certain traditions, on the ordination of women, on gender equality and homosexuality have fuelled the debate in Finland in the past decades. As the country is linked to global social and cultural changes, modern interpretations of the receding role of religion in society are rising.

By reflecting on the above mentioned societal and cultural changes, the aim of the present research is to study the religiosity and religious identity of the members of the Jewish Community of Helsinki. In the past few decades, several studies have been done on the topic of the Finnish Jewry. Although most of these touch the question of the observance and religiosity of the group, I could not find any research that would discuss the topic from a *halakhic* perspective, by using the combination of qualitative and quantitative research complemented by both traditional and contemporary literature on the topics of Jewish law and Jewishness.

My aim is to reflect on different “Jewish identities”, the religiosity and observance level of the community members, and to investigate their opinions on the future of the community, while giving a *halakhic* explanation to most problematic questions for Jewish communities in postmodern societies.

In its outstandingly complex nature, the issue of Jewish identity could be based on several factors, which are usually built into a multifarious system, defining where and under what circumstances and how one defines him/herself as a Jew. Hundreds of years ago Jewish people could all be recognised by their clothing, their language, their habits and the places they were living in. In the Diaspora, this definitely gave a strong basis of self-definition. Nowadays, some Jewish communities are more “visible” than others, while the “visibility” of more liberal groups started to fade away long ago, beginning with the *Haskalah* (Jewish emancipation) in the 19th century, and religious emancipation. Until early modernity, most European Jews lived a segregated life. There had barely been any changes in the liturgy or traditions of the services since the late antiquity. After the Grand Sanhedrin (1806), the political elite insisted on changing the Jewish traditions and practices everywhere, where the Jewish emancipation and the extension of the rights of the Jews come into play. The first expectation from the Jews included the change of language usage, meals and clothing, and later on they reflected on liturgy and architecture as well. Parallel to secular lifestyle becoming more and more widespread in the surrounding societies, the Jewish traditions and Jewish lifestyle had also transformed. Due to the consequences of the *Haskalah*, and especially after World War II and the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, the position of Judaism has radically changed. In most European countries, in the second half of the 19th century, shortly after Jews were given the right to permanent residence, they were able to have full and equal citizenship of that country too, and they became allowed to marry non-Jews as well. In many states facing the consequences of the rise of Nazism to power and of WWII, some Jews converted to Christianity – some might have even converted before. Their descendants on the one hand, and the descendants of those who had never converted and have survived the Nazi regime on the other, have really diverse views on their own Jewish identities, and on that of others.

All over the world, there are several discussions going on about the future of Jewish communities. As the saying goes “Two Jews – three opinions.” There are numerous Jewish communities whose tradition and whose habits are based on different views. These differences and the historical background of the Jewry often lead to a situation, where the dissimilarities of perspectives cause the disintegration of a congregation. For example, most members with orthodox observance level would not agree to having egalitarian services and thus including women in religious service, while members with

progressive views will consider the *mitzvot* – the commandments – flexibly. This may cause several disagreements and fragmentation in some communities.

In Finland, the majority of Jews immigrated to the country from Russia or Sweden during the 19th century. Due to the change of Finland's status under Swedish and Russian command, the status of the Jews has also transformed. The communities in Finland follow the orthodox tradition by their roots: they operate as orthodox communities. Yet, they – especially the Jewish Community of Helsinki – are diverse both on the national level and considering the religious affiliation of their members.

Most of the studies and research that has been conducted on Finnish Jewry so far are outdated – more than 10 years old. They typically focus on the history of the congregation, or on the identity formation of one specific group. The most recent study, a master's thesis at the University of Helsinki in 2014, written by Julia Larsson – entitled "*Juutalaisuus on sitä, että lukee ensimmäisenä lehdestä juutalaisia koskevat uutiset. Suomen juutalaisten nuorten aikuisten käsityksiä omasta juutalaisuudestaan*" (English: *Judaism is when one initially reads the news concerning Jews in the newspaper. Conceptions of Judaism by Finnish Jewish young adults.*) – studies the congregation by putting its emphasis on the young generation of Jews who will continue the inheritance of Judaism in the future in Finland.

How strictly do the members of the Helsinki Jewish Community observe Jewish law, and what kind of religious affiliations do they have? How do they perceive Judaism and their own identity? How do they Jew?<sup>1</sup> At the moment, the congregation is modern orthodox. What do the members think, what is the ideal path for the community in the future? In my thesis I am attempting to answer these questions.

For the transliteration of Hebrew, Aramaic and Yiddish terminology, I am using the most common English usage of the terms. I have chosen to use Anglicized versions of Hebrew names and for the books of the Torah. The translations of non-English texts in the study are mine with a few exceptions, which I have indicated in the footnotes. I marked the non-English expressions cursive throughout the text. The explanation of the terminology can be found in the "Glossary".

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<sup>1</sup> A wordplay made by the combination of the common English expression "How do you do?" in which the verb "do" was exchanged to the word "Jew" which is being used as a verb in the context.

## SHORT HISTORY OF FINNISH JEWRY

Contemporary Finland was part of the Swedish Kingdom until 1809, and as in many other European countries, Jews had limitations regarding their residence rights. Under Swedish reign they were only allowed to settle in three major cities of the Kingdom. As a consequence of the Finnish War (1808–1809), the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland was established in the Russian Empire. Despite this political change, the prohibition of the settlement of Jews remained in the Grand Duchy as well, though the governor of Finland did occasionally have the right to grant residence permit to Jews.<sup>2</sup>

The first Jews – the “Cantonists” – arrived to Finland in the first half of the 19th century as soldiers serving in the imperial Russian army. Due to the cantonment system of military service put into effect by Nicholas I, soldiers were required to serve for approximately twenty-five to thirty years. The purpose of this compulsory utilisation of the Jewish boys was to convert them into Eastern Orthodox religion.<sup>3</sup> The imperial decree of 1858 allowed them to stay in Finland temporarily, regardless of their religion, and the decree of 1869 decided about the occupations open to Jews, which came to be limited mainly as dealers of clothing and other handmade materials in *narinkkatori*.<sup>4</sup> In 1889, the Government issued an administrative decree expressly governing the presence of Jews in Finland: they were only allowed to settle in certain towns and they were given temporary visit permits. Their activities were still limited mainly as dealers of clothing.<sup>5</sup>

In 1872, the Diet of Finland made an attempt at the emancipation of the Jews. Nonetheless, they were granted full civil rights only after the country had gained independence in 1917.<sup>6</sup> On 22 December, 1917 the Parliament approved an Act concerning the Jews, which was promulgated in 1918, stating that Jews were granted civil right and could become Finnish nationals.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> HARVIAINEN 1984:11.

<sup>3</sup> BURSTEIN 1978:23-24.

<sup>4</sup> From the Russian word на рынке (*na rynke*), “on the market”. The place that is currently Scandic Hotel Simonkenttä, on Simonkatu, Helsinki.

<sup>5</sup> HARVIAINEN 2003:294.

<sup>6</sup> PENTIKÄINEN – ANTONEN 1995:163.

<sup>7</sup> HARVIAINEN 1984:13.

During the Winter War (1939–1940), Finnish Jews fought alongside non-Jewish compatriots, and during the Finnish-Russian War (1941–44), in which Finnish Jews also took part, Finland and Nazi-Germany were co-belligerents.<sup>8</sup> Due to the fast changes in the European refugee situation and the growing Nazi discrimination in the 1930s, new guidelines were set down in Finland concerning alien affairs: the Ministry of Interior gained the right to deport an alien from the country if it was necessary for “state security or other compelling reasons.”<sup>9</sup>

On November 6, 1942, a German transport vessel left the harbour of Helsinki with twenty-seven civilians, including eight Jews, who were deported from Finland. Only one of them survived the war. “Those eight” have become the symbol of Finland’s involvement in the Holocaust. By the time the deportations from Finland gained public attention, the Finnish authorities had already been deporting Jews – both foreign civilians and Soviet prisoners-of-war – to the German authorities.<sup>10</sup> According to Finnish historian, Oula Silvennoinen, the total number of eight deported Jews is a misstatement, as between June 1941 and November 1942 twelve Jews have been deported from Finland at very least.<sup>11</sup> According to some sources, the reason behind the November 1942 deportations of the Jews was that they were “disagreeable aliens”. Even if the State Police did not attempt a mass deportation of all non-Finnish Jews from Finland, Jewish origin was undoubtedly a factor leading to deportation. Moreover, the government of Finland never formulated either active participation, or refrain from participating in the *Endlösung*, and the Finnish authorities did not appear to have wanted the death of Jewish deportees *per se*.<sup>12</sup>

During the Arab-Israeli war of 1948-49 – the Israeli War of Independence)–, 28 Finnish Jews fought as volunteers for the State of Israel. After the establishment of Israel, Finland had a high rate of immigration to Israel, which led to a significant decrease in the number of members in Finland's Jewish community.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> HOLMILA 2013:218-219.

<sup>9</sup> SILVENNOINEN 2013:197.

<sup>10</sup> SILVENNOINEN 2013:194.

<sup>11</sup> SILVENNONIEN 2013:194-195.

<sup>12</sup> SILVENNOINEN 2013:210-2013.

<sup>13</sup> REIME 2010.



According to the website of the Jewish Community of Helsinki, Finnish Jewry currently numbers approximately 1,800 people, of whom about 1,400 live in Helsinki and in cities surrounding it (*pääkaupunkiseutu*), and approximately 400 live in Turku.<sup>14</sup>

There are organised Jewish communities in Helsinki and Turku, each with their own synagogue. Both of them are Ashkenazi Orthodox. The Jewish community of Tampere stopped its activities in 1981. The communities are members of the Central Council of Jewish Communities in Finland,<sup>15</sup> which is a member of the World Jewish Congress and the European Jewish Congress.<sup>16</sup>

## The Jewish Community of Helsinki

The synagogue of the Jewish Community of Helsinki was built in 1906. At the moment, the Helsinki Jewish Community consists of 961 members, among which 184 are underage. Membership in the community can be required by those, who are Jewish by *Halakhab* (Jewish religious law). In the case of children, a child with at least one Jewish parent can be accepted to the Jewish school. Children who are Jewish by patrilineal descent only, and thus are not considered Jewish by orthodox religious law, have to go through the process of a childhood conversion before their *bar/bat mitzvah*. In addition, boys are required to be circumcised when applying to the school; however, in certain circumstances (e.g.: in case of health-related issues), the circumcision can be a question for further discussion. The non-Jewish parent is not required to convert.<sup>17</sup> Concerning the nationalities of its members, the congregation is diverse. Just to mention a few of the nations that are represented in the congregation: Finnish, Swedish, Israeli, French, Russian, Hungarian members are registered, each bringing their own traditions and concerns to the Jewish scene of Helsinki, thus creating a “melting pot” of different traditions in such a small community.

The congregation has several organizations and societies, including its own Chevra Kadisha<sup>18</sup> established in 1864, a Bicur Cholim,<sup>19</sup> charity organisations such as “Frunтта”

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<sup>14</sup> Source: <http://www.jchelsinki.fi/en/community> Retrieved: 28.02.2016.

<sup>15</sup> A consultative body dealing with matters of general interest concerning Jews in Finland.

<sup>16</sup> Source: <http://www.jchelsinki.fi/en/community> Retrieved: 28.02.2016.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Rabbi Simon Livson 09.02.2016.

<sup>18</sup> Aramaic, lit. “the holy society.” The burial society, which is responsible for the ritual cleansing (*taharah*) and burial of the deceased. It also oversees the management of the community’s cemetery.

<sup>19</sup> “Visiting the sick”. The name refers to the *mitzvah* of visiting and extending aid to the sick. *Bicur Cholim* is an organisation that provides support and assistance for people in need of medical services.

(Judiska Fruntimmers Valgrenhetsfrening). Besides these, they have a cemetery and a *mikveh* as well. The congregation is a member of several international organizations, such as Keren Hayesod, Keren Kayemeth, Maccabi World Union and WIZO (Women’s International Zionist Organisation). It provides Jewish education for its members – both for children and adults. It has its own kindergarten and school, where there is a great emphasis on Jewish education. It also produces newsletters and events for its members and for its visitors. There is also a regular conversion course in the community for those who contemplate converting to Judaism. The congregation is a member of Bnei Akiva.<sup>20</sup> It is also important to mention, that Chabad-Lubavitch<sup>21</sup> also operates in Finland as an individual entity, but in many cases cooperating the Jewish Community of Helsinki.

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<sup>20</sup> One of the largest religious Zionist youth movement in the world. Bnei Akiva operates with over 125,000 members in 42 countries. For further reading: <http://www.bneiakiva.org/>. Retrieved: 23.03.2016.

<sup>21</sup> Orthodox Jewish, Hasidic outreach movement. One of the world's most well-known Hasidic movements. For further reading: <http://www.chabad.org/>. Retrieved: 23.03.2016.

## IDENTITY AND ITS “MANIFESTATIONS”

The question of one’s identity has recently gained much attention among scholars within humanities and social sciences. Being such a controversial and outstandingly complex topic, social psychologist Glynis Breakwell states that theorizing identity is “like traversing a battle-field.”<sup>22</sup> Identity is a concept widely used in many different disciplines, and also defined and conceptualised in several different ways.

Identity provides a way of understanding the interplay between our subjective experience of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which that fragile subjectivity is formed.<sup>23</sup> I am convinced, that identity must be understood as a part of complex social relations. On certain levels, it may be determined by authorities such as “state” or “church”, but it has to be acknowledged, that identities are in constant change: they are based on our reflections on ourselves and on others’ reflections on us – as Zygmunt Bauman asserts: identity arises only with the exposure to “communities.”<sup>24</sup> This statement however is rather incomprehensible for social psychologists, for whom both personal and social identity/identities exist. Social Identity Theory<sup>25</sup> (SIT)<sup>26</sup> assumes that individuals have personal and social identities. Social psychology acknowledges the ubiquity of both claimed and ascribed identities – id est. there is always an interaction going on between these identities. Hence, identities or the “manifestations” of identities may change according to the environment, situation and to many different factors the social group or the individuals. People have multiple identities and “most people have multiple group affiliations which may be emphasized or minimized according to the situation.”<sup>27</sup> They may be negotiated, constructed and defined based on social interactions.

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<sup>22</sup> LIEBKIND 1992:147.

<sup>23</sup> GILROY 1997:301.

<sup>24</sup> BAUMAN 2004:11.

<sup>25</sup> The theory was framed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979.

<sup>26</sup> TAJFEL 1981:33.

<sup>27</sup> HUTNIK 1991:20.

## Social and Personal Identity

The connection between one's self-concept and sense of belonging to a relevant group is being framed in the SIT which has been one of the most influential theories regarding the question of identity in social psychology. Identity in its present embodiment has a double sense: it reflects on social categories and to the sources of one's self-respect or dignity.<sup>28</sup> It means likeness and uniqueness.<sup>29</sup> On the level of personal identity individuals differentiate between themselves and others, but on the level of social or collective identity they see likeness between themselves and others with whom they share the same social/collective identity, while at the same time, they differentiate between "us" and "them".

Social identity is a part of the individual's self-concept, which is derived from a perceived group membership in a relevant social group. It rises from group membership and from the emotions and values associated with that membership. As Paul Gilroy states: "To share identity is apparently to be bonded on the most fundamental levels: national, 'racial', ethnic, regional and local. And yet, identity is always particular, as much difference as about shared belonging. It marks out the divisions and sub-sets in our social lives and helps to define the boundaries in our uneven, local attempts to make sense of the world."<sup>30</sup>

The difference between social and personal identity refers to the level of abstraction in the perception of self and others. In any given situation, self-perception depends on which level of identity is salient. Consequently, the distinction between personal and social identity is mainly temporal.<sup>31</sup> As my study is going to show, the division of personal and social identities as well as the existence and the perception of multiple identities are clearly visible among the members of the Jewish Community of Helsinki – and I am convinced, that is noticeable in any Diaspora Jewish community.

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<sup>28</sup> FEARON 1999:2.

<sup>29</sup> HERMAN 1989:28.

<sup>30</sup> GILROY 1997:301.

<sup>31</sup> DEAUX 1992:16.

## Religious Identity

One of the identities based on group membership is religious identity. While providing membership in a religious community, religious identity also offers a “sacred” view of the world. Similarly to other types of identity formation, a religious context can influence one’s perspective and modify his/her self-concept. Nevertheless, spirituality and religion have been relatively neglected in developmental sciences<sup>32</sup> such as education or developmental psychology.

Religious affiliation – a social identity itself – which is based on a system of guiding beliefs, serves a powerful function in shaping both social and psychological processes. People, who identify themselves with a specific religious group, may also perceive their group membership as central to their self-concept.<sup>33</sup> As they are connected to a group that has its structure based on “sacred” traditions, the group members often face difficulties when having to apply their traditions in a “secular” society or in a society where their religious group is a minority. In order to deal effectively with their situation in a world that constantly changes, individuals are not able to carry on with their former cultural traditions anymore: their customs are no longer socially relevant when it comes to the issue of how they should lead their lives – which does not mean that all of their traditions should be abandoned.<sup>34</sup> The methods of performing religious practices can be changed / revisited, but some characteristics of religion, such as emotional experiences and some sort of moral authority cannot be empirically disputed.<sup>35</sup> In the modernised world religious and ethnic traditions tend to be the ones that gradually become socially irrelevant. Due to liberal thinking and the achievements of science, people have started to re-evaluate the worth and virtues of the past centuries, which may modify the systems of practices in many religions.

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<sup>32</sup> KING 2004:2.

<sup>33</sup> YSSELDYK et al. 2010:61.

<sup>34</sup> DENCİK 2003:76-77.

<sup>35</sup> YSSELDYK et al. 2010:61.

## HOW DO YOU JEW? – DIFFERENT JEWISH IDENTITIES

Although the question “How do you Jew?”<sup>36</sup> appears to be easy to answer and the replies by different groups might be without nuances, the issue is far more complex: depending on the spatial and temporal context, the persona and background of the person who asks and the person who was asked, there can be several alternative answers. The subject of Jewishness and so-called “Jewish identity” has brought together many scholars, scientists and even people from outside of the academic field to provide perspectives on the epistemologies and on the ways of understanding who and what is to be considered “Jewish”.<sup>37</sup>

“The question of who is a Jew and what constitutes “Jewishness,” is one of the most vexed and contested issues of modern religious and ethnic group history.”<sup>38</sup> – Susan A. Glenn and Naomi B. Sokoloff state. According to Hungarian Jewish writer, György Konrád hat makes a person a Jew is saying they are Jew.<sup>39</sup> Being identifiably Jewish then, by definition, implies that a person has a Jewish identity.<sup>40</sup> According to Alan Untermann, we may distinguish four categories of “Jewishness:” one based on ancestry,<sup>41</sup> one based on religious affiliation, one based on membership in a community or in a cultural group, and one based on ethnic and national belonging or language use.<sup>42</sup> I would not divide the latter two into two groups, since national and ethnic belonging may go hand in hand with belonging to a group or community, as a matter of fact the latter one may be the “subset” of the former one. It has to be mentioned that in the case of “Jewishness” the word “nation” can refer to Am Yisrael – “The People of Israel” – which refers of Jews belonging to the “Jewish nation”, while feeling of belonging to other nations. Nevertheless, these categories are difficult to separate, and some scholars may use different groups for theorising Jewish identity. Diana Pinto notes: “...one can be Jewish in a religious, cultural, intellectual, ethnic, and political sense.”<sup>43</sup> Based on this statement, we can accept the fact that the question of Jewish identity – such as the question of any identity – is extremely complex.

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<sup>36</sup> DENCİK 2003:79.

<sup>37</sup> GLENN & SOKOLOFF 2010:3.

<sup>38</sup> GLENN & SOKOLOFF 2010:3.

<sup>39</sup> KONRÁD 1998.

<sup>40</sup> GRAHAM 2004:9.

<sup>41</sup> Although the original source mentions “biological origin”, as far as I am concerned, the word “ancestry” is the correct expression.

<sup>42</sup> UNTERMANN 1981:13.

<sup>43</sup> PINTO 1996:6.

In the case of Europe, Jews were living together with the non-Jews, rarely in total isolation in the host country. They have been also affected by the economic and political situation of their surroundings.<sup>44</sup> Judaism – a religion that is particularly based on oral and written tradition – therefore faces the “issue” of changing and multiple identities.

## Ancestry

ולד שפחה ועובד כוכבים, כמותן. בין שנתעברו מכשר, בין שנתעברו מפסול

ה:ח העזר אבן ע"שו

“The child of a female slave and a Gentile woman follows their status, irrespective of whether the father is of *kasher* or *pasul*.”

Shulchan Aruch, Even Haezer 8:5

עובדי כוכבים ועבד שבאו על הממזרת הולד ממזר ואם באו על בת ישראל בין פנויה בין אשת איש הולד כשר ופגום לכהונה

יט:ד העזר אבן ע"שו

„If a Gentile or a slave has a child with a Jewish woman – whether she is unmarried or married – the child is *kasher*, though cannot marry a *kohen*.”

Shulchan Aruch, Even Haezer 4:19

Even though the “secular world” usually does not differentiate between those who have a Jewish father and those who have a Jewish mother, according to the traditional definition, and to orthodox regulations, Jewish-ness is inherited on the matrilineal line, i.e. from the mother only, but not the father. The traditional explanations on one’s religious Jewish identity are summarized in other parts of the above quoted 16th century code of Jewish law *Shulchan Aruch*: a Jew is a person whose mother is Jewish, or who has undergone the process of conversion into Judaism. Thus, in orthodox Jewish law,

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<sup>44</sup> BENSIMON 2003:21.

irrespective of the paternal descent, the origin of the mother matters. Nonetheless, even despite having a Jewish mother and thus being Jewish by this definition, children of a non-Jewish father may be restricted in their rights: a *kohen* is forbidden to marry a non-Jew, and as seen in the second quotation, the *Shulchan Aruch* does not support the child of a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father marrying a *kohen*. This however is and was an often argued part of the Jewish law – as well.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the strict regulations regarding biological origin in Jewish law, in some cases “outsiders,” or those not versed in Jewish law, do not see any distinction between someone who is Jewish on the paternal lineage and between someone who is Jewish on the maternal lineage. In this paper, I refer to both the paternal and maternal lineage as “biological origin”.

During history, regardless of the regulations of Jewish textual and oral lore, which are considered as defining tradition and the law – such as the *Talmud* or the *Shulchan Aruch* – there have been various groups and sects who claimed that paternal descent was the standard: the *karaites*, for instance, believed that a Jew is someone whose father is Jewish, or who has undergone the procedure of conversion, and their justification for this is that all Jewish descent in the *Tanakh* is patrilineal.<sup>46</sup>

Due to different explanations on the legacy of matrilineal descent, to intermarriages between Jews and non-Jews, and to the consequences of the WWII, some reform and progressive communities within Judaism became attentive to the issue of youngsters coming from a “mixed background”.

Therefore, in 1983 the organized Reform Jewish Movement accepted the principle of patrilineal descent. Reform Judaism considers a child of an interfaith couple to be Jewish if one parent is Jewish, the child is raised as a Jew and receives a Jewish education, celebrates appropriate life cycle events – such as receiving a Hebrew name and having a bar/bat mitzvah – and does not practice any other religions.<sup>47</sup>

It is important to note that Jewish ancestry can now be researched through genetic tests as well, which provides yet another perspective on defining Jewishness.<sup>48</sup> Studying

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<sup>45</sup> For further reading: JACHTER, CHAIM: *A Kohen Marrying the Daughter of a Jewish Mother and a Non-Jewish Father* Source: [http://www.koltorah.org/ravj/A\\_Kohen\\_Marrying\\_the\\_Daughter\\_of\\_a\\_Jewish\\_Mother\\_and\\_a\\_Non-Jewish\\_Father\\_1.html](http://www.koltorah.org/ravj/A_Kohen_Marrying_the_Daughter_of_a_Jewish_Mother_and_a_Non-Jewish_Father_1.html). Retrieved: 28.04.2016.

<sup>46</sup> LEVINSON 1995:154.

<sup>47</sup> Source: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/patrilineal1.html>, Retrieved:12.01.2016

<sup>48</sup> For further reading: GOLDSTEIN, DAVID B.: *Jacob's Legacy. A Genetic View of Jewish History*. Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2008.



genetics allows making assessments among people or groups of people hence one's connection to Jews as an ethnic group can now be detected scientifically. Nonetheless, Jewish law does not accept DNA test results as the proof of one's Jewishness, or as the proof of one's status<sup>49</sup> in the community. Most communities require written proof and certificates – such as a marriage certificate, death certificates, indications of Jewish descent, or deportation documents from WWII, archival sources, personal identity papers, or any other state certificate proving the mother's Jewish origin.

## Religious Affiliation

“More than the Jewish People have kept the *Shabbat*, the *Shabbat* has kept the Jews.”

– Ahad Ha'am<sup>50</sup>

For generations, the most important factor of Jewish identity was religion. Traditionally, Jewish faith was based on the observance of the complex system of religious commandments and traditions, which encompass a Jew's life completely.<sup>51</sup> According to tradition there are 613 *mitzvot* in the Torah, which influence every moment of a Jew's life. Depending on the community a person belongs to, there are several written and oral interpretations regarding these regulations.

It is important to point out that there are emic<sup>52</sup> and etic<sup>53</sup> approaches to the question of religious affiliation, which may cause differences in the definitions for people who are within the culture or tradition on the one hand, and for people who are viewing it as a subject of scientific research on the other. Some may look at Judaism as a “way of living”, a “chain of traditions”, a religion or an ethnicity. Taking the numerous rules,

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<sup>49</sup> There are three “tribes” in Judaism - however some may argue that “tribe” is the appropriate word usage – distinguished even in contemporary religious practice: Kohanim, Leviim and Israel. These groups used to have different tasks and responsibilities at the Temple in Jerusalem, and have a somewhat different status today. For instance, Kohanim are eligible to be called to the Torah first. They are followed by Leviim. Kohanim are traditionally considered to be the descendants of Aron, Leviim are the descendants of Levi. A Kohen, as seen earlier, is not allowed to marry the daughter of a non-Jewish parent. A Kohen recites the priestly blessing in synagogue; a Levite washes the Kohen's hands. A Kohen may not step on burial ground or enter a house with a corpse in it etc.

<sup>50</sup> Asher Zvi Hirsch Ginsberg (1856 – 1927). Jewish essayist, Zionist thinker. He is known as the founder of cultural Zionism.

<sup>51</sup> POPKIN 2015:216.

<sup>52</sup> “Emic constructs are accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the native members of the culture whose beliefs and behaviours are being studied” in LETT 1990:130.

<sup>53</sup> “Etic constructs are accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the community of scientific observers” in LETT 1990:30.

regulations and their interpretations into consideration, the categorisation of the branches of Judaism is rather hard. In the following paragraphs, I am aiming to describe the most significant groups of Judaism.

In the beginning of the 19th century, the *Haskalah*, the emancipation of the Jews, the professions available for them, politics in general etc. had a significant influence on Jewish life in general. As one of its results, Western European Jewry started fitting into the society: they started to adapt the regional languages instead of Yiddish, and became familiar with European literacy.<sup>54</sup>

The language of sermons changed to the vernacular. Some synagogues adopted choral singing, or even organ accompaniment in the liturgy, while others opposed this change vehemently. Thousands of Jews abandoned their characteristically Jewish way of dressing, their Jewish lifestyle. In such an environment, the Jewish community has produced different denominational movements of Judaism.

None of the following movements can be seen as unified and uniform. Traditions may vary within congregations belonging to the same movement, depending on geographical locations, historical influences. On another axis, there is difference between communities using different – for instance *Askenazi* or *Sefardi* – customs and prayer rites. These differences are often, though not always, strongly connected to the geographical location or origin of the given congregation. Belonging to one specific denomination of Judaism may be dependent on *Halakhab*, on family tradition, on personal considerations, or many other factors. *Halakhab* may also be interpreted in several different ways even by rabbis who belong to the “same denomination” of Judaism. My aim is to give a brief introduction on the major differences between the below mentioned categories.

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<sup>54</sup> KOMORÓCZY 2012:868-869.

## Different Denominations of Judaism

### Progressive Judaism

Progressive Judaism – as any other movement of Judaism – cannot be considered as a completely unified movement. Its roots lie in the *Haskalah* and Jewish Emancipation. The first followers of the movement were seeking for a way to remain Jewish, while accepting more secular social customs. This search manifested itself on the outside mostly in vernacular services, changes in the synagogue architecture, changes in the liturgical music, and often mixed male and female choirs in the synagogue. It is often stated that the Reform Movement – from which the current progressive movements derive – was established by Abraham Geiger. Progressive Judaism is an attempt to construct a “post-Rabbinic Judaism,”<sup>55</sup> by expanding the scope of observance by granting full equality to all Jews irrespective of gender and sexual orientation, and by in some matters narrowing the scope by removing and changing certain parts of the traditional prayers. Progressive Judaism interprets the Torah and the *Halakhab* in the most progressive way. Liberal, Reform and Reconstructionist congregations can be listed in this category.<sup>56</sup>

### Conservative Judaism/Masorti Movement

Conservative Judaism is a modern stream of Judaism. It attempts to combine the commitments to Jewish observance with a positive attitude towards modern culture, as they view it, by continuing the *halakbic* evolution and adapting *Halakhab* to modern day. The movement was a continuation of the positive historical school led by Rabbi Zacharias Frankel in the mid-19th century in Germany.<sup>57</sup> The movement’s most fundamental doctrines evolved in the 20th century: Judaism has to be adapted to the modern age, but the traditional rituals, beliefs and laws and the Hebrew language have to be preserved as much as possible. The movement stresses the importance of

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<sup>55</sup> RAYNER 1998:1.

<sup>56</sup> For further reading: <http://wupj.org> or RAYNER, JOHN D.: *Jewish Religious Law. A Progressive Perspective*. Berghahn Books, 1998.

<sup>57</sup> For further reading: GOLINKIN, DAVID AND PANITZ, MICHAEL: “Conservative Judaism” in *Encyclopedia Judaica Online*. Source: <http://www.encyclopedia.com/article-1G2-2587504582/conservative-judaism.html>. Retrieved: 28.04.2016

conserving the laws of Judaism, but notes the need to modify them so that they relevant to the present needs and conditions.<sup>58</sup>

According to the self-definition found on the website of The Masorti Foundation for Conservative Judaism in Israel, “the Masorti Movement is committed to a pluralistic, egalitarian, and democratic vision of Zionism. Masorti represents a “third” way. Not secular Judaism. Not ultra-Orthodoxy. But a Jewish life that integrates secular beliefs. *Halakhab* with inclusion and egalitarianism. Tradition that recognizes the realities of today’s world.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> POPKIN 2015:228-229.

<sup>59</sup> Source: <http://masorti.org/about-the-masorti-foundation>. Retrieved: 28.04.2016.

## Orthodox Judaism

Orthodox Judaism considers itself as the holder of the most authentic tradition within Judaism. Needless to say, it cannot be considered as a coherent movement either. Nonetheless, many historians believe that orthodoxy as we know it today, was developed in Germany, the former Kingdom of Hungary and in Austro-Hungary in the 19th century.<sup>60</sup> Members of the denominations may also claim that orthodoxy represents the authentic forms of Jewish practices. However I would like to emphasise, that rabbis of other geographical locations – in Russia, Poland or Galicia – and the Vilna Gaon<sup>61</sup> had a great influence on the development of today's orthodoxy into its current form. During the 19th century, the term was used to describe Jews, who rejected any changes in *Halakhab* suggested by the Jewish Enlightenment movement. Having become frightened about the new political, social and economic opportunities opening up for the Jews, many of the most radically orthodox Jews urged the Jewish communities to reject the privileges offered by Emancipation.<sup>62</sup> However, some stood for “Torah with the way of the Land.”<sup>63</sup>

By the late 20th century, Orthodox Judaism has been divided into many sub-groups. The two most important strands are *Haredi* (or ultra-) Orthodox<sup>64</sup> and Modern Orthodox. *Haredi* is divided into two main groups, each with several further subdivisions: Hassidic and non-Hassidic. Modern Orthodoxy is also very diverse, in adherence to Zionism, in women's rights, etc.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> For further reading: SILBER, MICHAEL: “The Historical Experience of German Jewry and its Impact on Haskalah and Reform in Hungary,” in Jacob Katz, ed. *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model*, New Brunswick and Oxford, Transaction Books, 1987. pp. 107-157. or SILBER, MICHAEL: “The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: the Invention of a Tradition” in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity since Emancipation*, ed., Jack Wertheimer New York-Jerusalem: JTS distributed by Harvard U. Press, 1992. pp. 23-84.

<sup>61</sup> Elijah ben Shlomo Zalman. Talmudist, halakhist, kabbalist and leader of *mitnagdic* (non-hassidic) Jewry in the 18th century.

<sup>62</sup> KATZBURG 2007.

<sup>63</sup> *Torah im Derech Eretz*. The phrase refers to the philosophy of Orthodox Judaism articulated by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–88). It forms a relationship between traditionally observant Judaism and the developing world.

<sup>64</sup> Haredi Jews regard themselves as the most religiously authentic group among Jews. For further reading:

KATZBURG, NATHANIEL: “Orthodoxy” in *Encyclopedia Judaica Online*, 2007. Source:

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/article-1G2-2587515228/orthodoxy.html> Retrieved: 28.02.2016

<sup>65</sup> For further reading: ROSENTHAL, HERMAN AND DUBNOW, S.M: “Hasidim, Hasidism” in *Jewish Encyclopedia Online*. 1906. Source: <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/7317-hasidim-hasidism>. Retrieved: 28.04.2016

## Conversion

When talking about religious affiliation, there is also an issue which has nothing to do with biological origin. This is the issue of conversion. Judaism does not allow missionary activities, and there are strict regulations regarding conversion, which get gradually even stricter as one moves towards orthodoxy on the progressive-orthodox scale. One's Jewish religious affiliation could be based on the way of living an orthodox life in the strict perspective, but could also be based on interpreting the regulations of the Jewish Law in a "modernised way". To explain this statement, I would like to give an example which might be one of the most well-known facts about observant Jews. Any work or activity belonging to the 39 categories of work as defined by rabbinic law is strictly forbidden during *Shabbat*, such as lighting fire or finishing a construction,<sup>66</sup> or on its analogy, turning on or off electricity. In a progressive community, the regulations about work or lighting the fire are observed in a more modern manner: as turning the light on and off is not one's everyday job and – normally – it does not result in fire, it does not count as work.

According to Jewish religious law, conversion must consist of the following elements: acceptance of the commandments, the formal and ritual acts of conversion – circumcision in case of men, and submergence in a *mikveh* in case of both men and women – and the inspection of these by a rabbinical court of three. The conversion candidate must accept the commandments incumbent upon Jews on him/herself.<sup>67</sup>

If someone wants to convert to Judaism, it is expected from him/her to keep religious laws and regulations according to the level of strictness accepted by the community and its rabbis where he/she wants to convert.

Conversion is a long-lasting procedure that requires the convert to live according to oral and written regulations of the Jewish religion. Depending on the community and the knowledge of the person who wishes to convert it can take several years.

There are significant differences between denominations, but also within denominations between rabbis, in the actual requirements regarding the level of stringency required of the convert as regarding the understanding and observing the commandments. Accordingly, there is also a debate whether to accept each other's converts. Usually,

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<sup>66</sup> Exodus 35:3.

<sup>67</sup> FINKELSTEIN 2003:15.

within the same movement, conversions are accepted. However, only conversions made by specific, orthodox rabbinical courts are accepted by the State of Israel for the purposes of immigration and citizenship, and the requirement is even stricter for receiving religious services (i.e. wedding, burial) in the State of Israel.

## Membership in a Community or “Cultural Group”, Ethnic and National Belonging or Language Use

According to Karmela Liebkind and her colleagues, ethnicity refers to a certain – assumed – common ancestry or origin.<sup>68</sup> Ethnic identity could be considered one of the social identities any individual can have. For ethnicity and ethnic membership to have an importance in an individual’s life, that individual must find something valuable related to that membership. However, in some cases ethnic identities are (only) imposed from the outside, from dominant, majority groups.<sup>69</sup>

Dutch social scientist, Maykel Verkuyten claims that a shared belief in an imagined or real common origin and ancestry separates ethnic identity from other social identities.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, the concept of ethnic identity is abstract and rather complex, and it could be based on several definitions and emphasises. A person can easily define him-/herself as a member of a certain group, whereas others may define this person as something else.<sup>71</sup>

As Joane Nagel writes:

“Ethnicity is constructed out of the material of language, religion, culture, appearance, ancestry or regionality. The location and meaning of particular ethnic boundaries are continuously negotiated, revised and revitalised, both by ethnic group themselves as well as by outside observers.”<sup>72</sup>

Common culture, historical narrative, language and religion are substances and basic materials in the construction of ethnic identity. Culture, however, is not a historical legacy: the present plays an important role in it, just as the past does. Cultures change, they are rediscovered, reinterpreted, blended. Similarly to the way ethnic boundaries are created, culture is constructed based on the actions of individuals and groups, and their interactions with society at large. Structuring a cultural basis for new ethnic and national communities is a method of revitalizing ethnic boundaries and giving a new meaning to

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<sup>68</sup> LIEBKIND et al. 2015:1.

<sup>69</sup> ERIKSEN 2002:33.

<sup>70</sup> VERKUYTEN 2005:81.

<sup>71</sup> HUTNIK 1991:19-20.

<sup>72</sup> NAGEL 1994:152-153.



ethnicity in existing populations. The construction of culture supplies the content for national and ethnic symbolism.<sup>73</sup>

A non-Israeli Jew can easily perceive himself as a member of his home country and nation without excluding the “Jewish identity”. Thus, an American Jew can be both “American” and “Jewish”. As such, ethnic identity is often a “sub-identity”<sup>74</sup> of the complex image one creates of oneself. It is also negotiated in relation to other cultural and ethnic groups.<sup>75</sup> The majority group is usually a significant one, even if there are several potential reference groups for ethnic identity.<sup>76</sup> A person therefore may have many different individual and social identities (multiple identities).

It is important to mention that ethnic groups are often – but not always – minority groups: they may be dominant or subordinate.<sup>77</sup> Membership in a historically “stigmatized” group generally has psychological implications – this is the case of the Jews who tend to occupy a similar place in whatever society are they located.<sup>78</sup> The essential difference between definitions of ethnic groups and minority groups lies in the serious imbalances between power and prestige: “minorities are subordinate segments of complex state societies.”<sup>79</sup>

The concepts of ethnicity from the Jewish perspective were not necessarily taken into account during the Jewish Enlightenment. Judaism was viewed as a religion. Many texts refer to Jews in German as “*moseischen Glaubens*” (literally: “believers of Mosaic faith”). It was thought, that Judaism allows its believers to unite regardless of their ethnicities or nationalities.<sup>80</sup>

Language is claimed to be one of the most important factors of one’s identity: it gives the chance for an individual to name and express himself, for being able to socialise and to express culture. In discursive psychology, the use of language is regarded as a social action and practice that has different social functions. Language – as a medium of a given ethnic group – also communicates the group’s concepts of its common origin.<sup>81</sup> In

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<sup>73</sup> NAGEL 1994:162-165.

<sup>74</sup> HERMAN 1989:34.

<sup>75</sup> VARJONEN et al 2013:111.

<sup>76</sup> VERKUYTEN 2005:92-93.

<sup>77</sup> HUTNIK 1989:34.

<sup>78</sup> HERMAN 1989:34.

<sup>79</sup> HUTNIK 1991:21.

<sup>80</sup> BARTAL 2011:54.

<sup>81</sup> LIEBKIND 1992:150.

the case of Jews, there have been several specifically Jewish languages: Yiddish, Judeo-Arabic, Ladino. Besides these spoken languages, in sacred contexts Jews have used Hebrew and Aramaic for centuries. These distinct Jewish languages have been symptoms of separateness from the surrounding society, a form of group-identity.

## **Jewish Identity in Israel vs. in the Diaspora**

In 1958, David Ben Gurion (1886-1973) – the first prime minister of the State of Israel – wrote to 47 important Jewish figures (distinguished theologians, rabbis, jurists, philosophers and academics from various fields) in Israel and abroad about the issue of Jewish identity.<sup>82</sup> His inquiry focused mainly on the issue of whether a person born of a Jewish father could be permitted the right of return to Israel. The answers varied based on religious and national perspectives. Some claimed that the person had to go through a Jewish conversion – perhaps regarding Judaism only as a religious aspect. Others noted that in the case of Judaism religious and national or ethnic elements are intertwined, and thus conversion cannot be a requirement, or if it is, it should be as easy as possible.<sup>83</sup>

The Law of Return was enacted by the parliament of Israel on July 5, 1950. It declares the rights of Jews to immigrate to Israel.<sup>84</sup> The Law was extended in 1970. Since then, the Law of Return applies to those who have at least one Jewish grandparent or parent, whether on the paternal or the maternal side, in case they have not by their own free will changed their religion, and to converts to Judaism. People who immigrate to Israel under the Law of Return are immediately entitled to Israeli citizenship. Nonetheless, the Chief Rabbinate may not recognise them as Jews, depending on their *halakhic* status or conversion.

Israeli Jews constitute a majority among the citizens in the State of Israel. The country's national culture is based on Jewish memories and symbols, and Jewish and Zionist holidays are national holidays. Everything that is labelled as “Jewish history” or “Jewish

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<sup>82</sup> BEN RAFAEL, ELIEZER: *Jewish Identities. Fifty Intellectuals Answer Ben Gurion*. Brill. Leiden – Boston – Köln. 2002.

<sup>83</sup> For further reading: BEN RAFAEL, ELIEZER: *Jewish Identities. Fifty Intellectuals Answer Ben Gurion*. Brill. Leiden – Boston – Köln. 2002.

<sup>84</sup> The Law of Return 5710-1950. Source: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/mfa-archiv/1950-1959/pages/law%20of%20return%205710-1950.aspx>. Retrieved: 22.02.2016

culture” in the Diaspora is labelled as “history” or as “culture” in Israel. Jews are the majority in Israel, but their identity may be different – depending on whether they immigrated to Israel or were born there already, if they immigrated, whether it happened before the *Sboah*, immediately in its aftermath, or later, and from the country or region they immigrated from.

In his study<sup>85</sup> about Swedish Jewry – *Hemma i hemlösheten* (*At Home in Homelessness*),<sup>86</sup> Lars Dencik describes the “Trinity” of Judaism<sup>87</sup> as the combination of three important factors which form parts of modern Jewish identities: Judaism as a religion,<sup>88</sup> Jewishness as a prism through which one experiences the world<sup>89</sup>, and the State of Israel as an existing reality.<sup>90</sup> His approach shows three important aspects of one’s Jewishness.

**Table 1. The Trinity of Judaism**



Since Jews living in the Diaspora are not only Jewish, but are also citizens of their own countries and are surrounded by particular traditions, languages, environments and cultures, Dencik forms another “trinity” – of Swedish Jewry in his case:<sup>91</sup> citizenship in the state of Sweden<sup>92</sup>, “secularised” Lutheranism as a cosmology<sup>93</sup>, and Swedishness as a prism through which one experiences the world.<sup>94</sup> Dencik’s approach may be used for

<sup>85</sup> He mentions this theory in a latter study: “Homo Zappiens’: A European-Jewish Way of Life in the Era of Globalisation.” in LUSTIG, SANDRA & IAN LEVESON eds *Turning the Kaleidoscope. Perspectives on European Jewry*. Berghahn Books, Oxford & New York, 2006. I decided to use Dencik’s own translations of the expressions he uses for his explanations.

<sup>86</sup> DENCİK 1993:51.

<sup>87</sup> In Swedish: *Den judiska “treenigheten”*.

<sup>88</sup> In Swedish: *Judendom som religion*.

<sup>89</sup> In Swedish: *Judiskhet som upplevelsefilter och folktillhörighet*.

<sup>90</sup> In Swedish: *Israels existens och Sionism*.

<sup>91</sup> DENCİK 1993:55.

<sup>92</sup> In Swedish: *Sekulariserad lutheranism som kosmologi*.

<sup>93</sup> In Swedish: *Svenskhet som upplelsefilter*.

<sup>94</sup> In Swedish: *Sverige som hemland*.

approaching other Diaspora's Jewry as well, in the case of my present research, to Finnish Jewry:

**Table 2. The Finnish Trinity<sup>95</sup>**



By combining the two trinitities for visualising the model of complex Jewish identity in the Diaspora, Dencik creates the *Star of David of the Diaspora*, which may not only be valid only for Jews, but for other minority groups as well, such as Muslims in Denmark, Turks in Germany, Iranians in France etc., many of whom have been forced to leave their homelands because of political reasons, wars or other hardships.<sup>96</sup>

**Table 3. The Star of David of the Diaspora**



<sup>95</sup> Dencik's approach to the Diaspora Jewry was used by Julia Larsson in her Master's thesis in 2014. For further reading: LARSSON, JULIA: *Juutalaisuus on sitä, että lukee ensimmäisenä lehdessä juutalaisia koskevat uutiset*. Suomen juutalaisten nuorten aikuisten käsityksiä omasta juutalaisuudestaan. Master's Thesis. Department of Behavioral Sciences, University of Helsinki, 2014.

<sup>96</sup> DENCİK 2006:100.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In my research, I am using a combination of literature, quantitative and qualitative data, by which I wish to ensure that the limitations of one type of data are balanced by the strong points of another. My view is that the analysis of the results received by the combination of these methods gives access to different perspectives. The quantitative research was conducted to give an overall view on the religious affiliation and observance of the members of the Jewish community of Helsinki, and to present basic statistical information on them. With the qualitative study, my core objective was to reflect on those matters that cannot – or can hardly – be studied quantitatively. My overall intention was to study the observance level and religiosity of the registered members of the congregation, while reflecting on how strictly the members follow Jewish law, and how they perceive Judaism and their own identity.

### **Secondary Literature on Identity and Jewish Identity**

The basis of my research relies on several sources from different fields. Using scholarship from the fields of both humanities and social sciences, I attempted to collect various perspectives on the question of Jewish identity. There are numerous approaches to the topic, with significant differences in perspective, depending on various geographical, temporal, political and social perspectives. Besides theoretical writings on identity, one of my core sources was Swedish sociologist, Lars Dencik's work on the Swedish Jewry.<sup>97</sup> In his study, Dencik focuses on the “manifestations” of Jewishness in postmodern Sweden.

### **Primary Religious Literature of Judaism**

From a religious point of view, Judaism is based on strict written and oral traditions. The *Tanakh* is the Hebrew name for the Jewish Bible – the name being an acronym of its three main parts: Torah (the five books of Moses), Neviim (Prophets) and Ketuvim

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<sup>97</sup> DENCİK, LARS: “Jewishness” in Postmodernity: the Case of Sweden.’ in GITELMAN, Z., KOSMIN, B., KOVÁCS, A. eds. *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond*. Central European University Press, Budapest, 2003. pp 75-104.

(Writings). This is considered the “Written Law” of divine origin, and the source that holds the origin of the religious commandments (*mitzvoṭ*) – the interpretation and application of which was developed during the period of rabbinic Judaism (after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE). The *Talmud* is one of the major works of rabbinic literature, part of the “Oral Torah”, also considered to be of divine origin. It is a thematic collection of the commandments, and the debate of several generations of rabbis regarding it, including not only legal, but also narrative elements. *Midrash* is also a part of the “Oral Law”; it is a genre for textual interpretations and homilies on the Bible. *Responsa*-literature is another very important genre of rabbinic literature: collections of rulings and law-cases, in the form of responses to specific questions, from various times, locations, regarding various topics. The *Shulchan Aruch* (“Set Table”) is the most important later work of rabbinic literature. It is the law code of Jewish religious practice, of *Halakhab* and Jewish tradition, compiled in the 16th century. Rabbinic Judaism prescribes Jewish living to an exceptionally detailed level. In many cases, rabbinic rulings are derived from such principles as the divine origin and inerrancy of the Bible, or based on various, rationally not explainable assumptions and traditions. In modernity, many rulings and traditions of rabbinic Judaism have lost credibility to people who accept more liberal values in the Jewish world.<sup>98</sup> The *Shulchan Aruch*, as a result, came to be the book considered definitive in the stricter and more traditional communities. Its collection however has been questioned by reform and more progressive Jews through the past few centuries.

## Secondary Literature of the Finnish Jewry and the Helsinki Jewish Community

The Helsinki Jewish congregation and its history have been researched by several scholars during the past few decades. As already mentioned, the most recent study that correlates to my topic has been done by Julia Larsson in 2014. In her work *Juutalaisuus on sitä, että lukee ensimmäisenä lehdestä juutalaisia koskevat uutiset. Suomen juutalaisten nuorten aikuisten käsityksiä omasta juutalaisuudestaan* (Judaism is when one initially reads the news concerning Jews in the newspaper. Conceptions of Judaism by Finnish Jewish young adults). Larsson

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<sup>98</sup> RAYNER 1998:9.

focuses on the young generation of Jews who will continue the heritage of Judaism in the future in Finland. She invited members of the Jewish Community of Helsinki who were born between 1976–1986 to answer her qualitative questionnaire. Her survey was created based on the Dencik’s model of Judaism in the Diaspora, which I have also mentioned earlier. Larsson studied the meaning of Judaism to Finnish-Jewish young adults. Another recent work, Laura Katarina Ekholm’s dissertation, entitled *Boundaries of an urban minority: The Helsinki Jewish Community from the End of Imperial Russia until the 1970s*, deals with the analysis of how ethnic-boundary drawing has been influenced in the urban context by the turbulent events of twentieth-century Europe. Her analysis was specifically applied to the social boundaries of the Helsinki Jewish community from the beginning of the 20th century until the 1970s.

In the past 15 years, there was only one extensive study done about the identity and practices of Finnish Jewry. Using the questionnaire that was already used by Karl Marosi and Lars Dencik in the Stockholm and Göteborg communities in 1999, Svante Lundgren conducted his study in 2002, entitled *Suomen Juutalaiset – Usko, Tavat, Asenteet (Finnish Jews – Religion, Manners, Attitudes)*. His extensive survey consists of 72 questions (and 11 additional questions of the Jewish Community of Helsinki itself), focusing on how the members perceive themselves, as a religious group or as the part of Jewish people, and on their integration to the Finnish society.

Besides these studies, there have been several different publications written about the history of the community and about the usage of different languages – such as Yiddish, Swedish, or Russian – of its (former) members. I have used these works to gain a better understanding of the community itself, but I am not quoting these in my own work, as I do not consider them strictly relevant to my research perspective.

## **Quantitative Research**

Most questions in my survey that was distributed among all registered members of the Jewish Community of Helsinki were formed by Swedish sociologist Lars Dencik, Danish sociologist Karl Marosi, and Sigvard Rubenowitz, a professor of social psychology at Gothenburg University.

As my interest was to receive more information about the religious affiliation and the Jewish orientations among the members of the Helsinki Jewish Community, I modified a few of the questions, placing the emphasis on issues that a religious Jew often faces in liberal societies. These questions focused mostly on the individual senses of Jewishness and on questions such as women's participation – which may be significant in Finnish society, and which are usually criticised in the cases of strongly traditional religious congregations.

During preparations for the research I consulted the members of the community and tried to focus on questions that would be of special interest for them as well. The questionnaire consists of 13 questions, which mostly reflect the religious standpoint of the community members, and the way they place themselves in the Finnish society. Two additional questions concern the gender and age of the respondents. The questionnaire was available in English and Finnish.

## **Qualitative Research**

The qualitative part of the research was done between November 2015 and January 2016. I made 8 in-depth-interviews with members of the congregation. While reflecting on some parts of the quantitative questionnaire, my focus was on researching what the community members think of their Jewishness, how observant they are, and how they see the future of Finnish Jewry among the current circumstances.

I found the contacts to participants in my interviews in various ways, some of them might even have answered to my survey. For ensuring the variety of responses, I interviewed both Jews by birth, converts, male and female members of the congregation, Finnish and non-Finnish citizens. The age range of my respondents varies from 22–69 years, and there are active as well as non-active members of the congregation. All information that may reveal who the interviewees were, is abbreviated or left out of the transcripts. In order to follow basic ethical principles, I also decided not to include the names of my respondents, thus ensuring that they are not recognisable. I use abbreviations instead of names in the study, I simply follow the first 8 letters of the English alphabet. While there are quotations from the original interviews in the text of



this study, the names, places, occupations and other data of the respondents that may reveal their person or that of their acquaintances are left out or abbreviated in the text.

## QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

This research is an investigation of the registered members of the Helsinki Jewish Community. The membership in the congregation is voluntary, and in case of adults, requires the person to be Jewish according to *Halakhab*: born to a Jewish mother or converted to Judaism with a *bet din* that is accepted by the community. Rabbi Simon Livson – the rabbi of the Helsinki congregation – requires conversions to be at least modern orthodox in stringency level. However, in certain cases he does accept *conservadox gilyurim* as well, based on the convert's background and their home community's level of observance.<sup>99</sup>

All registered members of the community above the age of 18 at the time the survey was sent – from 25.10.2015 to 18.11.2015 – received the questionnaire, and also several reminders of it, via email or via regular mail. Anonymity of the respondents was guaranteed in the description of the research.

I have only analysed the social composition of the respondents in terms of their age, gender, and whether they were born as Jews or had converted to Judaism. In all, the community has 961 registered members, among which 777 reached the age of 18 during the time the survey was conducted. 67 responses were made, among which 65 were 100% complete. Thus, response rate was less than 10%.

It can be estimated that approximately one fourth of the members who had received the questionnaire did not answer because having moved, because they were travelling or were sick in the period of the survey. It is also probable that certain members of the congregation did not answer due to the language barrier. We can also assume that for the majority of those who did not answer the questionnaire, Jewishness was not so important, or that there were less active members of the group. I would like to underline that due to the small response rate, the results of this study are to be seen only as assumptions, and should not by any means be considered representative of the whole Jewish Community of Helsinki.

49.3% of the respondents were male, 50.7% female, from which 6 (9%) were below the age of 30; 32 (48%) of them were between the age of 30 and 55; whereas the number of respondents older than 55 years was than 29 (43%). 73.1% were born Jewish, and 26.9%

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<sup>99</sup> Interview with Rabbi Simon Livson. 09.02.2016.

had converted to Judaism. Throughout the analysis, the number of total answers received is marked on the bottom of each table. The most popular response is also indicated with bold letters and the distinguishing dark blue bar.

I decided to divide the questions of my survey into five main categories:

1. Religiosity
2. Feelings of “Jewishness”
3. Observance of Jewish Practices
4. Jews as Modern Finns
5. Jews in Helsinki





While giving a *halakhic* explanation to the most common interpretation of traditions, I analyse the level of religious affiliation of the respondents from that perspective. I intend to reflect on the correlations between different “levels” of observance and liberal answers given to my questions.

## Religiosity

I decided to include the options “I am non-observant/secular”, “I am liberal/progressive/reform”, “I am conservative” and “I am orthodox” as alternative answers for the question below. According to my best knowledge these are the most common among the community members. I did not differentiate between different strands of Orthodoxy and Conservative Judaism, nor did I give any explanations of these terms.

**Table 4.**

**How would you describe your relationship to Jewish religious practices?**

| Response                         | Count | Percentage | Bar  |
|----------------------------------|-------|------------|--|
| I am non-observant/secular.      | 15    | 22.4%      |    |
| I am liberal/progressive/reform. | 23    | 34.3%      |   |
| I am conservative.               | 9     | 13.4%      |  |
| I am orthodox.                   | 20    | 29.9%      |  |
| Total                            |       | 67         |  |





According to the results, a little less than one fourth of the respondents are secular. The rest I consider religious – regardless of their observance level. The biggest group is the “liberal/progressive/reform,” with 34.3% of the responses. Approximately 38% of the converts consider themselves orthodox, whereas only 26% of the respondents born as Jewish stated the same. Among the converts, there was only one (5%) person, who considered himself secular. This number is 14 (29%) among the respondents, who were born as Jews. 27% of the converts responded that they were liberal/progressive/reform, whereas 37.5% of the born Jews put themselves into the same category. Proportionally therefore, the number of respondents with stricter observance level is higher among the converts.

## Feelings of “Jewishness”

Jewish identity can be based on, emotions and feelings are hard to describe and categorise. Nevertheless, I decided to include questions on one’s feelings of Jewishness in the survey. Even if the alternatives of the study from which this question was taken<sup>100</sup> included an additional option, namely “Even though I have a Jewish background I don’t consider myself as a Jew” in my opinion it is odd to be a member of a Jewish community by choice if one does not consider him/herself as a Jew.

**Table 5.**

**There can be various senses of being “Jewish”. Which of the following alternatives best describes your feelings?**

| Response   | Count |       |  |
|--|-------|-------|--|
| I am aware that I am a Jew, but do not think about it frequently.      | 4     | 6.0%  |     |
| I rather feel Jewish, but other aspects of my life are also important. | 16    | 23.9% |   |
| I am very aware that I am Jewish and it is very important to me.       | 46    | 68.7% |  |
| None of these alternatives - hard to say.                              | 1     | 1.3%  |   |
| Total: 67  |       |       |  |

The vast majority of respondents answered “I am very aware that I am Jewish and it is very important to me” to this question. The second biggest group of respondents stated that they “rather feel Jewish”. Only 6% of the respondents answered that they did not think about their Jewishness frequently, whereas only one person stated that none of these possibilities described his feelings. This data shows that the majority of informants have clear thoughts about their Jewishness, and it is also considered to be a significant part of their lives. I would like to underline that less than 10% of the members have responded to the survey. It can be assumed that the respondents are the ones, who consider Judaism a meaningful part of their lives.

<sup>100</sup> DENCİK, LARS: “Jewishness” in Postmodernity: the Case of Sweden.’ in GITELMAN, Z., KOSMIN, B., KOVÁCS, A. eds. *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond*. Central European University Press, Budapest, 2003. pp 75-104.

**Table 6.**

**Do you feel more Jewish or Finnish?**

| Response                           | Count |       |  |
|------------------------------------|-------|-------|--|
| I feel more Finnish than Jewish.   | 5     | 7.5%  |  |
| I feel equally Finnish and Jewish. | 32    | 47.8% |  |
| I feel more Jewish than Finnish.   | 26    | 38.8% |  |
| Difficult to say, not sure.        | 4     | 6.0%  |  |
| Total: 67                          |       |       |  |

The data derived from the answers to the next question “Do you feel more Finnish or Jewish?”, which wanted to see how Finnish and Jewish identity correlated, indicate that the respondents identify really strongly as Jews, and that almost half of the respondents perceive themselves equally as Finnish as Jewish. 38.8% of the respondents stated that their Jewish identity was stronger than their Finnish. Nonetheless, it has to be taken into consideration that the survey did not reflect on the respondents’ official relation to Finland. All registered members of the Jewish community of Helsinki had the possibility to respond, even those, who do not identify as Finnish in any context, neither as their nationality nor as their identity, or were in Finland temporarily, albeit as members of the congregation. One can assume that most of the informants who answered “I feel equally Finnish and Jewish.” have a strong connection with Finland – they were either born and raised here, or immigrated here a long time ago etc. Among these members of the congregation, the consciousness of multiple identities is rather obvious. I would like to emphasize, that as far as I am concerned, a person who was not born or raised in Finland can also identify as a Finn.

**Table 7.**

**There can be various senses of being “Jewish”. Which of the following alternatives best describes your feelings?**

| Variable   | Very important     | Of certain importance | Not important at all |           |
|--|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------|
| A feeling of being Jewish in essence (e.g. as a personality, way of thinking). | <b>48</b><br>71.6% | <b>17</b><br>25.4%    | <b>2</b><br>3.0%     | Total: 67 |
| A feeling of belonging with other Jews.  | <b>40</b><br>59.7% | <b>25</b><br>37.3%    | <b>2</b><br>3.0%     | Total: 67 |
| A feeling of solidarity with Israel.   | <b>31</b><br>46.3% | <b>26</b><br>38.8%    | <b>10</b><br>14.9%   | Total: 67 |
| Religious activities, going to the synagogue, religious customs, etc.          | <b>19</b><br>28.4% | <b>28</b><br>41.8%    | <b>20</b><br>29.9%   | Total: 67 |
| The Jewish atmosphere at home (food, customs, etc.)                            | <b>37</b><br>55.2% | <b>23</b><br>34.3%    | <b>7</b><br>10.4%    | Total: 67 |
| Loyalty to my Jewish inheritance.  | <b>44</b><br>66.7% | <b>19</b><br>28.8%    | <b>3</b><br>4.5%     | Total: 67 |

The answers given to the question “There can be various senses of being ‘Jewish’. Which of the following alternatives best describes your feelings?” demonstrates the individual factors of one’s “Jewishness”. It has to be mentioned that there were only 66 responses given to this question. The answers given indicate that for 71.6% of the respondents “being Jewish in essence” is of a higher importance than religious activities, moreover to more than half of them traditional aspects, such as Jewish food or customs at home are also more important. A significantly big amount, almost a third (29.9%) of the respondents did not find religious activities important at all. Parallel to this, the number of those who do not find the feeling of belonging to other Jews and loyalty to their Jewish inheritance important at all was also low. A feeling of solidarity with Israel was also considered to be important for the majority of the respondents. Based on these answers, we can draw the conclusion that the most important factors of how Jewishness was perceived were “abstract elements” of one’s life, such as a “feeling” or culture.

## Observance of Jewish Practices

**Table 8.**

**How often do you visit the synagogue?**

| Response  | Count | Percentage | Bar |
|---|-------|------------|-----|
| During every Shabbat and all the holidays.                        | 9     | 13.6%      |     |
| Sometimes during Shabbat and during the big holidays.             | 23    | 34.8%      |     |
| Only on big holidays. (Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah)              | 25    | 37.9%      |     |
| Only if there is a unique opportunity (wedding, bar mitzvah etc.) | 7     | 10.6%      |     |
| I do not go to the synagogue at all.                              | 2     | 3.0%       |     |
| Total: 66   |       |            |     |

When answering the question “How often do you visit the synagogue?”, 37.9% of the respondents stated that they visit the synagogue during important holidays such as *Yom Kippur* and *Rosh Hashanah*. A similar amount claimed to be taking part at the services during some *Shabbat* services as well. There were only two respondents stating that they did not attend synagogue at all – both of them are non-observant/secular. And the percentage of people who claimed going every *Shabbat* and all the holidays was only 9–13.6% of the answers.<sup>101</sup>

The fact that so few members claimed that they attended synagogue every week may be due to the fact that travelling more than 3 *parsah* by foot is forbidden on *Shabbat*, which restricts some orthodox members from visiting the services in certain holidays.

Interestingly, 7 of the 15 non-observant/secular respondents claimed that they visit the synagogue on “big holidays” such as *Yom Kippur* or *Rosh Hashanah*, which may be due to the significance of these holidays among the Jewish customs.




Most of the members who answered “Sometimes during *Shabbat* and during the big holidays” to this question consider themselves to be liberal/progressive/reform.

<sup>101</sup> It has to be mentioned that there were only 66 responses to this question.



**Table 9.**

**If you have son/s, is he/are they circumcised?**

| Response                 | Count |       |  |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|--|
| Yes                      | 41    | 62.1% |  |
| No                       | 2     | 3.0%  |   |
| I do not have a son/sons | 23    | 34.8% |  |
| Total: 66                |       |       |  |

זאת ברית אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין זָרְעֵךְ אַחֲרַיךָ הַפּוֹל לָכֶם פְּלִיזָר:  
 וְנִמְלְתֶם אֶת בְּשָׂר עָרְלַתְכֶם וְהָיָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם:  
 וְכֹל־שִׂמְנֵת יָמִים יִפּוֹל לָכֶם פְּלִיזָר לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם יְלִיד בְּיַת וּמְקֻנַּת־כֶּסֶף מִכָּל כּוֹנֵן אֲשֶׁר לֹא מִזָּרְעֵךְ הוּא:

**בראשית 17:10-12**

“This is my covenant which you shall keep between me and between you, between your seed, after you: every male among you shall be circumcised, and you shall be circumcised on the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be a token of the covenant between me and you. And he, who is eight days old shall be circumcised among you – every male throughout the generations: he, who is born in your house or bought with money from any man, who is a foreigner, who is not from your seed.”

**Genesis 17:10-12**

The rite of *brit milah* is perhaps one of the most ancient practices stated in the Torah, often considered as one of the most “basic” parental obligations of Judaism. Abraham was the first to be given the commandment the Torah (Genesis 17:7-14.), and the commandment is repeated later on in Leviticus 12:3. It has to be mentioned that Zipporah, the wife of Moses has also done a circumcision to his own son (Exodus 4:24-26).

Only two respondents – less than 1% – stated that their son was not circumcised, which may mean that most of the community members still view circumcision as one of the most central markers of their Jewish identity.

**Table 10.**

**Do you keep kosher at home?**

| Response                   | Count | Percentage | Bar  |
|----------------------------|-------|------------|--|
| Yes.                       | 20    | 30.3%      |  |
| Yes, but not rigidly.      | 11    | 16.7%      |  |
| No, but I do not eat pork. | 18    | 27.3%      |  |
| No.                        | 17    | 25.8%      |  |
| Total                      |       | 66         |  |

The largest group among the respondents (30.3%) is the people who claim to keep *kosher* at home. I must note that I did not give a description of “keeping *kosher*” in the questionnaire. The regulations of eating *kosher* are rather complex and their exact interpretation may vary – just as in many other questions in Jewish law. Some people keep *kosher* by adhering to a very strict form of laws, and some may self-identify as *kosher* observers, but are lenient in the adherence of the laws themselves, especially outside of home. To keep *kosher* – in the most basic level – means following the Biblical restrictions regarding food: only eating animals that the Bible considers to be permissible, only consuming ritually slaughtered meat products, dividing milk and meat.<sup>102</sup> According to the traditional rabbinic understanding of keeping *kosher*, there are regulations not only regarding groceries, but also regarding kitchen accessories and utensils.<sup>103</sup> In the orthodox understanding of the laws of keeping *kosher*, only *kosher* ingredients cooked in *kosher* utensils, under the supervision of an observant Jew, served in *kosher* utensils, is to be considered *kosher*. There are restrictions and stringencies even regarding certain vegetables, especially leafy vegetables, and fruits, which can easily become *treif* if they include insects, or if they are canned or frozen – as they may contain non-*kosher* ingredients.

Most of the respondents who keep *kosher* at home, are orthodox. By these answers, we may assume that they are aware of the regulations of kashrut, and only consume food accordingly.

<sup>102</sup> Biblical regulations of kashrut: Non-animals and birds: Leviticus 11:3–8, Deuteronomy 14:3–21; Twisted nerve and limb of an animal: Genesis 32:32, Genesis 9:4; Prohibition of fruit from a tree in the first three years: Leviticus 19:23; Prohibition of new grain: Leviticus 23:14, Prohibition of mixture of meat and milk: Exodus 23:19, Exodus 34:26, Deuteronomy 14:21; Prohibition towards „plants that are grown together”: Leviticus 19:19, Deuteronomy 22:9–11.

<sup>103</sup> *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim*, 318:1.

Interestingly, 4 of the respondents who considered him/herself orthodox in the earlier presented part of the survey claimed to keep *kosher* at home “not rigidly” and 3 of them stated that they do not keep *kosher* at home but do not eat pork. This shows a high level of leniency among the members concerning even the most basic regulations of the Jewish law.

**Table 11.**

**Do you fast on Yom Kippur?**

| Response                           | Count |       |  |
|------------------------------------|-------|-------|--|
| Yes - neither drinking nor eating. | 32    | 48.5% |  |
| Yes, most of the time.             | 7     | 10.6% |  |
| Yes, but I do drink.               | 7     | 10.6% |  |
| No.                                | 20    | 30.3% |  |
| Total                              |       | 66    |  |

כִּי־בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכַּפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל חַטָּאתֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה תִּטְהָרוּ:

**ויקרא 16:30**

“For on this day, [the priest] shall make an atonement for you, to cleanse you from all your sins before the Lord and you will be clean.”

Leviticus 16:30

I decided to include a question concerning one specific holiday, *Yom Kippur*, which is considered to be the holiest day of the year, with a full-day (ca. 25 hours) fast and synagogue services. Besides from not eating and not drinking, traditionally it is also a day when one is expected to restrain from various bodily pleasures, like washing one’s body, wearing leather – expensive – footwear, using ointments, sexual relations. Many Jews who otherwise do not observe any other Jewish holiday or custom, may fast on this day, restrain from work and/or attend at the service in the synagogue on this day. The answers show that almost half of the respondents fast on this holiday to a certain extent at least. However, 30.3% of them do not fast at all.

**Table 12.**

**Do you have a mezuzah on your doorpost?**

| Response  | Count | Percentage | Bar |
|-----------|-------|------------|-----|
| Yes       | 60    | 90.9%      |     |
| No        | 6     | 9.1%       |     |
| Total: 66 |       |            |     |

וּכְתַבְתֶּם עַל-מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ:

**דברים 6:9**

“And you shall write on the posts of your house and on your gates.”

Deuteronomy 6:9

A *mezuzah* on the doorpost designates the home as Jewish, reminding Jewish people of their connection to God and to their heritage.<sup>104</sup> Observant Jews have a *mezuzah* on all of their doorposts, and often even the most secular Jews have at least one *mezuzah* affixed to their entrance door. The vast majority of the respondents – including both the non-observant and secular ones – fulfil this commandment.

## Jews as Modern Finns

The traditions and the system of Jewish Law have worked for centuries, in constant change but continuity. The 19th century brought about a big change in Jewish society, religion and culture – most notably due to the Enlightenment movement in Europe, then the emancipation of the Jews in most countries, a gradual assimilation into surrounding societies, the birth of nationalisms, including Zionism. Many Jews decided to give up their Jewish traditions, languages, sometimes even identities, while others started to experiment with new forms of Judaism. The *Shoah* and its aftermath further

<sup>104</sup> The name of God, *Sho-dai*, which appears on the reverse side of the parchment, is an acronym for the Hebrew words which mean "Guardian of the doorways of Israel." The placing of a *mezuzah* on the doors of a home or office protects the inhabitants - whether they are inside or outside.

enhanced this tendency. From the perspective of Progressive or Conservative Judaism, Jewish traditions can be seen with a certain flexibility and had always been adjusted to contemporary circumstances and societies, and thus can be adjusted to modern and post-modern needs as well. Finland is often said to be a secular and a modern society. It is often considered as one of the most gender equal countries in the world.<sup>105</sup> Without arguing about these statements, my interest was in finding out whether egalitarianism – as a sign of postmodernity – is reflected in the attitudes of the Jewish Community of Helsinki. I decided to put my focus onto questions that I consider relevant according to this community’s recent practices and tendencies. Therefore, I did not address the issue of egalitarian text versions in the *siddur* or in prayer.<sup>106</sup>

**Table 13.**

| What is your opinion regarding the following statements?          |                |             |             |             |                   |           |
|---|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|
| Variable  | Strongly Agree | Agree       | Neutral     | Disagree    | Strongly Disagree |           |
| A Jewish woman can be a mohelet.                                  | 21<br>31.8%    | 18<br>27.3% | 13<br>19.7% | 6<br>9.1%   | 8<br>12.1%        | Total: 66 |
| Jewish women should be counted in minyan.                         | 10<br>15.2%    | 9<br>13.6%  | 22<br>33.3% | 13<br>19.7% | 12<br>18.2%       | Total: 66 |
| A Jewish woman can be a rabbi.                                    | 13<br>19.7%    | 16<br>24.2% | 14<br>21.2% | 11<br>16.7% | 12<br>18.2%       | Total: 66 |
| A Jewish woman can be called to the Torah.                        | 11<br>16.7%    | 17<br>25.8% | 17<br>25.8% | 11<br>16.7% | 10<br>15.2%       | Total: 66 |
| If a person’s father is Jewish, the person is Jewish him/herself. | 10<br>15.2%    | 13<br>19.7% | 17<br>25.8% | 15<br>22.7% | 11<br>16.7%       | Total: 66 |
| Same-sex marriage within the community should be allowed.         | 12<br>18.2%    | 8<br>12.1%  | 17<br>25.8% | 11<br>16.7% | 18<br>27.3%       | Total: 66 |
| A Jew does not need to marry another Jew.                         | 16<br>24.2%    | 16<br>24.2% | 13<br>19.7% | 12<br>18.2% | 9<br>13.6%        | Total: 66 |
| The service in the synagogue should be in Hebrew.                 | 14<br>21.2%    | 21<br>31.8% | 18<br>27.3% | 8<br>12.1%  | 5<br>7.6%         | Total: 66 |
| A Jew should marry a Jew.   | 13<br>19.7%    | 18<br>27.3% | 16<br>24.2% | 6<br>9.1%   | 13<br>19.7%       | Total: 66 |

<sup>105</sup> Source: <http://www.weforum.org/agenda/2014/10/top-10-gender-equal-countries-world/> Retrieved: 20.03.2016

<sup>106</sup> Some prayer books for instance offer gender-neutral language for God and allow to mention the matriarchs in the *Amidah*. As there is a great variety of these prayer books and as their usage requires certain awareness concerning the orthodox tradition, I decided not to touch these questions.

## Women and Worship

There are several women, who played an important role in the Torah, some of them specifically in the situation of worship and prayer. Among the seven prophetesses in Jewish tradition, Miriam led the women's chorus after crossing the Sea of Reeds,<sup>107</sup> various liturgical rules use Hannah's prayer at Shiloh as the ideal form of prayer.<sup>108</sup> Before the destruction of the second Temple in 70 C.E. women attended Festival pilgrimages and brought their own sacrifices. The prophets, Ezra and Nehemiah count male and female singers while listing members of the congregation, indicating that there were female singers during Temple times. Although women could not serve as priestesses, they definitely had a place within their own community and were even granted honours for their roles. Since Temple times, the role of women in synagogues and general ritual life has continually restructured itself according to the traditions and norms of each community. During the Middle Ages in Jewish Europe man and female interaction was discouraged. Women were usually separated from the religious community and were prevented taking an active role in Jewish ritual life. Due to these changes the general tradition today does not include women neither in the *minyan*, nor in most of the prayers. In recent years, however, many women expressed the desire for being involved in the synagogue services in a more active way, namely with the creation of "partnership *minyanim*" or egalitarian *minyanim*. Jewish legal authorities have expressed varying options on the thought including supporting and opposing opinions. The establishment of such *minyanim* requires an understanding of *halakhic* and historical material.<sup>109</sup>

There is a clear tendency among respondents towards moving the worship into a more egalitarian direction: almost half of the respondents appeared to be accepting or neutral towards women's roles in the services. The opponents of the statements are mostly among the orthodox members. Among the three points concerning women's place in service, women to be counted in the *minyan* has received the least support ("Strongly Agree" or "Agree"), whereas women becoming rabbis the most of it. *Minyan* is an important element of the communal prayers. Some prayers may be only recited in a

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<sup>107</sup> Exodus 15:20.

<sup>108</sup> Samuel 1-2; Berachot 31a-b.

<sup>109</sup> RAPAPORT, JULIE: "The Orthodox Egalitarian Minyan: An analysis of Women and Public Torah Reading" on *Hashita UMD*. Source: <https://sites.google.com/site/hashtaumd/contents-1/minyan>. Retrieved: 20.04.2016

quorum. Prayer in *minyan* is preferable than private prayer. A rabbi is a person, who serves the community's religious needs – weddings, funerals etc. – and gives guidance in questions concerning the religious observance. We may assume that the respondents. What may be the reason for not agreeing with the idea of women in *minyan*, but being rather supportive towards woman as “religious leaders”? We may assume that the respondents who support the idea of female rabbis but do not support the idea of women in *minyan* do not have a frequent connection to their rabbi: for instance, they do not ask for guidance in problematic questions concerning *Halakhab* very often. They may participate at the services on a more frequent basis. In such a case, they would face the “consequences” of women in the quorum more often.

### **The Question of a Female *Mohelet***

Concerning the status of female *mohelet*, it is often mentioned that *Shulchan Aruch* has two opinions: one says that a *brit milah* done by a female *mohel* is *kosher*, the other one says it is not. However, both of them agree, that if there is a male *mohel* available, the *brit milah* should be done by him.<sup>110</sup> As mentioned above, there are two examples for circumcision in the Torah: one committed by Abraham and one committed by Zipporah.

Out of 66 participants, only 14 stated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “A Jewish woman can be a *mohelet*.” There was nobody among the secular/non-observant members who would oppose having a woman in this position. Most of the respondents who marked “Disagree” or “Strongly disagree” – 10 people – were among the orthodox respondents. The vast majority of the liberal/progressive/reform respondents agreed with the statement.

### **The Question of Patrilineal Descent**

As mentioned earlier, if we use strictly and only the text of the Hebrew Bible as our basis of information, matrilineal descent is not a biblical notion. Abraham, Judah, Joseph, Moses and David took foreign women as wives. According to I Kings 2, Solomon married seven hundred gentiles and took another three hundred as concubines.

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<sup>110</sup> *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 264:1.

The text does not indicate that these marriages would have been invalid. Nor is it mentioned that the children from these marriages would be considered non-Jewish, or that the women were expected to convert.<sup>111</sup> In post-Biblical times, the tradition was reversed in the favour of matrilineal descent in Judaism. The earliest statement of this change is found in the *Mishnah*:<sup>112</sup>

Wherever there is betrothal and no sin, the child follows the male. Which is this? This is a *Kohenet*, a *Levite* woman, or an Israelite woman who married a *Kohen*, a *Levite* or an Israelite. Wherever there is betrothal and there is a sin, the child follows the defective one. Which is this? This is a widow married to the *Kohen Gadol*, a divorcee or a *chalutzah* to an ordinary *Kohen*, a *mamzeret* or a *Netina* to an Israelite, a female Israelite to a *mamzer* or *Netina*. With any woman for whom there is no betrothal to him, but there is betrothal to others, the child is a *mamzer*. Which is this? This is one who has sexual intercourse with any one of the forbidden sexual relations in the Torah. Any woman for whom there is no betrothal either to him or to others, the child is like her. Which is this? This is the child of a [non-Jewish] maidservant or a non-Jewish woman.

Mishnah Kiddushin 3:12

Shaye J. D. Cohen<sup>113</sup> offers two assumptions on the origin of the matrilineal principle: it may have been a response to a long history of persecution to maintain religious and ethnic identity in the diaspora or it arose organically from rabbinical thought on the subject offspring of intermarriages.<sup>114</sup>

As one of the consequences of the emancipation and assimilation of the Jews, the number of intermarriages has risen. There is a theoretical possibility for prevailing the father's or the mother's religion, as well as none of them. Consequently, no assumption can be made concerning the future religiosity or identity of the child: his/her paternity can be as influential as the maternity. This situation has prompted some of the non-Orthodox movements of Judaism to shift the emphasis from the matrilineality to

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<sup>111</sup> GOLDSTEIN 2008:77.

<sup>112</sup> RAYNER 1998:156.

<sup>113</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen is the Littauer Professor of Hebrew Literature and Philosophy in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations of Harvard University

<sup>114</sup> COHEN 1985:5-13.



accepting either matrilineal or patrilineal status of the children, if they identify themselves as Jewish.<sup>115</sup>

According to Jewish law, a person remains Jewish even if they convert to another religion. Children of a Jewish mother, who had converted to Christianity and has not transmitted her Jewishness or Jewish identity to her children, are considered to be Jewish according to Jewish law – even if they do not have any knowledge or perhaps even personal feelings about Judaism. On the other hand, children of a Jewish father – but a non-Jewish mother – may have received Jewish education throughout their lives, and therefore have a strong feeling of Jewishness, but are not considered Jewish by *Halakhab*.

By accepting patrilineal descent, a congregation would lose its status as a Jewish congregation internationally, among any stricter community, but definitely within Orthodox and Conservative Judaism, as the *Halakhab* is really explicit about this part of the tradition. On the other hand, they may at the same time attract valuable potential members to the community.

Most respondents, who opposed the acceptance of patrilineal descent, are among the orthodox members. The liberal/progressive/reform and the non-observant/secular group seem to be the most welcoming towards children of patrilineal descent. Only one third of the respondents oppose the thought acceptance of patrilineal descent in Jewish practices.

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<sup>115</sup> RAYNER 1998:156-157.

## Language of the Prayer

As Hebrew and Aramaic are regarded as *leshon hakodesh*, and according to Jewish tradition, this is believed to be the language in which God spoke and in which he commanded the world to come into being. The question of the language of the prayer is argued in the in the *Mishnah* and the *Talmud*, pointing out that the *Shema*, *Tefillah* and *Birkhat haMazon* may be recited in any language, as these prayers should be entirely understood by those who recite them. This point was a question of argument in the Post-Talmudic Period as well. Yosef Karo, the author of the *Shulchan Aruch* repeated all the permissive rulings of the former discussions. With the sole exception of the *Birkhat Kobanim*, it is permissible to pray in the vernacular.<sup>116</sup> However, this may be true theoretically, in practice, prayers in vernacular are rather rare even nowadays.

More than half of the respondents stated that they either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” with the statement “The service in the synagogue should be in Hebrew”, approximately 17.9% of them either “Disagrees” or “Strongly Disagrees” with the statement, 27.3% of them appeared to be “Neutral” concerning this matter. Without being aware of the language skills of the respondents, and knowing that the majority of stated that they are not orthodox or strictly observant, we can assume that this answer is based on a traditional perspective, rather than a conscious thought about *kavannah*.

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<sup>116</sup> RAYNER 1998:84-86.

## The Question of Same-sex Marriages

וְאֶת-זָכָר לֹא תִשְׁכַּב מִשְׁכַּבֵּי אִשָּׁה תוֹעֵבָה הוּא:

ויקרא 18:22

“Don’t lie with man the same way you would lie with woman – it is abomination.”

Leviticus 18:22

וְאִישׁ אֲנָשִׁי יִשְׁכַּב אֶת-זָכָר מִשְׁכַּבֵּי אִשָּׁה תוֹעֵבָה עָשׂוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם מוֹת יוּמָתוּ דְמֵיהֶם בָּם:

ויקרא 20:13

“And if a man lie with a man as with a woman, both of them have committed abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.”

Leviticus 20:13

These two verses of the Torah have been understood to prohibit same-sex sexual relations between men. On the basis of ancient rabbinic teachings, these relations were threatening for the secure family life. Sexual relationship between women is usually considered to be a violation of the same prohibition, although there are no biblical verses prohibiting specific these relations. Most of the prohibitions related to same-sex relationships are derived from the Talmudic tradition, where the biggest concern is against imitating gentiles.<sup>117</sup>

Nevertheless, many progressive, liberal, reform or conservative communities do allow their homosexual members to marry within the borders of the community. There are also a few orthodox communities that have a more lenient interpretation of the conclusions in regards to the meaning of homosexuality, and are more welcoming for those who are engaged in same-sex relationships. The vast majority of orthodox

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<sup>117</sup> GREENBERG 2004:74-91.

congregations strongly oppose same-sex relationships and consider them as a violation or abomination. Yet, welcoming synagogues could be found.

The Finnish Parliament accepted the bill legalizing same-sex marriages on 12 December 2014. The bill was signed by the President on 20 February 2015. According to the Eurobarometer<sup>118</sup> survey on discrimination in the European Union, in 2015 66% of the Finnish respondents agreed that “Same sex marriages should be accepted throughout Europe”.<sup>119</sup>

As for my survey, 30% of the respondents – most of them from the secular/non-observant and liberal/progressive/conservative members – expressed their agreement concerning the question, 42% – mostly orthodox members – disagreed with it, the rest appears to be neutral. The majority of the informants therefore would not necessarily mind opposing the Talmudic tradition concerning this question.

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<sup>118</sup> The Public Opinion Analysis sector of the European Commission has been monitoring the evolution of public opinion in the member states of the European Union since 1973. The surveys and studies address produced by them address major topics concerning European citizenship: enlargement, social situation, health, culture, information technology, environment, the Euro, defence, etc.

<sup>119</sup> Source:

<http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/PublicOpinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2077> Retrieved: 02.03.2016.

## Intermarriages

וְלֹא תִתְחַתֵּן בָּם בְּתוּרָה לְאִתְּתֶן לְבָנוֹ וּבְתוּרָה לְאִתְּקַח לְבָנָהּ:

כִּי־יִסִּיר אֶת־בְּנֵהוּ מֵאַחֲרַי וְעָבְדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְחָרָה אַף־יִהְיֶה בְּכֶם וְהִשְׁמִידֶנּוּ מְהֵרָה:

דברים 7:3-4

“And neither shalt you make marriages with them: your daughter you shall not give to his son, you shall not take his daughter for your sons. For he will turn away your son from following me, that they may serve other gods; so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and He will destroy you quickly.”

Deuteronomy 7:3-4




As the biblical source states, intermarriages between Jews and idolaters are not accepted by Judaism, as they may encourage the children to follow other traditions (other religions). Many members of the Jewish community in Helsinki are married to non-Jews. Taking this into consideration, what is the opinion towards intermarriages in the community? 48.4% of the respondents agrees or strongly agrees that a “Jew does not need to marry a Jew”. Only 13.6% expressed strong disagreement towards this question – most of them orthodox members of the community.

It is noticeable that when asking the opinion on “A Jew should marry a Jew,” the percentages change quite remarkably. 47% thinks that a Jew should marry a Jew and 28.8% disagrees or strongly disagrees with the statement. This data may suggest that the members try to give a “traditionally accepted answer” to the question, but when it is being asked in a different way, they give an opposing idea. They do not consider intermarriages crucial for the future of the community.

## Jews in Helsinki and in Finland

**Table 13.**

**How would you describe the Jewish community in Helsinki? Mainly as a religious group or as a part of the Jewish people?**

| Response                               | Count | Percentage | Bar  |
|--|-------|------------|--|
| Mainly as a religious group.           | 2     | 3.1%       |   |
| Mainly as a part of the Jewish people. | 27    | 41.5%      |  |
| Both equally.                          | 36    | 55.4%      |  |
| Total: 65                              |       |            |  |

Despite of the fact that most respondents did not consider the religious aspects of their life important when answering the question of Table 5 above, more than half of the respondents answered to this question regarding the nature of the Jewish community in Helsinki that it was equally a religious group and a part of the Jewish people – a significant percentage of them entirely leaving the religious perspective out of their view. Only two respondents stated that it was mostly a religious group. They consider belonging to the group of Jewish people (perhaps both on the ethnic and national level) – equally or more important than religious practice.

**Table 14.**

**Today there is a considerable discussion concerning the future of Jewry in Finland. What is your view?**

| Variable  | Agree       | Doubtful    | Do not agree | Total     |
|---|-------------|-------------|--------------|-----------|
| With conscious investment in cultural and social activities Jewry can survive in Finland. | 50<br>76.9% | 14<br>21.5% | 1<br>1.5%    | Total: 65 |
| In the long run Jewry has the chance only in Israel.                                      | 10<br>15.4% | 19<br>29.2% | 36<br>55.4%  | Total: 65 |
| Only as orthodox can Jewry survive in the diaspora.                                       | 11<br>16.9% | 19<br>29.2% | 35<br>53.8%  | Total: 65 |

The continuation of tradition and the interpretations of Jewish law and the customs connected to it are topics of a continuous discussion in many Diaspora Jewish communities. In case of a bigger number of Jews living in one country, there is a possibility for the establishment of more congregations. Hence, I asked the same question Dencik asked about Swedish Jewry.

This data may reflect on the respondents' cultural connection to Judaism. 76.9% of the respondents think that Jewry can survive in Finland with conscious investment in cultural and social activities. More than half of them do not agree that Jewry has the chance of survival only in Israel or that only as orthodox can Jewry survive in the diaspora.

The overall results of the quantitative survey show, that the respondents have a strong cultural connection to Judaism, but they do not necessarily consider the aspects of religion important. The majority of them are not orthodox and would not have problems with a more liberally organized community. What is the reason for the Jewish Community of Helsinki to operate with modern orthodox *minbag* then?

The following chapter – *Qualitative Analysis* – will reveal the answer to this question, and give a more personal perspective and a deeper understanding of the congregation and its members.

## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

### The Respondents

As mentioned earlier, I have made 8 in-depth interviews with members of the Jewish Community of Helsinki. My goal was to interview people from different backgrounds, ages and gender, active and non-active members, Jews by birth and converts. I found them in any access routes I could.

**Table 15. The participants and their demographic data**

| <b>Abbreviation</b> | A. | B. | C. | D. | E. | F. | G. | H. |
|---------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| <b>Age</b>          | 56 | 22 | 22 | 69 | 60 | 34 | 47 | 30 |
| <b>Gender</b>       | M  | F  | m  | f  | m  | F  | m  | f  |
| <b>Nationality</b>  | X  | F  | F  | F  | F  | X  | F  | F  |

In the table above, I listed the age, gender and nationality of all respondents. In case of Finnish citizens I have indicated the nationality by “F”, in case of foreign nationalities, I have used “X”, not defining their exact citizenship, as that might reveal their identity. My interviews could be categorised as topic-centred, semi-structured interviews, with a high-level of flexibility towards the structure and towards my interviewees. I decided to mark the information (words, sentences etc.) that I considered to be the most important concerning the research in bold in the quotations. I did not correct the grammatical mistakes my respondents made during our discussions.



## The Analysis

As the interviews were semi-structured, the important points I was hoping to reflect on may have not followed each other in the same chronological order with each and every of the participants, hence I decided to group the answers into the following categories:

1. What is Judaism?
2. Observance and Religious Affiliation
3. Identity
4. Egalitarianism and Ordination of Women
5. Knowledge and Education
6. The Question of *Minbag*
7. Other Thoughts about the Community and Its Future

### What is Judaism?

Judaism, Jewish identity and “Jewishness” can be defined and described in many different ways, which do not necessarily exclude each other. They may overlap, or be of certain importance. I started my interviews by giving an introduction to my study. I told my interviewees that I am investigating identity and religiosity of the Jewish Community of Helsinki, while reflecting on issues that may be problematic from the traditional perspective, but are present in the postmodern Finnish society. After the introduction to my study, even without asking them, most of my interviewees gave me their own definition on Judaism.

**Judaism is a way of life.** Despite of this, if you convert to Judaism, you convert to a religion [...] I think the classic Hebrew text is misunderstood in regard to the “God issue” and **God is not central to my belief in Judaism.**

(A.)

I guess Judaism as I see it is a **tradition** for thousands of years. In that sense, I feel some respect towards it. I wouldn't say I believe, but I think it is still better to know about your traditions that you do for so many years. Out of respect you

have to know some. [...] So I think Judaism is **a religion, a tradition, and it is also a way of living**. There are rules you have to follow and it is really practical. It guides if you are observant. It is culture and upbringing. It is not just a religion that you go every Saturday to the synagogue. There is a **language** involved, a **tradition, your family and a community**. It is many things. [...] I consider myself more like **traditional. I don't know if I believe**.

(C.)

For me Judaism is mostly **traditions**. I don't believe in all the stuff I read. I know my religion really well. It's more like I have to find my own way to believe, and also to respect others' beliefs. If someone is more religious than me, I am fine with that. I can be with religious people and celebrate *Shabbat*, but I only **respect the tradition** in it. **I don't believe in God in any way**.

(B.)

B. (22, f) and C. (22, m), my youngest respondents, emphasised the importance of respect towards the tradition in their answers. Whereas B. clearly stated that she did not believe in God, C. was unsure about this aspect.

Judaism is **a way of life**.

(D.)

**Judaism is not only a religion. It is a way of living.**

(E.)

**Judaism is not all or nothing**. [...] Who are we to decide what is precious in God's eyes? Ultimately being Jewish or keeping the commandments is...there is no gun at your throat or at your head. It's **our way of connecting to something higher**. It is **our way of connecting to Hashem**, so if **those two hours are sacred for you** and that's your moment then no one for you could decide the rest of the 22 hours that're are left for that two hours. [...] **Hashem** is something very real for me.

(F.)

F.'s (34, f) interpretation on Judaism clearly shows her opinion on the importance of God, which she considers to be “something higher” and sacred. Both the concept of *numinous*<sup>120</sup> and the division of the sacred and the profane appear clearly in her answer by referring to the sacred time of *Shabbat*. These are concepts of a religious worldview. She obviously has a strong belief in God, hence the aspect of “religious aspect” in her way of perceiving Judaism is strong. Both her opinion concerning the considerations of the sacred day “if those two hours are sacred for you” and the way she refers to Judaism – “Judaism is not all or nothing” – raises the possibility of different interpretations and levels on one can follow the regulations of *Halakhab*, and divides the time into sacred and profane.

Judaism is more about **feeling and the way of thinking**. Nobody is really asking if you believe in God. In Judaism you don't have this question. [...] **This is a way of living, not only a religious structure.**

(G.)

I wouldn't say that my family is religious. It is more of a **cultural** thing. [...] Judaism in my very kind of zero level of knowledge is... I just have **a feeling**. But I feel its...well, because it is so **practical**, it is about your needs. **It doesn't have so much to do with what you believe in** it's like you can shake it off. This is what I did. I didn't want to be a part of the community. I hated the thought of it. [...] One of the cores of Judaism is that **you should argue!**

(H.)

The most frequently mentioned description of perception of Judaism was “a way of life” or “way of living”. Tradition and culture are also common definitions given by the participants of the study. There was only one interviewee who mentioned the importance of God in her way of perceiving Judaism. However, participants are aware of the fact that although Judaism is often considered to be “only a religion”, the

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<sup>120</sup> The *numinous* experience is the experience of the Sacred which is particular to religious human beings (*homo religiosus*). For further reading see: RUDOLF, OTTO: *The Idea of the Holy: an Inquiry Into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*. Oxford University Press, London, 1923.

systematic life that Judaism requires has a greater importance in one's life, which may overwrite the aspects one connects to the idea of a religion, especially being influenced by the Christian concept of religion. Moreover, only one interviewee – C. (22, m) mentioned the involvement of a certain community at this point in his own perception of Judaism. While knowing the religious aspects of Judaism, similarly to A. (56, m), B. (22, f) stated that Judaism can be present without having a personal faith in a deity. From these opinions we may assume that religious activities may not be the most important factors in the informants' way of interpreting Judaism. Hence, I was also interested in their level of awareness regarding Jewish practices and regulations.

### **Observance and Religious Affiliation**

As the quantitative questionnaire has shown, the members of the congregation are rather flexible and lenient with *Halakhab*. Due to the different interpretations, it is hard to judge one's observance level. It is possible, however, to compare each one of them to the strictest or to the least strict groups in "Jewish society" both at large and in Helsinki. The participants of the qualitative research support the assumption derived from the quantitative data about the community's overall leniency regarding *Halakhab*. Some may have very clear thoughts on their belonging to a specific denomination of Judaism, whereas others may perceive their Jewishness from a secular perspective. As it is often impossible to judge one's religiosity from the outside, I decided to ask my informants about how observant they considered themselves to be.

The thing I always used to say is if you look at what I do, you gonna think that I am orthodox. I am *shomrei shabbat*, I am *shomrei kashrut* [...]. Up until very recently, I have spent a year outside of central Helsinki. I couldn't do anything with community really in terms of *Shabbat*, because I don't drive or use public transport or etc. on *Shabbat*. The reason that I said, that if you look at me I look orthodox, is because if you could actually look into my brain and see what I am thinking, then you could see that I was a *reconstructionist* or something similar. [...] I would probably define myself as *conservadox* with a *reconstructionist* element. [...] I think the classic Hebrew text is misunderstood in regards of the "God issue" and **God is not central to my belief in Judaism**. I would say it goes something like

this: the commandment given in the text that is normally interpreted as belief in God, so:

(אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּיַת עַבְדִּים:)<sup>121</sup>

Who is actually it said to? Don't try and read it as 'Bible'! Understand it from what contexts it's been to be read with the text not against the text. And if you read with the text what it is saying is: It is me! I am the one who took you out of Egypt. I am your God you should have no other Gods before me. If this is the people who just come out of Egypt, they know that God is the one that taken them out of Egypt according to the text. So you don't have to command them to believe in God. It doesn't make any sense. So the question comes: What is actually being said here? My view is that, what's being said here is 'I'm commanding you to follow what – I personally call – “the Godly agenda”'. Now what the Godly agenda isn't necessarily defined there and then, but it says you should have no other gods – it doesn't mean you should have no other gods – before me! So: 'Follow my agenda, because my agenda is central to the civilisation of you.' The “Godly agenda” is the important thing. Not the belief in God. I think the question of God is irrelevant. The way I think about it – if I think about it at all, and I don't usually is that if there is a god, the last thing that god needs is humanity acknowledge them, to establish them. If there isn't a God is the best thing we can do is follow the godly agenda and develop the society. **It doesn't matter to the world if I drive on *Shabbat*, but it matters to me.**

(A.)

A. (56, m) is the only respondent who gives a really clear and pragmatic explanation and introduction to his opinions. His rhetoric starts with a look into the traditional point of view. He is really conscious about his interpretations, and it is obvious that he has studied the Jewish texts, and built up his own understanding of the Jewish traditions and practices. He deliberately thinks about interpreting the text and sharing his opinion for a better understanding, being the only person among my interviewees who chooses this method of answering my question. A. indicates that the belief in God or the existence of God is not central from his perspective of Judaism. In his opinion, Torah functions as a practical guideline for life, which leads to the development of the society. He does not see it as a revelation, however by saying “It doesn't matter to the world if I drive on

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<sup>121</sup> The interviewee quoted the Hebrew text from the Torah: Deuteronomy 5:6.

*Shabbat*, but it matters to me” he reflects on the importance of this guideline for himself, yet he consciously indicates that the way outsiders perceive him may be different from how he identifies himself: “...if you look at what I do...”.

When asking about the level of my informants’ observance, they mostly associated the question with the important holidays and the dietary restrictions. And even so, in most cases they did not give an explanation, or a definition of the extent to which they obey the rules. Their answers show that their observance conscious in their own ways: they are aware of a stricter level of obeying the rules, yet they still do not do so:

I do celebrate **all of the holidays**. I keep ***kosher*** at home. I light the ***Shabes*** candles, I prepare a *Shabes* meal and I bake the *challah*, although I barely bake anymore. If we consider this observant, then I am. [...] But compared to “F. and Y.”<sup>122</sup> I am not observant.

(D.)

D. (69, f) celebrates all the holidays, lights *Shabbat* candles and keeps *kosher* at home. She did not mention to what extent she does so, but she is aware that there are members in the community who follow a stricter level of observance. She found it important to underline that she is not married to a Jew.

I am not observant. I am a secular Jew. Not secular in the moral way, secular in the Jewish way. I keep the traditions almost all of them. Meaning that my family celebrates the high holidays and this kind of things, but during the normal days, we don’t keep kosher and so on. My wife is not Jewish. My home was not really religious. [...] I am not married to a Jew. My children are Jewish, but it maybe also something that influences my attitude. I respect her background and tradition. She is not religious, but she also has kept some of her traditions. We don’t celebrate Christmas at home, we don’t eat pork at home, but we celebrate Christmas at her parents’ home. If you look how many people keep kosher...10-20%. There is only one shop here, and what they offer is not a very big variety. It is very expensive, it is frozen meat. The families don’t live in the centre of the city anymore. They have to make a big effort to keep kosher.

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<sup>122</sup> “F”. stands for one of my informants and “Y”. stands for another member of the community, whose name I decided not to reveal.

(E.)

E. (60, man) considers himself a secular Jew, who keeps most Jewish traditions. By saying that he is “not secular in the moral way” he indicates that he has a strong connection to Judaism, which may also be associated to the feeling G. (47, m) and H. (30, woman) has mentioned when talking about Judaism. Similarly to D. (69, f) E. mentioned that his wife is not Jewish, but out of respect towards her background, he celebrates Christian holidays outside of his home. We can assume that the customs of Judaism therefore have a higher importance for him than aspects of one’s belief, if it was not the case he would most probably deny the celebration of Christian holidays due to the theological differences between Judaism and Christianity.

**I am not religious.** When we celebrate *Hannukah*, we buy oysters. It is ours. It feels like *Hannukah*: Now we are soooo Jewish! And yeah, during *Rosh Hashanah* there is **traditional food**. It tells about a little bit of quirky way of relating to this whole thing in my family. I’d love to celebrate *Shabbat from time to time*. It doesn’t have to be every Friday.

(H.)

At home we do *Shabbat dinners*, every Friday night. I try to avoid meat outside of home, but I still eat it. In that sense, I am **traditionally Jewish**. I don’t pray every morning nowadays, but I guess that’s about it. Traditional, but when I was in Jewish school, I was considered to be very observant because I went to the morning prayers, but I consider myself more like **traditional**. I don’t know if I believe.

(C.)

C. (22, man) considers himself “traditional”, whereas a belief in the Deity is not a significant part of his life. From his answer, we can assume that he is aware of the regulations of *kasbrut*, but he still eats even meat at non-*kosher* places.

We have **every Jewish holiday at home**, with all our family. My mom’s siblings are there. Not everyone is Jewish. But we don’t celebrate *Shabbat* in that way that the **Torah** says. My mom relaxes on Saturdays. She takes it easy. [...] If you think

about it, Bnei Akiva as a youth organisation is way too religious for Scandinavia. But we can learn a lot from them about the religion. [...] Chabad and Bnei Akiva do things differently than how we do them here in Finland. Here we have “**K-kaupan kosher**”. **I don’t eat pork or seafood**, but if I buy chicken I buy it from K-Market. **I mix milk and meat**.

(B.)

Both Chabad and Bnei Akiva are present in Finland – they are cooperating with certain activities and services of the community. “Bnei Akiva as a youth organisation is way too religious for Scandinavia. [...] Chabad and Bnei Akiva do things differently than how we do them here in Finland.” – from this statement it is obvious that the respondent considers both organizations apart from the local congregation. According to B. (22, f), both Chabad and Bnei Akiva are considered to be strongly religious (observant) organisations. The Jewish Community of Helsinki therefore is thought to be less observant by this participant than the two international outreach groups.

[...] I think there is no right Jewish–wrong Jewish. It is up to each individual, how Jewish he wants to be. [...] **We don’t watch TV and don’t use the phones on Shabbat. But other than that...of course we keep kosher at home, but we are not shomrei shabbat, because we don’t live close to the synagogue.** [...] What is your personal faith? It doesn’t exist. **First we do, and then we listen.**<sup>123</sup> The faith in Judaism is not the same as the faith in Christianity, because there it is personal belief. But in Judaism, nobody is interested in how you believe.

(G.)

G. (47, m) said “First we do and then we listen.” This sentence is a paraphrase of Exodus 24:7<sup>124</sup> and emphasises the central role of the commandments in Jewish life.

I try to **obey** all the rules of the ***Shulchan Aruch***. But that’s in our personal life and our family. We don’t judge or expect anyone else to do the same. I think they have grown up in different circumstances and what’s easy for me might be more

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<sup>123</sup> Hebrew: ונעשה ונשמע.

<sup>124</sup> “Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, ‘We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.’”



difficult for someone else or vice versa. But we do try to live by that and teach that as well.

(F.)

F. (34, f) is the only one who explicitly mentions the *Shulchan Aruch* in relevance to her own observance. Nonetheless, I am convinced that most respondents are aware of the existence of Yosef Karo's law code. By obeying the regulations of the *Shulchan Aruch*, and consciously mentioning it, F. may be considered the most observant among all interviewees – even without discussing the details of her interpretation of the rules. She has also pointed out that the matter of upbringing may have a huge impact on one's observance level.

The majority of the respondents are flexible concerning the traditions and laws. This shows the best in the “*K-kaupan kosher*” and “*oysters for Hannukah*” – “paradigms”. During my visits to the community, I became familiar with the “*K-kaupan kosher rule*”, namely: some members think, that buying non-*kosher* from a non-*kosher* store is acceptable, but eating red meat for instance is only allowed if the meat is *kosher*. K-Market<sup>125</sup> may have some *kosher* groceries, it is not specifically *kosher* store. Needless to mention that oysters are not *kosher* at all, and are most definitely not among the traditional *Hannukah* meals for most families. Despite the different levels of awareness and stringency, the *kosher* dietary restrictions are among the rules most respondents seem to consider, at least to a certain extent.

We can say that it is common to observe the laws that are easier to keep under the Finnish circumstances. What can be the reason behind this? It is undeniable that it is difficult to keep both the dietary laws and those of *Shabbat* in Finland – as it is in any smaller diaspora community. Some of the groceries from local stores are *kosher*, but there are only three *kosher* product and catering service providers in Helsinki, and they are significantly more expensive than non-*kosher* counterparts.

Keeping kashrut at home may also be complicated if we take the separation of dairy and meat utensils into consideration. Many people cannot afford purchasing *kosher* products or do not have adequate space and resources for two sets of utensils, sinks etc.

Some informants mentioned living far away from the synagogue in the context of keeping *Shabbat*. The commandment to keep *Shabbat* appears in the Torah many times

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<sup>125</sup> A Finnish chain of hypermarkets.

and it is emphasised in Exodus 31:12-17. *Shabbat* starts on Friday evening – with sunset – and ends on Saturday evening – with sunset. The Jewish law prohibits 39 *melachot* (activities) on *Shabbat*, which have several interpretations. This means, that even if there is an activity, that is not mentioned explicitly, it may be connected to some of the 39 activities, hence it is also forbidden. The activities are based on the *Mishnah*<sup>126</sup>, according to which travelling, cooking, carrying things from private to public area, working etc. is prohibited on *Shabbat*.<sup>127</sup> Due to the strict regulations, people who keep *Shabbat* used to move close to their community's synagogues, which resulted the formation of the Jewish quarters. Reform/progressive/liberal and conservative Jews often allow travelling on *Shabbat* – especially if it is connected to taking part at the service in the synagogue –, but the traditional rabbinic interpretation does not allow it.

In Helsinki, the members of the congregation often live far from the synagogue: if they wish to be strictly observant they cannot travel on many holidays to participate at the services. Moreover, in the winter time, sunset can start as early as 15.00. In the secular world it is not common that a Friday working day ends that early. It is very difficult for Jews who work as employees to strictly obey the time-frame of *Shabbat*, especially if that includes the preparation of a *Shabbat* meal at home.

## **Intermarriage**

According to the community's rabbi, Rav Simon Livson, intermarriages can hijack the community's survival. As it was stated earlier, they are often considered to be a taboo in Jewish communities.<sup>128</sup> Intermarriages may also be interfering with someone's conversion to Judaism. The two passages of Deuteronomy mentioned earlier in the *Quantitative Analysis*<sup>129</sup> are often considered to be the Biblical prohibition towards marrying someone who is not of Jewish tradition.

**I am not married to a Jew.** My children are Jewish, but it maybe also something that influences my attitude. They converted when they were going to the Jewish school. I respect my wife's background and tradition. She is not religious, but she

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<sup>126</sup> *Mishnah Shabbat* 7:2.

<sup>127</sup> The entire list of the activities prohibited on *Shabbat*: sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, selecting, winnowing, grinding, sifting, baking, kneading, shearing wool, combing, cleaning, dyeing, spinning, making loops, weaving threads, separating the threads, stretching the threads, tying a knot, untying a knot, sewing, tearing, trapping, slaughtering, skinning, tanning, smoothing, ruling lines, cutting, writing, erasing, building, breaking down, lighting fire, extinguishing fire, striking the final hammer blow, carrying.

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Rabbi Simon Livson 23.10.2015

<sup>129</sup> Deuteronomy 7:3-4.

also has kept some of her traditions. [...] A big part of the marriages in our community are mixed-marriages. One thing that saved the community if that quite big part of the non-Jewish spouses has converted. Without that the future of the community would have been very much looking differently than how it looks now. It is also typical, that in these families you have mostly the wife who has converted, they keep more traditions and maybe also *kosher* and so on... **I think it is a very important part of the community's identity. The mixed marriages and the converts.** My children converted. One of the key points is that the community has an already existing system for the children to convert. It is quite unique in an orthodox community. Because it is officially orthodox. But children can convert without the conversion of the mother. Which means in a mixed marriage family is that if the mother is not Jewish, children can become Jewish through a certain system.

(E.)

E. (60, m) is not married to a Jew, but his children are Jewish. They converted to Judaism when they attended the Jewish school. If a child has a Jewish parent (regardless if it is the mother or the father) and that parent is the member of the community, he/she may attend the Jewish school. In case of the father being Jewish, the child has to go through a childhood conversion, before the *bar/bat mitzvah*.<sup>130</sup> E. thinks that intermarriages and conversions are a great part of the community's identity. This may be due to the fact that members are open and flexible in terms of observance, which allows them to be flexible about the religion of their spouses as well. A strictly orthodox community with strictly observant members may not be this diverse in terms of mixed marriages and conversions.

But of course **I am not married to a Jew.** However, he respects everything I do.

(D.)

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<sup>130</sup> Interview with Rabbi Simon Livson 09.02.2016.

**I am engaged. He is not Jewish.** Obviously, because this is Finland. I actually never dated a Jewish guy.

(H.)

Both D. (69, f) and E. (60, m) are married to non-Jews. Yet, they consider themselves traditional and keep many Jewish holidays. Similarly to them, H. (30, woman) is also in a relationship with a non-Jew. In her answer she emphasises the small number of Jews in Finland, which may make it difficult for a Jew to date another Jew. According to my interviewees, their non-Jewish spouses are open and respectful towards the Jewish traditions. This helps devising the knowledge and the traditions for the younger generations.

I finally came to the time to conversion. In Israel, they gave me two alternatives: “You divorce, or your wife converts”. That’s why it took me so long time. **If I didn’t have kids, the divorce would have been an option**, but my wife said she was willing to convert. *B’ezrat Hashem*.<sup>131</sup>

(G.)

G. (47, m) did not know about his Jewish roots for a long time. He was also married to a non-Jew. After finding out about his father’s Jewish roots, he started to go to the community’s conversion classes. When the time of the *giyur* came, the rabbinical court allowed him to convert, because wife was also willing to do so. He would have considered leaving his wife for being able to perform the *giyur*, hence we can say that the importance Jewishness in his life would have overwritten many other things.

As mentioned before the aspect that most *Halakhic* authorities find problematic about mixed-marriages is it is the issue of children’s upbringing. This however does not seem to influence the attitudes of community members towards mixed marriages. Moreover, spouses are accepting and respectful towards Jewish education. Having a childhood conversion program for those whose fathers are Jewish in the community, the congregation has an already working process for educating the Jewish youth.

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<sup>131</sup> “With God’s help.”

## Identity

As discussed earlier, the question of identity is a complex issue, which is based on one's self perception of him/herself, or on other's reflections on him/her. I was interested in how do my interviewees perceive their "Finnishness" – if they identify as Finnish at all – and their Jewishness. Dencik's trinity of Jewishness in Finland shows that Finland as a homeland has a great importance in Jewish self-construction. My interviewees seemed to consider this aspect as a key factor of their identities as well.

I don't know if I can compare my "Finnishness" and "Jewishness". I am definitely Finnish. I have gone to **Finnish high school** and now to a **Finnish university**. I have **Finnish friends**, I speak the **language** and **I understand the culture**. **I see myself as Jewish**, I have been to the **religious school**, my mother has converted I am **Jewish halakhically** but also from home. We have **Shabbat dinners**, I studied **Hebrew**, I have been to the Jewish school, so there are **rituals involved**. There are some things I don't do that Finnish people do. **I don't celebrate their holidays: Christmas, Easter...** I know they exist but there is a part of Finnish culture I don't know. You see a division and you may see that there are two very different things, but then again. My roots are not "Finnish Jewish" so maybe there is a particular Finnish Jewish way of doing things that you might learn from school or from participating in the services. [...] It is good when people see Judaism as participation. If you don't participate there is no community. When you participate in the community, you get a stronger Jewish identity yourself. Jewish people spend time with **Jewish people, doing Jewish things**. **Participation in a community is a way to strengthen your identity**.

(C.)

C. (22, m) has multiple identities, as both "Finnishness" and "Jewishness" are present in his answer. He reflects on the importance of the languages, communities and traditions in one's life. To a certain extent, he refers to the belonging to a national or ethnic group, but he also reflects on the religious aspects of Judaism. He differentiates Jewish customs from the Finnish ones: "*I don't celebrate their holidays*". His answer shows the dichotomy of "us" and "them", which contributes to a sense of conceptual ethnocentrism that may be

present from both the Jewish and non-Jewish parties, when talking about the other group.

I believe that you can find your own way and **own identity** in Judaism, and not everybody have to be religious. [...] **I feel more Finnish than Jewish.** We are quite **assimilated** here.

(B.)

B. (22, f) thinks that Jews are being assimilated to Finnish society. I suggest – based on the history of Finnish Jewry and on my interview with B., integration may be a better word for describing the Finnish situation. Regardless of what intention the minority group had when they started adapting the majority group's customs, in case of assimilation, the person/group would abandon his/her/its customs and traditions for the better acceptance to the majority group. As there is an interest in both maintaining the Jewish heritage and having daily interactions with other groups<sup>132</sup>, integration usage of words. C. (22, m) also underlines some aspects of integration for instance the language skills, or the attendance to a Finnish educational institution. In one of his earlier answers quoted, he mentioned the community and the Hebrew language as important factors in one's involvement with Judaism. The preservation of the language of the prayer, the community as it is and the traditions they follow also indicates that the local community is integrated but not assimilated.

Judaism is a very big and important part of my identity. **I feel Jewish very much. I am a Finnish Jew.** I am very **proud** to be a Jew. I never had any problems to be a Jew. I also have a lot of non-Jewish friends. **I always felt that they are accepting me as I am.** I have all these **positive feelings** of being a Jew. But I would also underline that I am a **Finnish Jew.** I was born in Finland. I think I am really **Finnish in many ways.** If I would make some circles of my identity, I think the biggest is I am a Finn, and the second biggest is I am a Jew, and then would come the other ones. **I think in some ways I am more Finnish than Jewish.** I have travelled to many countries, to Jewish events and conferences. And of course you find very much in common, but you can also find that all Jews are different, depending on which country they are from.

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<sup>132</sup> BERRY 2005:705.

Similarly to C. (22, m), E. (60, m) also feels that both “Finnishness” and “Jewishness” as important parts of his life. He connects positive feelings to Judaism, which may support his Jewish identity. “Some ways I am more Finnish than Jewish” refers to the temporal presence and continuous interaction of his multiple identities. By emphasising that he is a “Finnish Jew”, he makes a differentiation between Jews in certain countries, being aware of the diversity of traditions and customs that are associated with other countries’ cultures. He draws to layers of the “us and them” dichotomy: Jews and Finns; Finnish Jews and Jews from other countries. By this, he refers to the uniqueness of both Jews in Finland and Finnish Jews among other Jewish groups.

Sometimes I have been thinking about taking my grandmother’s **name**. That would somehow **strengthen my Jewishness** for me, **so then I wouldn’t need the community anymore**. It is a name that would be really obvious for everyone you know. It can’t be ignored. There is power in the name. Of course on the other hand I enjoy having **multiple identities**, so I don’t want to label myself so strongly you know as “Jewish” on the first hand for my environment. Especially since it is not the name I was born with. Somehow it helps me to deal with the situation, because it is something that no one can take away. [...] In my school there was almost no one with **brown eyes**. That was always kind of **different**. If people would have described how do I look, it would always start with that I have brown eyes. That is also something that tells a lot about Finnish society. It is easy to look different. I have some glasses which if I wear my friend always says: “You have lovely Jew glasses!” And she says it as a huge compliment. I have been really struggling with my Jewish identity. I kinda found out when I was in primary school. When I have heard about the Holocaust and then I realised so they were Jews, and that f\*ck, we are Jewish! Then I had really bad nightmares all the time, and then you know...sure that the Nazis are coming. I was really afraid. I didn’t get such a positive start. I was afraid. And later on, I started **questioning religion** in general. [...] **It became more clear when my parents separated, because than we always had Christmas and *Hannukah* as well**. It was a good system for a divorced family. And of course twice a year we had a big family dinner and later on I realised it was *Rosh Hashbanah*. We have some **Yiddish words** in my

family that I thought were Swedish. And I had really polite friends who have never asked, they just nodded. I think I was in my late teens when I realised that they have never heard of that expression. Always **Finnish-Yiddish expressions**. Not so many.

(H.)

C. (22, m) mentioned that belonging to the Jewish community can strengthen one's "Jewish identity". H. (30, f) seems to be on a similar opinion: "Sometimes I have been thinking about taking my grandmother's name. That would somehow strengthen my Jewishness for me, so then I wouldn't need the community anymore." People, who do not know her, may not be aware of the fact that she is Jewish. At the moment belonging to the community officially supports her own feelings of Jewishness. Moreover, a name that indicates one's origin – for instance a very stereotypical Jewish name – or this membership to a community clarifies this for everyone. By the reflection of the outsiders, her self-perception as a Jew would also change or strengthen.

I have always been **proud** of that I am Jewish. I always said you can turn me inside out and back again, I am still a same Jewish girl, I have always been. That's my identity. That is how strong I **feel** about it. Having a **name** like mine is not that usual in Finland. Once a man asked me what brought me here, and how come I learned Finnish so well. I looked at him and told him I was born here, raised here. My family goes back to 5 generations in Finland. [...] Years ago, I walked into a store in Etelä-Esplanadi with my friends. My **hair** used to be a little bit curlier, and more black. All of the sudden I was approached with English! I was shocked!

(D.)

I tried to be really Finnish, but **I looked different**. I had this feeling that **my name is not my name**. My mother's mother always said that I was different. [...] A friend of mine went to Israel with a Christian missionary group. [...] And he told me it was great and I should go next year. [...] I got to Tel-Aviv. [...] People came to talk to me asking why am I with a Christian group and where is my *kippah*...that was the first time I felt something. In the beginning the group was



really happy. [...] One evening I felt like something is not good, I don't feel comfortable with my group. I got into a fight with the leader of the group and I left to Jerusalem. [...] I have checked my father's family's name. And I checked it in the synagogue in the town they came from and it was a very typical form to change it to in case of their community.[...] I started to go to the community and to the conversion program, in 2010. I don't know exactly which year, I took a **gene test**. I wanted to know. I was afraid that what if we are Arabs? Honestly. [...] That time you could only check the haplotype. [...] **My mother's mother is not Jewish. But I am not ashamed of that family.**

(G.)

Besides the observance and the leniency towards traditions, the presence of multiple identities shows in each of the answers. H. (30, f) even said "multiple identities" when talking about taking the name that would differentiate her from the non-Jewish society. She does not only have a strong individual Jewish identity, but a strong social identity of belonging to the group of Jewish people as well. D. (69, f) and E. (60, m) talked about the pride towards their Jewish inheritance, G. (47, m) only suggested it by saying that he is "not ashamed" of his non-Jewish family members, which may lead to the assumption, that – however he did not say it openly – he is proud of his Jewish roots. The projections of self- and social perceptions and social identities are noticeable in their case as well. Their identities are being formed by receiving "feedback" from non-Jewish members of the society.

The importance of one's name – both from the perspective of the Jewish and the non-Jewish group –, the usage of language (Yiddish, or Hebrew) and the importance of "looks" appears in the process of the members' self-identification. Through these features individuals could be "labelled" by other social groups. However, "Finnish looks" and "Jewish looks" cannot be generalized, my respondents distinguish themselves (and are being distinguished) from the non-Jewish society because of their names and physical features, such as brown eyes, dark hair etc.<sup>133</sup> As it can be seen from the quotes, the way other people reflect on the members plays a significant role in their self-perception. They strongly identify as Finns, but they tend to notice – or perhaps

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<sup>133</sup> I would like to emphasize, that I am aware, that these features in general cannot be labelled or defined objectively as "Jewish".

emphasise – the differences between the non-Jewish and themselves. Their social identities connect them both to the Finnish and to the Jewish group.

**My mother's mother is not Jewish. But I am not ashamed of that family.** I haven't been that interested in them. [...] I got the test result, I opened it any I have the haplotype which is the most common among the Askhenazi Levi men. This haplotype is more Eastern-European, than Middle Eastern. [...] [...] The gene tests have developed more. Maybe three years ago came a new test. I did it. [...] I got the results, and I opened it. And I saw that I am 47% European, and 53% Jewish both Askhenazi and Sefardi and there was 24% Finnish, which was correct because as far as we know my grandmother was Finnish. [...] Sefardic-Arabic: there is a very thin line. The Israeli Arabs as well. They look really Jewish and they are still Arabs. [...] What if it turns out that I was an Arab or a gypsy? **If your identity is Jewish, it doesn't matter in a sense...but well you kind of want to know what your inheritance is.** That's the reason I am saying that Jewish is a very complex thing. **It is not only a faith, not only a way of living and not only an ethnic group.** The ethnicity of Jews is very mixed. There are Ethiopians, Indians, Askhenazi...Sefardi. You can't say that there is one Jewish background it is impossible. But if you think about the members of the community: they are members because they feel like they belong to this **Jewish ethnic group**, even though most of them hardly has any...because they are so diluted and they are already 3<sup>rd</sup> generation and of course it is very difficult. If someone asked me 'How did it feel to convert?' I don't know what would I say, because I have always been like this. I don't know what do I converted into. **Of course I have always had a weird name for a Jew.** I can doubt it. My second name officially is more Jewish, but everyone knows my first name, I can't change it. Because we live in Finland it is nicer to have a Finnish name. Many of them have a Christian background. For them Judaism is more of a religion than a way of living. Many people who have a strong Christian faith before the conversion has this challenge. For them, Judaism is more of a religious thing. [...] That's why I think some of them have hard times to participate. They feel alone, even if they do all the things and go to the service. In the end it what is your role in the nation. That is the reason: you can be Christian and live alone and **you can't be Jewish if you are not born Jewish.**

(G.)

G. (47, m) mentioned the ethnic aspect of Judaism. Nonetheless, he also stated that Judaism is a complex matter. He was the only one who tried to prove his Jewish roots by DNA tests. This indicates the importance of ancestry in his way of thinking about Judaism. Despite the fact that his mother was not Jewish and that he had to convert to Judaism, he is strongly connected to his Jewish ethnicity from his paternal side. In his interpretation, the concept of faith and the structures are so different in Christianity and in Judaism, that a person who does not have any Jewish roots “can’t be Jewish”. He converted – due to the lack of maternal Jewish ancestors. His statement suggests, that he considers paternal ancestry as important as maternal. G. (47, m) was the only person, who mentioned the importance of Israel in his personal story.

G. travelled to Israel for the first time with a Christian missionary group, where he felt like he did not stand out with his looks. He felt a sense of belonging.

All of the respondents are consciously aware of their Jewishness in the Diaspora in terms of differences in traditions, customs, etc. Those who identify as Finns, have a strong sense of feeling home in Finland due to the familiar language, environment and their Finnish acquaintances.

The non-Finnish respondents A. (56, m) and F. (34, f), who came from countries where the amount of Jews is significantly higher than in Finland – but they are still a minority –, have not addressed these issues. They did not talk about their looks or names in our discussion. Their “Jewishness” – in their traditions, usage of language or even in their looks – seems to be less “special” in the environment where they came from due to the bigger amount of Jews in those countries. Their self-perception therefore is less dependent on how does society reflect on them.

### **Egalitarianism and the Ordination of Women**

Most post-modern criticism within Judaism towards religious tradition – and towards many of the religions – targets the lack of gender equality within its system. The quantitative results showed ambivalent opinions regarding the role of women in the Jewish practices. For this reason, I was interested in how my interviewees regard this issue and how they reasoned their statements.

My personal belief is that from historical data that I have seen, I actually believe that the issue of the *Ezrat Nashim* in basic *Mikdash* is **totally misunderstood by Modern Orthodoxy**. I don't think that we necessarily had an exclusion and separation in the *Mikdash* [...] I think that a large amount of separation that is normative in orthodoxy had come from external communities, much more recently. They are not indigenously interdict to Judaism. There are differences between different communities all around the world, which in some degree reflects that. **I have no problems with the idea of women participating**. From my perspective, **if someone is prepared to learn...then the gender doesn't worry me**. There are female orthodox *minyannot*, but I can't see that happening here.

(A.)

I had my *bat mitzvah* that I really loved. I loved learning **Hebrew**. That's maybe the point. When I was a kid, I felt like I was **accepted at the community**. Then I had my *bat mitzvah*, and suddenly like...your being placed somewhere all the time, as a "woman" or a "man". And I already felt that it was strange...I am upstairs or downstairs. Who cares? Then I was really considering just not being the part of the community anymore. Also, because I didn't believe in religion. [...] There are events when women are not allowed to participate the same way as men are. And **it feels horrible. It is a misuse of power**. And they say that there are things that we have these older ways, but I don't feel that it's true or that we have to accept it. Because when there are people from our family, then it's our concern. [...] Equality questions happen to be my Achilles heel. [...] I haven't been in the synagogue in a long time, and it would be great to go there with male family members for instance but then I would have to be upstairs. And they would be downstairs.

(H.)

Neither A. (56, m), nor H. (30, f) are against women's participation in the service, however their opinions are based on different perspectives: one of them bases his opinion on the change of tradition because of external influences, the other person

thinks of it as the unbalanced power relations between man and women, and the feeling of acceptance in the community itself.

An **Orthodox *minhag*** can't keep up to many things. I know that the community doesn't accept many things. I know that there are people, who would like to do certain things that they can't. In a way, it is quite sad, but in a way it makes things easier for the community. There is a minority who wants to do it. Like women wanting to read the Torah. I guess I am a bit brainwashed in the question of orthodox *minhag*. **I think we should have it. But we have to be open.**

(B.)

**I wouldn't mind** sitting next to women, or being in an egalitarian community, I think. But if there is one community and one synagogue, **maybe it is better like this**. In the scope of **attraction** as they usually say, it is logical to keep man separately.

(C.)

**I don't mind egalitarian communities**. I have been in a community in Norway that had a woman rabbi and a cantor. **I don't have anything against it at all**. But here it is a mess. [...] In the end, people all want to do as it has always been done in the synagogue, and have the men and women separate. That's the 'orthodox way'. I remember, there were times, when at *Simchat Torah* you let the women come downstairs to the men's side and take part at the service there. But then when the Torah scrolls came out, the women had to go away, because the Torah for them is so holy that women must not touch it: certain times of the month a woman is **not pure**<sup>134</sup>. That in a sense defines it. I remember when I was a child we never had a *mechitza* in the *Shul* downstairs. It is interesting that we have one now.

(D.)

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<sup>134</sup> This refers to the menstruation period of women.

Outwardly, the respondents do not have any specific issues with the idea of egalitarian communities. By saying “attraction”, C. (22, m) referred to the possibility of men and women being attracted to each other, which may be problematic as they would not be able to concentrate to the prayer. “Purity” and the orthodox *minhag* seem to be the explanation for the traditional approach to women in worship. However, many of the informants reflected on the question of “mixed sitting.” D. (69, f), A. (56, m) and B. (22, f) talked about higher levels of female participation: D. explicitly, mentioned her own experiences in a Norwegian community, A. used the word “participation”, which – in my interpretation – does not only refer to mixed sitting, but to participation in other activities, such as reading from the Torah, being counted in the *minyan* etc. B. also mentioned reading from the Torah as a woman, which may be problematic in orthodox *minhag*.

Something that is really important to remember is also that Judaism is a very pro-women and a very female-role<sup>135</sup>. It is not just that, but Judaism comes from the woman. What better proves it, is the importance of women. I feel something that has been forgotten, is that **equality doesn't mean sameness**: meaning that being like a man doesn't make you equal. But having the same opportunities that's what makes you equal. To remember **we have each have our roles**: if a man's role is to do certain thing a woman's role might be something else. [...] We have that approach that you are not going to become equal to men by getting an *Aliyah* to the Torah. Even though you can find Orthodox rabbis who give you the OK that you can have the *minyan* of 10 women and they can also read the Torah. I am not denying that and I am not a **halakhic authority** but I think if we each focus on the role that we are the strongest I think it is the best way to succeed. [...] Just by nature, woman is different: she is the nurturer, she is the mother. By nature, man feels like he has to be the giver. So we have all this equality, we are blessed to have that, but in Judaism we have to remember that we each have our roles. One is not higher than the other. It is a different position.

(F.)

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<sup>135</sup> This refers to the importance of women in Judaism.

F. (34, f) mentioned different levels of female participation in the services: “*Aliyah* to the Torah” or “*minyán* of ten women.” She did not say explicitly that she approves or that she disagrees with these aspects of egalitarianism, but she indicated that a “*halakhic* authority” has the right for making a decision in these matters. Assuming that an issue which is not stated in the rabbinic or sacred literature de facto, she would probably consult a *halakhic* decision making “entity” instead of giving her own interpretation to certain traditions. She did not specify the nature of the authority, however taking the fact she “tries to obey all rules of *Shulchan Aruch*” it can be assumed, that she disagrees with these levels – at least in her own personal life. According to her explanation the roles of men and women may be different, but this does not mean that their value is not equal, and that their tasks are not equally important.

Most respondents appear to be standing on the same side: they, themselves would not mind neither participation of women in the service, nor mixed sitting in the synagogue, although they strongly feel that it may bother some more observant members of the congregation. According to their conclusions, it is better and easier for the community to keep the customs as they are right now, regardless of the fact that this may oppose the values of the members, who specifically feel uncomfortable among these circumstances.

### **Knowledge and Education**

Studying and knowledge has a great significance in Judaism. The commandment of studying is indicated both in the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:7) and the *Talmud* (Shabbat 125a). The importance of education appears in the answers of the informants as well. Knowledge is often connected to future concerns of communities, as without the knowledge and understanding of texts and practices many customs may seem to be irrelevant to postmodern societies.

And of course the most important thing is **education**. Nobody does anything because it's the rule, or nobody likes to do that. We are not robots we are not in Tsarist Russia. [...] Like the saying goes: “You bring Jews closer to the Torah, not the Torah closer to the Jews.”

(F.)

F. (34, f) suggests that people learn how to follow certain rules, if they are educated about them. By mentioning the common saying “You bring Jews closer to the Torah, not the Torah closer to the Jews.” she proposes the importance of available education and transfer of knowledge.

Judaism in my very kind of zero level of knowledge is... I just have **a feeling**. [...] Then it was only later on, during the past 5 years that I wanted to discover more of this. And I want it to be the part of me. And I am just really sad, that there is no way I can live out my Jewishness over here. Except at my home. But **because I don't know so much about tradition I just have to make stuff up**.

(H.)

According to H. (30, f) it is difficult to “live out” one’s Jewishness without knowing the customs. Hence she creates her own personal traditions – such as eating oysters for *Hannukah*. She perceives knowledge as an important factor, as it may make the observance of certain traditions easier.

But compared to F. and Y.<sup>136</sup> I am not observant. But for them, it is interesting that **I know everything**.

(D.)

We should let everyone who knows things to participate, or who would like to **know more about Judaism**.

(B.)

When I was younger, I thought the *Halakhab* was clear...But then you meet these people, who **know more and who feel a stronger connection** to Judaism and it feels so weird, that **you can born Jewish without knowing anything**, without caring and **you can be raised with all the knowledge and tradition and not be Jewish in a sense**.

(C.)

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<sup>136</sup> “F.” is another participant of mine, who happens to know “D”. “Y.” is another member of the community.



I know some people whose fathers are Jewish, and who are very-very **knowledgeable**. [...] Personally, I most probably don't accept the patrilineal descent automatically, but if it is there together with a practice then I do. **I would actually rather not accept matrilineal descent automatically**, I want to see evidence that a person understands.

(A.)

I think it is not important whether the mother or the father is Jewish. I understand that there is certain historical background. I know people here, who try to convert because they don't have a Jewish mother and I can say that sometimes they are more Jewish than I am: **very religious and knowledgeable**. There are rules that are outdated.

(E.)

C. (22, m), A. (56, m), and E (60, m) reflected on the issue of patrilineal descent in connection to one's knowledge. According to them, the Jewish knowledge of a person may be more important than *halakhic* regulations concerning matrilineal descent.

If you are a Jewish woman, and you are married to a non-Jewish man, your child is *halakhically* Jewish. But **the question is: how much do they know about Judaism?** If they don't know anything they are ignoramus. They are ignorant people who don't even...well, what can you expect? It is like if you have a hobby and you have a club, but if you wouldn't know anything about the hobby....let's compare it to horse polo. Would you expect that if you go there to people who do it in your daily life and you start telling things that they should do differently? You don't come here, yes, it is true that your mother used to ride here and she was a junior pony riding champion. Great, but you don't come, and you bring your kids and you expect to get the best competition horse and you tell how it should be? These people totally lost their rationality. If I'd go to Helsinki University and start to tell that I am a scientist and we should do things like this....they would kick me out!

(G.)

G. (47, m) also considers knowledge and involvement a significant part of one's "Jewishness". Keeping his thoughts on the importance of lineage in mind – G. is the person, who said that a person who does not have any Jewish roots "can't be Jewish" –, while he respects and to a certain extent obeys the rules of *Halakhab*, he thinks of certain parts of it flexibly when they do not come together with practice and knowledge. The importance of knowledge of the traditions and their origin appears to be a common concern of the respondents regardless of how strictly do they observe *Halakhab*.

### **The Question of *Minhag***

The question of what kind of tradition should a community follow – the question of *minhag* – already appeared when talking about female roles and egalitarianism in the community. According to the interviewees, not all of the members are orthodox. What is the reason for keeping an orthodox tradition then?

I definitely think that keeping the community as it is, is the way. I think it is hard to oppose on its members to do certain things, but the community as it stands should stand as strong as it can to *Halakhah*, because that is the only way it will survive. When you start bending the rules that is when things get out of hand and start getting questioned. When the community itself keeps to *Halakhab* and how it should be, and when its members keep to that setting, so **they know what is expected, even if they are not up to doing it**, I think that is the best way for the community to survive. [...] Slowly people start realising, like kids: they check their limits, but when there are **rules**, that's what they love the best, because then they know what is expected. Everyone needs to be welcomed and accepted, but there need to be rules. If there are no rules who decides? And then everything goes out of the window.

(F.)

"...they know what is expected, even if they are not up to doing it..." – when the interpretation of Jewish law has been clarified, the congregation is able to keep up to the expectations if its members wish it. The education of the members and the "declaration" of some rules and regulations that give boundaries to certain acts at the community can

contribute to the survival of the congregation. By saying “survival” this respondent meant not being assimilated to the non-Jewish society, in which case *Halakhab* may act as a distinguishing force: something that makes Jews differ from non-Jews.

I guess I am a bit brainwashed in the question of **orthodox minhag**. I think we should have it. But **we have to be open**.

(B.)

There are some people who think it important to have rules, because they think this is the way Jews can survive.<sup>157</sup> If we did not keep *kosher* and have these rules, the community would assimilate very fast into the surrounding society. Maybe. I don't know. [...] Because you have to keep the community orthodox to satisfy the orthodox people, and then you have the reality, the everyday life of **the majority which is far away from orthodox**. In an orthodox community in the States for instance the people around the rabbi are all orthodox, they have an alternative: if they are not satisfied they can go to a conservative *shul*. **Here you don't have the alternative**. You have to keep them under the same roof and it is a very difficult task. The differences between the orthodox and non-orthodox people have become really ugly. It has become the question of **power and politics**. [...] The right way is the **Nordic modern orthodox tradition** that we had in our community all the time. The one, **that takes the local situation into consideration**. We have thousand few hundred people and a lot of mixed marriages also. We have to take that into consideration: the environment, the place, the time and so on. [...] In Helsinki, the modern Nordic orthodox is the only way to **survive**. If we start splitting the community into different groups, there are so few of us, that we have to keep together. This may be community's best way to **serve all kinds of Jews**.”

(E.)

While being unsure about the possibility of potential assimilation in case of not obeying certain rules, E. (60, m) suggests, that the continuation of the modern orthodox tradition may be the most beneficial for the community.

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<sup>157</sup> He referred to the survival of Jews in Finland.

It is a mess. People don't know what their true identity is. Some of them know, yes. Some of them want to be more orthodox, some people want to be more traditional. Some of them want to be very liberal. In the end, they all want to do as it has always been done in the synagogue, and have the men and women separate. That's the orthodox way. [...] If we want to keep the community orthodox, we just have to **accept** that there are certain things that we need to do for an orthodox community. What anyone does at home is their business. You need to feel safe and secure in your own skin and you need to feel that you are a part of the society. There are ways to go about everything else. There are things that I don't mind but they can be experienced very offensive. And yet, **I can't make up those rules of Judaism, so I just accept.** [...] **Modern orthodox** is what the community deep inside wants to be.

(D.)

D. (69, f) has the same opinion as E. (60, m): the community should be modern orthodox, even if its members follow more progressive approaches to Judaism.

I understand the system: by the roots the founders of the community were religious. I understand how it came to be like this. I also understand why some people want to keep it, because in a sense, this way it is **easier** maybe for people who come there. For more observant people who come there, then if everybody would sit mixed. I understand. In a sense there is no choice. **If there were more people, and more synagogues that could maybe open up more possibilities of choice.** I think that this is good and if there would be a choice – and I have not really gone to liberal communities, I haven't visited them, I have never tried. I don't know if I had a choice which one would I choose. I think it is good to keep it this way, because if everybody would sit mixed we would **exclude** the observant people, but then I know that this way we exclude another group: the people or families who would like to sit together. Also because of **tradition**, in Finland this is probably a good choice. [...] **In a sense the community is not orthodox, but on the surface level it is, on the practical level, it can't be.** It would fall apart. It would start to separate people. I think it is good that they don't exclude people.

I don't think it is very Jewish to exclude the Jews. The community has to include people to survive and accept the differences. Of course people who would want to sit together with their family are also excluded this way. I don't know. It is difficult.

(C.)

C. (22, m) also stated that however the congregation may be officially orthodox, “on the practical level” it is not and it cannot be as it would divide the people into different groups. Despite this, he knows that the community may also exclude people who share different values than a modern orthodox *minhag*.

When I look at the community, **I know that it is not all orthodox**. I know that in practice, the **synagogue is really a community centre**. It doesn't present itself at the first instance. And of course there is Chabad-Lubavitch. It divides Jews into two categories: “Lubavitch” or “potential Lubavitch”. There are examples of religious Jews here, who are not necessarily the members of the religious community. But they are the exception, the very exception. [...] I think there is a historical reason why this is an orthodox community. [...] The very first Jews that entered were the “Cantonists”. If you were adopted at the age of 10-12, and you spent 20-30 years in a system that is “designed” to make them convert Christianity....there were very few people at the age of 10 or 12 that were adult Jews. They did not think like adult Jews. By and large – and this is actually a major complaint about Jewish communities worldwide – that if people stop getting Jewish education by the age of 13, and keep on getting secular education, why do we think that they are going to be adult Jews? They are adults, who happen to be Jewish, but Judaism has stopped grade 6, or whatever's the equivalent. **The community here thought that “orthodox” was the definition of community.**

(A.)

A. (56, m) mentioned the history of the community as a reason for the orthodox *minhag*. According to him, a Jewish community meant an orthodox community at the time when the Helsinki congregation was established, hence the ongoing consideration of the importance of orthodox community. He drew connections between the “Cantonits”

and the current members of the congregation: the highest Jewish educational institution run by the community is a primary school. The children stop receiving Jewish education from the school when entering secondary education. Some families may keep some traditions, but their children are surrounded by the “secularized Lutheranism” of Finland. In such circumstances, their perceptions of Judaism may also change.

My interviewees are aware that in case of a more liberal setting, the more orthodox respondents would be “excluded” from the synagogue as their affiliation would not let them practice Judaism in a way their religious affiliation allows them. Although services in the synagogue are according to orthodox traditions orthodox, the respondents know that in practical life the majority of the community members does not follow an “orthodox lifestyle”.

Considering the religious observance of most participants, it is interesting that on the personal level, they are willing to break down *halakhic* considerations, but when it comes to the question of the community, most of them encounter the fear of breaking gender hierarchies. This fear is strongly connected to the survival of the community and of the issue of pleasing the more orthodox members – which is a general tendency among small Jewish communities.

### **Other Thoughts about the Community and Its Future**

As my interviews were semi-structured, in some cases individual thoughts about the community appeared in them. These thoughts have an important role in understanding Finnish Jewry, as well as in interpreting the data received through the quantitative and qualitative research. Thus, I decided to mention some of these opinions in this part.

### **Values and Morals**

Some respondents criticized, that they feel somewhat omitted from the – regardless of their nationality and of their length of residing in Finland. They mentioned different aspects and levels of exclusion:

I found it interesting that in the communities that I have lived in, if somebody turned up, changed *shul* or started asking questions about the community, we were

always trying to get know more about them, trying to involve them. **They didn't reach out to me.** And when they did try to reach out to me at all, I didn't get responses – which I have found interesting. Now, I am also vegetarian...basically vegan. I make my own bread. Most things, that would classically draw me in, like *kosher* meat most of the time I don't need. The things I need sometimes are things like buying *matzah*.

(A.)

While A. (56, m) does not give any potential explanation on why the members did not try to reach out to him, seemingly for him as a foreigner it tends to be harder to get involved with the activities of the community. This may be caused by the fact that he does not use the “services” offered by the community, as he does not need *kosher* meat. He is not being able to go to the services, because he lives far away from the synagogue.

What I feel is that the community is **so closed for me based on its values.** I feel that there is a distance for between the values and in how things are expressed. There are some things that I can't understand, maybe because I am not religious in that sense. There are events when women are not allowed to participate the same way as men do. And it feels horrible. **It is a misuse of power.** And they say that there are things that we have these older ways, but I don't feel that it's true or that we have to accept it. Because when there are people from our family, then it's our concern. And **I actually don't feel being part of the community anymore.** Of course that wouldn't make me less Jewish. Of course I expressed them my will of actually I would like to be a part of the community. I feel that the circles may be a little bit closed in that sense, that if they don't want to take our concerns as if they would need to they just don't. I am Jewish by birth, so they can't even get rid of me.

(H.)

H. (30, f) feels being excluded, because her principles differ from the ones the community tends to follow. A. (56, m) and H. are from different religious affiliations, they both experience a boundary between themselves and the community. As one of them is a Finnish citizen and one of them is not, we cannot assume that nationality

would necessarily serve as a burden concerning the involvement in the activities. Furthermore, A. is observant, H. is not. It can be assumed, they have a common set of values, which may be “foreign” to the traditions or practices the congregation wishes to follow. This may result the community “not reaching out” to A. and H. “does not feel like being the part of the community anymore”.

## The Rabbi

**There is not much activity in there, for young adults.** Which I see is a problem. There is a kindergarten, a school but after that there is nothing. Even if you were interested, there is not anything. Last year and this year there are these *shlichot* contracted by the community. It is a step into the right direction. [...] I think Simon [Rabbi Simon Livson, the rabbi of the Jewish community of Helsinki] is in a difficult spot. He was in an orthodox *yeshiva*, where they tell you what to do. In a sense, “Don’t shoot the messenger!” The community sent him to an orthodox *yeshiva* and that’s what they got: an orthodox rabbi from an orthodox yeshiva. He comes back and people start to question. I admire him in a sense, because I wouldn’t want to be in that situation. He deserves all the help and respect he can get. It is not easy. If there were more Jews and more communities people would be able to choose. It would be much clearer and easier. But there aren’t many communities, you have to include all but you have to follow the religion. You have to respect the culture and the tradition you have received. I **think it is important that he knows Finnish.** People can participate at the services. I think it is like 50-50%: 50% speaks Finnish 50% doesn’t. But it is important for the school and for the kindergarten to establish a connection with the upcoming members of the community. They are members of the community, but the future active members of the community. If you don’t establish a connection, how do you expect them to come back? It would be absurd. I think it is good that he is Finnish. He is a good man. He has a strong knowledge of the religion. **We need that knowledge.** Otherwise it would be really weird. How do you run a Jewish establishment if you don’t know what does the religion say? At least you have to know. What you do after that...**The salvation of the community is this guy.** He is still young. He has the potential to be here for a long time. He has connection to the kids in the school. He knows the future



people who will come there. It will just get better. The kids that are now in school are the material to work with for the future.

It is good that he was brought up in Finland. He knows the Finnish culture he knows he can understand. He can see the point of view. **Finland isn't a very religious country itself.** People don't go to the church every Sunday. From the normal secular life in Finland you can understand where did these things come from."

(C.)

I think there hasn't been any **programme for the young adults** in the past. Now there is, and it is good. Of course it is natural that after some for instance we light the *Shabbat* candles or something, but **it doesn't have to be only that religious.** Bnei Akiva was always a bit of a brainwash, and there were people who didn't come because they felt that it is too much for them. But now it is changing and it is good. There are no lectures, no speakers nothing. Just Jewish people hanging out together. But I still see that we have to have an **orthodox minhag to keep the community open.** If not, **than we have big problems with Chabad coming up.** And then we wouldn't have a **Finnish speaking rabbi.**

(B.)

Simon [Rabbi Simon Livson] has a great knowledge. But not all people understand this. [...] He is open, but it is not easy for him. What I have understood, he wants to hold on to the orthodox tradition and to the orthodox ways, and **the community is difficult.** There are those, who want to make it much stricter, much more orthodox than it is and those who want to make it more liberal. **Finding the balance** between these people is not easy. [...] The issue is that we have now so many different groups you have those, who were born into this community and part of their parents are still alive. You have those, who have immigrated to Finland from Israel, who have married to non-Jews who converted. They like the way Israelis do things. Then you have Americans, French, Italians, South-Americans...whatever. They have their own ways. And to find the balance between all those people is not easy. I give it another hundred years. There is so many "convertees" nowadays. So many who want to convert to

Judaism – which I find interesting, in the sense, as the world is getting more hostile, people turn back to their roots or they find something in Judaism which brings them solace or a good feeling or a good identity or something like that. [...] We are too small of a community to have parties. **We should all hold on to the same torch, if we want this community to survive. We should forget about our own selves, and work for the community!**

(D.)

B. (22, f) and C. (22, m), the two youngest respondents, mention the lack and the need of activities for young adults from the community's life. They emphasise their importance of these events. Interestingly, they also mention the significance of a Finnish-speaking rabbi, which may lead to a closer connection between the upcoming generations and the community. It is important to point out that both of them attended the local Jewish school at some point of their lives, they have personal experiences in the question of the *Rav* [rabbi] reaching out to the youngsters of the community. The members consider the Rabbi Livson to be in a difficult situation, as the community is diverse and has to serve people from different backgrounds and affiliations. Similarly to E. (60, m) D. (69, f) has also mentioned the great number of people who wish to convert to Judaism, as one of the most descriptive matters of the community.

What I have noticed a lot whether if people who are more conservative, more open-minded, more liberal whichever way you want to put it Finnish people are very connected to the roots or what was comfortable and familiar to them. Even if someone doesn't necessarily keep *kosher* or keep *Shabes*, they feel when they come to the synagogue, or they come to a religious setting, they want it to be the original, or what they were once used to, what their *zaidas* did, what they *babes* did. Even if they are not up to that level they still want the genuine to be there. I feel that I don't think it would be that easy to change even if not all members are let's say...practicing in an orthodox way. **I feel that that's familiar to them and that's what they want to keep.** Whatever they do at home. That's the great thing about Judaism: it's not like everything or nothing religion. If they're given the opportunities to grow and if they're given the educational knowledge, than they are really excited to do it! [...] I have a lot of hope to this Finnish community. I

think as it grows, there is always going to be someone against it and someone challenging it. And that's what makes us stronger.

(F.)

According to F. (34, f) the members of the congregation may be diverse – more liberal, conservative, or open-minded – they are strongly connected to the traditions of their ancestors, which suggests that they would like to keep those traditions, instead of reinterpreting them, regardless of their level of observance.

We have a very young and Finnish speaking rabbi. The community has never had that. He knows and he understands the local circumstances and understands that you have to live according to them **and not according to the strict rules**. It is very difficult work for him. You have to keep the community orthodox to satisfy the orthodox people, and then you have the reality, **the everyday life of the majority which is far away from orthodox**. In an orthodox community in the United States for instance the people around the rabbi are all orthodox, and they have an alternative. If they are not satisfied they can go to a conservative *shul*. Here, you don't have the alternative. **You have to keep them under the same roof**. It is a very difficult task. The differences between the orthodox and not orthodox people has become really ugly. It has become the question of **power and politics**. [...] long ago the community was very independent, the chief rabbinate did not have anything to say about what are the things happening in here. That was in the 60-70s. But then they slowly changed and Jewish world became more like the Catholic world that you have a home institute – the Chief Rabbinate in Jerusalem – which is now asking things that you have to obey. The influence of the chief rabbinate became stronger and stronger during the last years. I think it is a totally wrong way to go in the Finnish world. They are pushing their ideas. A very typical example is the conversion: if you ask them about what conversions that are accepted...there is hardly any anymore.

(E.)

E. (60, m) also emphasised the importance of the Finnish speaking rabbi in the life of the congregation. As he sees the situation – amongst basically all of my respondents – there has been conflicts between the orthodox and the non-orthodox observants.

H. (30, f) has mentioned the misuse of power in one of her answer<sup>138</sup> which was strongly connected to the question of orthodoxy as well. From different perspectives, both H. and E. tend to sense the same issue within the congregation. Furthermore, E. wishes the congregation to be more independent. From his answer we may sense, that the connection to Israel and the acceptance in Israel may not be a significant part of the member's.

### **The Future: Smörgåsbord.**

There is a wonderful *Midrash* that all of us were present at Sinai when we have received the Torah. It is interesting. What it means, that if I have a different point of view to somebody else, my point of view is legitimate. **I was there. It is Torahenu<sup>139</sup>! It is ours! Not only yours! Don't tell me what to do! It only works, if you do it within the context of tradition.** You might follow the majority, but everyone's opinion in the tradition is valid! [...] I think the future of community isn't based upon knowledge it is based upon *smörgåsbord*.<sup>140</sup> I remember having discussions, and thinking seriously about the things that Jews have in common. And the answer is – in general – they don't. What they do though, is that they sit at the same table. What I love about the *smörgåsbord* - **analogy** and for various reasons it makes sense, is that it is a play also on the *Shulchan Aruch* and on the *mapah*. It continues that analogy to the next level. **What it says, is that if you eat a selection from the dishes that are on that table, than that is the thing that defines you as Jewish.** Now it takes into account where you come from and what your history is, but in the end of the day the idea that Judaism is an oligarchy – which it was until *Haskalah* on the path in a modern society, it is interesting that in most of the places where I lived unless Jews were a significant majority, they lived within ghettos. Not all of them, but there are different Jewish ghettos. I don't know many around here.

(A.)

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<sup>138</sup> Quoted on page 68 and page 78.

<sup>139</sup> Hebrew. Lit. Our Torah.

<sup>140</sup> Swedish. Lit. "sandwich table". A meal, with many different foods placed on a large table, so people can serve themselves. In this context, the analogy means a great mixture of many different things.

A. (56, m) believes that the future of the community lies in the free-choice of people. By using the *smörgåsbord* -analogy, he indicates that the freedom of choice in which they can live out their Jewishness to the extent, they wish to do so is the most important for the community. In other word, there should be a possibility to everyone to practice Judaism the way he/she wants to. He thinks the Torah was given to all of the Jews in the world, without any selection. His opinion is in line with the other respondents' ideas and underline that the most important thing is the positive feeling of "Jewishness" one can have.

## CONCLUSIONS

The classification of an orthodox Jewish person is the degree to which he or she deliberates the *Halakhab* to be an important part of the way they live their lives and which draws his or her boundaries. As it was revealed both in the quantitative and qualitative analysis, most members of the Jewish Community of Helsinki are not orthodox. They may be aware of the regulations and prohibitions of the Jewish law, but most of them do not keep them in a strict – “orthodox” – manner and they do not keep *Shabbat* either. Despite of this fact, concerning certain other questions they are rather traditionalist. They are conscious about their Jewish roots and some of the traditions accompanying those. Many of both the orthodox and non-orthodox members show significant leniency towards certain traditions or customs – even towards the most significant ones, like *kashrut*.

Regardless of their age and gender, they think of Judaism as a way of life, a chain of traditions which leads back thousands of years, hence it should be respected. While Jewish customs are being appreciated by them, the aspect of religion and religious beliefs have a low importance in their lives. They are members of the Jewish community voluntarily, not due to a primordial assignment. Even if they have made the decision for different reasons, their membership shows the importance of Jewishness for them.

Most members of the community included in my study identify as Jewish as well as Finnish, and they do not make an attempt to draw clear boundaries between their “Finnishness” and “Jewishness”. They present a strong self-awareness of their Judaism and of their potential multiple identities. They identify themselves both as Jewish individuals (or Finnish Jews) and as members of the larger group of Jewish people, however fictile their definition of who or what is a Jew may be. They distinguish themselves from the non-Jews based on the reflections they receive from the non-Jewish societies on their looks, names or customs. They may be integrated or acculturated into the Finnish society, but they are definitely not assimilated, as they wish to follow and keep following their Jewish traditions and customs – even if selectively –, and Judaism consists a significant part of their life. By choosing their “Jewish activities” freely – using the analogy of one of my interviewees –, they enjoy the *smörgåsbord*, and pick activities that can fit into their lifestyle and that are balanced with their principles.

Most of them do not keep *kosher* at home, or observe *Shabbat* strictly, but they do circumcise their sons, have a *mezuzah* on their door-posts and are liberal concerning the questions of egalitarianism and *Halakhab*.

The egalitarianism of the Finnish society clearly crushes with the traditional worldview of Judaism, although *Halakhab* is not the strongest element that is present in the Jewish Community of Helsinki. There may be growing interest in changing some customs, but this interest is being blocked by certain concerns. The system of the synagogue, the separation of men and women by the members do not come from being afraid of “labelled out”, or being afraid to reject the traditional interpretations of *Halakhab*, but rather from trying to keep an “all-inclusive” community, which is able to accommodate Jews from different religious affiliations and excludes the possibility of breaking the community to smaller groups.

This study indicates the current tendencies of modern Judaism in the Diaspora: the decreasing importance of ethnicity and the increasing importance of traditions. While being surrounded by the customs and traditions of the majority, the possibility for assimilation of the Jews of the Diaspora as a minority is always present. The members of the Helsinki congregation are aware of the possibilities and threats of assimilation, which most likely could be a projection of the small size of the community. Hence the members wish to run the community as open and as available for everyone as they can.

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Interview with F. – 04.01.2016

Interview with G. – 18.01.2016

Interview with H. – 21.12.2015

Interviews with Rabbi Simon Livson – 23.10.2015 & 09.02.2016



## APPENDIX

### Survey on Jewishness As Perceived By Community Members

As a student at the University of Helsinki, studying Intercultural Encounters – Study of Religions. I am doing my Master Thesis about the Helsinki Jewish Community. I hope that as many of you as possible will reply to this short questionnaire that can be found under the following link: <http://fluidsurveys.com/s/helsinkiUniversity/>

The community will also be able to use the results.

Coming from a Hungarian Jewish background I have conducted Jewish Studies, Cultural Studies and Religious Studies and wrote my BA thesis about the Sabbatarians of Transylvania.

In my Master Thesis I will reflect on the religious standpoint of the community members, their knowledge about Judaism and the way they place themselves in the Finnish society. My supervisors are Prof. René Gothoni and Prof. Karmela Liebkind. If you have any questions about my study, please do not hesitate contact me (e-mail: [mercedesz.czimbalmos@helsinki.fi](mailto:mercedesz.czimbalmos@helsinki.fi) or tel.: 046-6137875).

*In the first part of the questionnaire, we are interested in your relationship to Judaism.*

1. Were you born as a Jew?
  - a) Yes.
  - b) No, I have converted.
  
2. How would you describe your relationship to Jewish religious practices?
  - a) I am non-observant/secular.
  - b) I am liberal/progressive/reform.
  - c) I am conservative.
  - d) I am orthodox.

3. There can be various senses of being “Jewish”. Which of the following alternatives best describes your feelings?
  - a) Even though I have a Jewish background, I don’t consider myself as a Jew.
  - b) I am aware that I am a Jew, but don’t think about it frequently.
  - c) I rather feel Jewish, but other aspects of my life are also important.
  - d) I am very aware that I am Jewish and it is very important to me.
  - e) None of these alternatives – hard to say.
  
4. Do you feel more Jewish or Finnish?
  - a) I feel more Finnish than Jewish.
  - b) I feel equally Finnish and Jewish.
  - c) I feel more Jewish than Finnish.
  - d) Difficult to say, not sure.
  
5. How important is each of the following aspects for your personal feeling of being Jewish?

|  | Very important | Of certain importance | Not at all important |
|--|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| A feeling of being Jewish in essence (e.g. as a personality, way of thinking). |                |                       |                      |
| A feeling of belonging with other Jews.  |                |                       |                      |
| A feeling to solidarity with Israel.   |                |                       |                      |
| Religious activities, going to the synagogue, religious customs, etc.          |                |                       |                      |
| The Jewish atmosphere at home (food, customs, etc.)                            |                |                       |                      |
| Loyalty to my Jewish inheritance.  |                |                       |                      |

*Next, we are interested in your religious behaviours and affiliation.*

6. How often do you visit the synagogue?
  - a) During every Shabbat and all the holidays.
  - b) Sometimes during Shabbat and during the big holidays.
  - c) Only at big holidays. (*Yom Kipur* and *Rosh Hashanah*)
  - d) Only if there is a unique opportunity (wedding, bat mitzvah etc.)
  - e) I don’t go to the synagogue at all.

7. What is your opinion regarding the following statements?

|   | Agree completely | Agree by and large | Neither – nor | Disagree in part | Disagree completely |
|---|------------------|--------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------|
| A Jewish woman can be a mohelet. <sup>141</sup>                   |                  |                    |               |                  |                     |
| Jewish women should be counted in minyan.                         |                  |                    |               |                  |                     |
| A Jewish woman can be a rabbi.                                    |                  |                    |               |                  |                     |
| A Jewish woman can be called to the Torah.                        |                  |                    |               |                  |                     |
| If a person's father is Jewish, the person is Jewish him/herself. |                  |                    |               |                  |                     |
| Same-sex marriage within the community should be allowed.         |                  |                    |               |                  |                     |
| A Jew does not need to marry another Jew.                         |                  |                    |               |                  |                     |
| The service in the synagogue should be in Hebrew.                 |                  |                    |               |                  |                     |
| A Jew should marry a Jew.   |                  |                    |               |                  |                     |

8. If you have a son/sons, is he/are they circumcised?

- a) Yes.
- b) No.
- c) I do not have a son/sons.

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<sup>141</sup> Mohel: Hebrew term, gender: masculin = the „covenant of circumcision”, i.e., the male person conducting circumcision on new-born Jewish boys. Mohelet is the female equivalent of a mohel in communities which accept female members to become certified mohels.

9. Do you keep *kosher* at home?
- Yes.
  - Yes, but not rigidly.
  - No, but I do not eat pork.
  - No.
10. Do you fast on *Yom Kipur*?
- Yes.
  - Yes, most of the time.
  - Yes, but I do drink.
  - No.
11. Do you have a mezuzah on your door-post?
- Yes.
  - No.

*The following questions are going to be focusing on the Finnish Jewry.*

12. Today there is a considerable discussion concerning the future of Jewry in Finland. What is your view?

|   | Agree | Doubtful | Don't agree |
|---|-------|----------|-------------|
| With conscious investment in cultural and social activities Jewry can survive in Finland. |       |          |             |
| In the long run Jewry has the chance only in Israel                                       |       |          |             |
| Only as orthodox can Jewry survive in the diaspora.                                       |       |          |             |

13. How would you describe the Jewish community in Helsinki? Mainly as a religious group or as a part of the Jewish people?
- Mainly as a religious group.
  - Mainly as part of the Jewish people.
  - Both equally.

*Finally, we would like to know only your age and gender.*

I am \_\_\_\_\_ years old.

I am female: \_\_\_\_ / male: \_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR REPLYING!

## Kysely seurakuntalaisten käsityksistä juutalaisuudesta

Opiskelen Helsingin yliopistossa uskontotiedettä Intercultural Encounters maisteriohjelmassa ja kirjoitan maisteritutkielmani Helsingin juutalaisesta seurakunnasta. Toivon, että mahdollisimman moni teistä vastaisi tähän lyhyeen nimettömään kyselyyn: <http://fluidsurveys.com/s/helsinkiUniversity/>

Tulokset tulevat olemaan myös seurakunnan käytettävissä.

Minulla on unkarinjuutalainen tausta ja olen opiskellut juutalaisaiheita, kulttuuria ja uskontoa. Kandidaattityöni aiheena oli The Sabbatharians of Transylvania.

Maisteritutkielmassani pohdin seurakunnan jäsenten uskonnollisia kannanottoja, heidän tietoaan juutalaisuudesta sekä millaiseksi he kokevat itsensä osana suomalaista yhteiskuntaa. Ohjaajijani toimivat prof. René Gothoni ja prof. Karmela Liebkind. Vastaan mielelläni kysymyksiinne, jotka koskevat tutkimustani (s-posti: mercedesz.czimbalmos@helsinki.fi tai puh: 046-6137875).

*Kyselyn ensimmäisen osan kysymykset koskevat suhdettasi juutalaisuuteen.*

1. Synnyitkö juutalaiseksi?
  - a) Kyllä.
  - b) En, käännyin myöhemmin.
  
2. Miten kuvaisit omaa suhtautumistasi juutalaisiin uskonnollisiin perinteisiin?
  - a) En noudata perinteitä/olen maallistunut.
  - b) Olen liberaali/progressiivinen/reformijuutalainen
  - c) Olen konservatiivijuutalainen.
  - d) Olen ortodoksijuutalainen.
  
3. Oman juutalaisuutensa voi käsittää monin eri tavoin. Mikä seuraavista vaihtoehtoista kuvaa parhaiten kokemustasi juutalaisena olemisesta?
  - a) En koe olevani juutalainen, vaikka minulla on juutalainen perhetausta.
  - b) Olen juutalainen, mutta en ajattele asiaa kovin usein.

- c) Koen olevani juutalainen, mutta elämässäni on myös muita tärkeitä asioita.
- d) Olen erittäin tietoinen juutalaisuudestani ja se on hyvin tärkeää minulle.
- e) Ei mikään yllä mainituista – vaikea sanoa.

4. Koetko olevasi enemmän juutalainen vai suomalainen?

- a) Koen olevani enemmän suomalainen kuin juutalainen.
- b) Koen olevani yhtä paljon suomalainen ja juutalainen.
- c) Koen olevani enemmän juutalainen kuin suomalainen.
- d) En osaa sanoa.

5. Kuinka suuri merkitys seuraavilla asioilla on omalle juutalaisuuden kokemuksellesi?

|   | Erittäin tärkeää | Melko tärkeää | Ei yhtään tärkeää |
|---|------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Perustavanlaatuinen tunne omasta juutalaisuudesta (persoonallisuus, ajattelutapa) |                  |               |                   |
| Yhteenkuuluvuuden tunne toisten juutalaisten kanssa.                              |                  |               |                   |
| Solidaarisuus Israelia kohtaan.   |                  |               |                   |
| Uskonnolliset menot ja tavat, synagogassa käyminen ym.                            |                  |               |                   |
| Juutalainen ilmapiiri kotona (ruoka, tavat ym.)                                   |                  |               |                   |
| Uskollisuus juutalaisia sukujuuriani kohtaan.                                     |                  |               |                   |

*Seuraavat kysymykset koskevat usekonnollisia tapojasi ja tottumuksiasi.*

6. Kuinka usein käyt synagogassa?

- a) Joka sapattina ja kaikkina juhlapyhinä.
- b) Joskus sapattina ja tärkeimpinä juhlapyhinä.
- c) Vain tärkeimpinä juhlapyhinä (*Jom Kippur* ja *Rosh Hashana*)
- f) Vain erityistilaisuuksissa (häät, bat mitsva ym.)

g) En koskaan.

7. Mitä mieltä olet seuraavista väittämistä?

|   | Täysin samaa mieltä. | Osittain samaa mieltä. | En osaa sanoa. | Osittain eri mieltä. | Täysin eri mieltä. |
|---|----------------------|------------------------|----------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Juutalainen nainen voi olla mohelet. <sup>142</sup>                     |                      |                        |                |                      |                    |
| Juutalaiset naiset tulisi laskea mukaan minjaniin.                      |                      |                        |                |                      |                    |
| Juutalainen nainen voi olla rabbi.                                      |                      |                        |                |                      |                    |
| Juutalainen nainen voidaan kutsua lukemaan Tooraa.                      |                      |                        |                |                      |                    |
| Henkilö, jonka isä on juutalainen, on myös itse juutalainen.            |                      |                        |                |                      |                    |
| Sukupuolineutraali avioliitto tulisi sallia juutalaisissa yhteisöissä.. |                      |                        |                |                      |                    |
| Juutalainen voi avioitua ei-juutalaisen kanssa.                         |                      |                        |                |                      |                    |
| Jumalanpalvelus tulisi pitää hepreaksi.                                 |                      |                        |                |                      |                    |

<sup>142</sup> Mohel: Heparalainen termi, maskuliini = „ympäreikkauksen suorittaja” eli miespuolinen henkilö, joka suorittaa ympärileikkauksen vastasyntyneille juutalaisille pojille. Mohelet on mohelin naispuolinen vastine niissä yhteisöissä, jotka sallivat myös naisten suorittaa ympärileikkauksia.



|   |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| Juutalaisen tulee avioitua toisen juutalaisen kanssa. |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|

8. Jos sinulla on poika/poikia, onko hän/ovatko he ympärileikattu(ja)?

- d) Kyllä.
- e) Ei.
- f) Minulla ei ole poikaa/poikia.

9. Noudatatko *kosher*-sääntöjä kotonasi?

- e) Kyllä.
- f) Kyllä, mutta en tarkasti.
- g) En, mutta en syö sianlihaa.
- h) En.

10. Paastoatko Jom Kippurina?

- e) Kyllä.
- f) Kyllä, suurimman osan ajasta.
- g) Kyllä, mutta juon.
- h) En.

11. Pidätkö mezuzahia ovenpielessäsi?

- c) Kyllä.
- d) En.

*Seuraavat kysymykset koskevat Suomen juutalaisia ryhmiä.*

12. Suomalaisten juutalaisten tulevaisuudesta on viime aikoina keskusteltu paljon.

Mikä on oma näkemyksesi?

|  | Samaa mieltä | En usko | Eri mieltä |
|--|--------------|---------|------------|
| Juutalaiset voivat säilyä Suomessa, mikäli kulttuurillisiin ja |              |         |            |

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| sosiaalsiin<br>aktiviteetteihin<br>panostetaan riittävästi.                  |  |  |  |
| Pitkällä tähtäimellä<br>juutalaiset voivat säilyä<br>vain Israelissa.        |  |  |  |
| Juutalaiset voivat<br>selviytyä diasporasta<br>vain olemalla<br>ortodokseja. |  |  |  |

13. Onko Helsingin juutalainen yhteisö mielestäsi enemmän uskonnollinen ryhmä vai osa juutalaista kansaa?

- d) Enemmän uskonnollinen ryhmä.
- e) Enemmän osa juutalaista kansaa.
- f) Molempia yhtä paljon.

*Lopuksi vielä pari kysymystä iästasi ja sukupuolestasi:*

Olen \_\_\_\_\_ vuotta vanha.

Olen nainen: \_\_\_\_ / mies: \_\_\_\_\_

**KIITOS PALJON VAIVANNÄÖSTÄSI!**