

Belonging

Thought for the Day

Ephraim Borowski (Director, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)

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In what a BBC Scotland programme last night called this “year of big decisions” about the future of Scotland, it’s not surprising that what Scottish identity means is up for debate.

It’s not just that there’s more to it than the right to put on a ‘Hey Jimmy’ hat and get maudlin to some Burns verse, it’s how that relates to the other things we identify with or are identified by. Perhaps it’s a culture, or a football team, or your gender, or your ethnicity, or your religion.

If you think back to census night in 2011, if you were in Scotland, you were asked “What religion or religious body do you belong to?” For minorities, that word “belong” particularly matters – *that’s* not the trigger for prejudice and discrimination, but sometimes just looking different, or sounding different, or dressing differently. But if you live somewhere where there is no temple or mosque or synagogue or gurdwara to belong to, however deep your feelings or devout your observance, you’d have to respond truthfully that you have nothing to belong to.

But perhaps belonging is changing. The census reports fewer Jewish people in the central belt, but rural numbers are up. That’s not because Jewish people have become crofters in droves, but because our “Being Jewish in Scotland” projects have given them something they feel they belong to. A couple of years ago, one elderly lady in the north east told us sadly, “I am a community of one”; last month, after 30 people turned up to a party, the same lady told us that for the first time she feels part of a community.

A community isn’t necessarily a neighbourhood – it’s a network of people who have a shared identity, shared experience, can offer one another support, and give each other a sense of belonging.