

Critical Friendship

Thought for the Day

Ephraim Borowski (Director, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)

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As many people are about to discover, the down-side of holidays is the pile of mail that awaits your return! But hiding in mine was a report from the Institute for Jewish Policy Research on the attitudes of Jews in Britain towards Israel that I found fascinating.

This should be taken seriously – it's based on more than 4000 responses, 4 times as many as pollsters often use to predict general election results.

Don't worry – I'm not going to spout statistics, but some of the numbers are worth mentioning: more than 82% say that Israel plays an important role in their Jewish identity, almost all have visited the country, and a large majority feel it's relevant to their day-to-day lives in Britain.

On the other hand, more than two-thirds say Israel should give up land for peace with the Palestinians; almost three-quarters, even of those who call themselves Zionists, are opposed to expansion of settlements in the West Bank; and a small majority favour negotiating with Hamas.

– But why did I say "on the other hand"? There's no contradiction, except in the eyes of those who see everything in black and white.

Instead a picture is painted of critical friendship, as if to say we care about you, but we don't like everything you do. That should make sense to anyone with family and friends – being critical means you care enough to say so!

That's why it's so worrying that in same report almost a quarter said they had witnessed an antisemitic incident that year, and more than one in ten had been victims. More worrying for us in Scotland is that the most isolated are the most likely to feel uncomfortable.

It doesn't mean this country is unfriendly to Jewish people, but these findings should give us all pause at a time when the news reminds us that xenophobia of all kinds again feels able to speak its name. We do well to remind ourselves that "*One Scotland, Many Cultures*" is an aspiration – if it were a fact we wouldn't need the slogan!

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