

A GUIDE TO FACILITATING EDUCATION AND  
TRAINING OF THE ULTRA-ORTHODOX  
JEWISH COMMUNITY



**According to the 2011 census there are approximately 50,000 members of the Jewish community in Victoria. It is a broad and diverse community, consisting of many cultural backgrounds, histories and levels of religious observance. Within this community, there are sub-groups of various sizes, which view religious obligations as binding and follow Jewish traditions to the letter of the law.**

Residing predominantly within the local government areas of Glen Eira and Port Phillip, these groups are described as Ultra-Orthodox, and for the most part, have tended to keep to themselves. Most are members of a further sub-group known as Adass.

Jewish Care has written this guide to assist you in adapting your learning environment to make your training programs more welcoming and accessible to this unique sector of our community.

We hope this guide will provide you with a better understanding of the Ultra-Orthodox community so that you are better equipped to accommodate their needs as you work together with them in overcoming the barriers to employment.

While we have written this guide primarily with Learn Local programs in mind, the information contained within will be useful for other service providers and employers as well.



## Role Differences

Men and women have clearly defined roles in Ultra-Orthodox Judaism. Men are required to pray three times a day together with a *minyan*, a quorum of ten men. When praying in the morning, men wear a *tallit* (prayer shawl) and *tefillin* (phylacteries). Men also have an obligation to spend a significant portion of their day studying the Torah (the Old Testament and the accompanying oral law) and other religious texts.

Jewish women have their own areas of responsibility. Seen as the heart and mainstay of the Jewish home, women are generally exempt from time-bound obligations which would take them away from their caring obligations. While many Ultra-Orthodox women prefer their role as full-time mothers and housewives, some Ultra-Orthodox women may seek qualifications which will enable them to access enhanced opportunities outside the home.

## Interpersonal Contact

As distinct from the casual familiarity of Western society, the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish community is sensitive to differences between the genders. Generally men and women move in separate circles; attend single-gender schools and pray in synagogues with separate seating. With the exception of close family members, men and women within Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities do not touch. As foreign as it may seem to our Western mindset, even the smallest gesture such as a handshake is forbidden. In certain circles, eye contact between men and women is discouraged as well.

## Dress

Ultra-Orthodox Jews are always fully dressed in accordance with Jewish laws. Men will typically wear a *kippah* (skullcap) or a hat on their head. Men also wear a mini prayer shawl known as a *tallit* under their shirt or jacket; the fringes (*tzitzit*) of the *tallit* are sometimes worn externally and visible to others. Men usually wear their hair short, except for their sideburns, which are often curled and tucked behind their ears.

Dress styles can differ for different Ultra-Orthodox community groups. Members of the Adass community, for instance, typically wear either full or three quarter length black pants, a white shirt, black button-up vests, and a long black jacket. On working days, they may wear a traditional black hat. On *shabbat* and holidays, they may wear a tall black hat with fur sewn onto it called a *shtreimel*.

Ultra-Orthodox Jewish women tend to wear plain-coloured, loose-fitted clothing, taking care to have their legs covered by socks or stockings, elbows covered by sleeves and knees covered by longer skirts. In addition to this, married Ultra-Orthodox Jewish women cover their hair with either a *sheitel* (wig) or a scarf or both, as a sign of their marital status.

## Modesty & Privacy

Modesty is one of the main principles Ultra-Orthodox Jews adhere to. Whilst dressing in modest clothing is an obvious external manifestation, modesty is also about the way one acts, talks and carries oneself. In particular, modesty informs the relationships between men and women; expressions of affection between men and women – whether between husband and wife or sister and brother – are not publicly displayed.

Ultra-Orthodox families are usually very private and unwilling to discuss personal matters. Even though they may be a 'high needs' group, they may be reluctant to expose their lack of secular knowledge and academic skills.

## TV & Technology

The Jewish home is considered a mini-sanctuary in the Ultra-Orthodox community – a place of peace and sanctity, where every aspect is well-considered and designed to foster a religiously-oriented lifestyle and set of values. Most families in the Ultra-Orthodox community will go to great lengths to exclude anything deemed to present a foreign or intrusive influence. In most Ultra-Orthodox homes there will be no television, radio, or popular magazines or newspapers. Some homes may have computers for the purpose of work or business but children would often be banned from their use; adults would be discouraged from using the internet unless there is a filter barring exposure to violent or sexual content, or any other influences deemed unacceptable. As a result they may be

restricted in their ability to do research as content may be deemed unsuitable.

This lack of exposure means that common everyday references may not register with the audience. For example, it is unlikely that many members of the community would be familiar with Taylor Swift or media personality Eddie McGuire, nor the latest episode of MasterChef.

## Prayer

Prayer takes a central role in Jewish life. Jewish prayers take place in all Ultra-Orthodox synagogues three times a day: morning, afternoon and evening.

When scheduling courses especially during the winter months, it is advisable to either conclude activities well prior to sunset, depending on where the training takes place or to incorporate an adequate break time to accommodate afternoon prayers.



## Shabbat (The Sabbath)

Shabbat, also known as Shabbos or the Sabbath, is a day of rest, a day to go to synagogue, pray and connect with God, self and family. The source of Shabbat is in the Old Testament or Torah which describes how God created the world in six days and on the seventh day he rested. It is a day of symbolic new beginnings and one dedicated to God, and is a holy day of rest. It begins at sunset on Friday and concludes at sunset on Saturday. Shabbat as a day of rest refreshes each person spiritually and physically. On this day there is a strong emphasis on spending quality time together as a family and as a community. It is marked by wearing festive Shabbat clothing, praying together with a congregation in a synagogue (Shul) evening, morning and afternoon and enjoying festive meals together with family and friends.

Many activities are forbidden during Shabbat, including the following: working, turning on electricity (although electricity or time clocks can be set beforehand), using a vehicle (except for medical emergencies, which take precedence over all other restrictions), carrying, writing, shopping, dealing with money and cooking.

Preparations for Shabbat begin anew each week, reaching their peak of activity on Friday as sunset approaches. Ultra-Orthodox Jews will observe Shabbat day with a strict level of commitment that is difficult for the uninitiated to understand. One of the consequences of Shabbat observance is that members of the Ultra-Orthodox community will not attend training programs or activities on Saturdays or maybe not even on Friday afternoons.



**There are many holidays and festivals in the Jewish religion. The Jewish festivals are calculated based on the lunar calendar so the dates for festivals change from year to year. Most festivals are considered holy days and follow similar rules, restrictions and modes of celebration as Shabbat.**

For a list of the dates of religiously significant Jewish holidays over the next few years refer to [www.hebcal.com/holidays/](http://www.hebcal.com/holidays/).

### **Rosh Hashana - New Year (September/October)**

This is a two-day festival commemorating the start of the Jewish New Year and celebrated by prayers at synagogue and by festive family meals. Both days of this festival have similar restrictions as Shabbat described above.

### **Yom Kippur - Day of Atonement (September/October)**

Yom Kippur is considered the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. It is a day like Shabbat as well as being a total fast: The 25 hour period from sunset to sunset is spent in prayer at synagogue. This day is almost universally observed by all Jews to various degrees and hence has earned the reputation as being the holiest day of the year.

### **Succot (Tabernacles), Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah (September/October)**

This is a nine-day festival celebrating the travels of the Jewish nation in the desert en-route to Israel. During the first eight days of this festival, meals are eaten in an outdoor hut with covers made of tree branches called a *Succah*. The first and last two days of this festival follow similar rules and regulations of Shabbat.

### **Chanukah - Festival of Lights (December)**

Chanukah is an eight-day festival commemorating the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem many centuries ago. It is celebrated by lighting a nine-branched candelabra on each night of the festival. Chanukah customs include eating foods fried in oil such as *latkes* (potato pancakes) and doughnuts; playing with the *dreidel* (a spinning top) and the giving of gifts of money to children and charity.

### **Purim (February/March)**

Purim is a joyous festival commemorating an event in which the Jewish nation overcame the threat of annihilation. It is celebrated in four ways: reading the Scroll of Esther; giving out gifts of food; giving charity and a festive Purim meal. This day is also celebrated by dressing up in costumes and other celebratory festivities. Although the festival does not follow the rules and regulations of Shabbat, it is nevertheless a festive, family-oriented time when everyday work is generally not undertaken.

### **Pesach - Passover (March/April)**

Pesach is an eight-day festival celebrating the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage over three thousand years ago. Traditional to Pesach is the *Seder*, a festive meal, usually held in a family setting, incorporating many symbolic procedures emulating the Exodus. One of the major Pesach laws is not to eat nor retain in one's possession any leaven or leaven products such as bread instead to eat *matzah* - unleavened bread during the *Seder*. The weeks leading up to Pesach involve intensive preparations. The first and last two days of this festival follow similar rules and regulations of Shabbat in which prayer services are held and various works are forbidden.



### **Shavuot - Pentecost (May/June)**

Shavuot is a 2-day festival celebrated 7 weeks after the 2nd day of Pesach, commemorating the giving of the Torah, the written and the oral law to the Jewish Nation on Mount Sinai. During this festival, dairy meals are eaten and greenery is placed around the house and at the synagogue. Families go to a synagogue to hear a reading of the Ten Commandments which encapsulate the essence of Torah. Both days of this festival follow the same rules and regulations of Shabbat, when prayer services are held and various forms of work is forbidden.

### **Tisha B'Av (July/August)**

On the ninth (Tisha) of the Hebrew month of Av, the first and second Jewish temples in Jerusalem were destroyed. Due to the centrality of the temples in Judaism a day of national mourning was instituted. Men and women fast in similar fashion to Yom Kippur but the prevailing mood is one of deep sadness and introspection on how we can improve our deeds to merit the rebuilding of the temple.

## Minor Fasts

The Jewish calendar has many minor fast days. These fast days commemorate various tragedies and near tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people throughout the generations. On these days people will abstain from both food and drink from before sunrise until after sunset. Accordingly, this can affect the ability of some participants to focus. So despite there not being any of the restrictions on work or travel that are associated with Shabbat and the major Jewish holidays, it is recommended that providers avoid running educational programs on minor fast days.

For a list of specific dates over the next few years refer to minor fasts on [www.hebcal.com/holidays/](http://www.hebcal.com/holidays/).

## Lifecycle Events

In addition to formal Jewish festivals, the Jewish lifestyle is replete with significant lifecycle events. So strong is the sense of community, that such events are considered not only a cause for celebration by the immediate family but indeed by all members of the community, who will often participate in or contribute to the celebration in one way or another.

- *Brit* (Circumcision) – Celebratory event on 8th day after birth of a baby boy, usually held in synagogue after morning prayers
- *Pidyan ha Ben* – Celebration marking 30 days after the birth of a first born baby boy

- *Bar Mitzvah* (boy) or *Bat Mitzvah* (girl) – Celebration marking 13th birthday of a boy and 12th birthday of a girl
- Weddings – Weddings are the highlight events of the Jewish community. Jewish weddings can be held any day, excluding the Sabbath or Jewish festivals.

## Death and Mourning

Respect for the dead and those in mourning is considered one of the greatest duties in Judaism. Every effort is made for burial to take place speedily, so as to return the body to the earth as soon as possible after the soul has departed. When a member of the community passes away, even those outside the immediate family circle may find themselves called upon to participate in “escorting the dead”; absenting themselves from other commitments with little or no notice.

Following the funeral, immediate family members will sit “*shiva*”, a seven day mourning period, gathering together in a house of mourning (usually in the home of a member of the deceased’s family), where prayers are held and where visitors come to pay their respects. During this seven day period, members of the immediate family circle will abstain from all work and activity outside the home.

## Kosher Food/ Kashrut

The word ‘*kosher*’ is a Hebrew word that means ‘befitting’ and when used in reference to food, it refers to food which is befitting for a Jewish person to eat. The Torah provides instructions about special dietary laws that apply to Jewish people - foods that may or may not be eaten and how food needs to be prepared. At a high level only certain types of animals, birds and fish may be eaten. For example, only fish with fins and scales may be consumed. Beef, veal and chicken may be eaten if they have been slaughtered in accordance with the laws of kashrut. Pork, on the other hand, may not be eaten at all, nor any other animal not slaughtered under Rabbinical Supervision.

The laws of kashrut apply not only to food but also to dishes and utensils. Jewish law also states that certain foods must not be cooked or eaten together. Meat and milk must never be mixed together at any time. So a kosher kitchen will have separate dishes, cooking areas and appliances; one lot for preparing dishes containing meat and one lot for dairy foods.

Commercial foods require certification from a recognised kashrut authority that they have been prepared according to the detailed requirements of kashrut. They may either be identified as kosher by a kosher certification label or by their inclusion on a kashrut list. Typically, Ultra-Orthodox Jews will follow the guidance of their own community Rabbi who will advise them on the kashrut authority in which he personally has confidence. This can cause confusion because food that is labelled as kosher does not always mean that it is of

the standard required by a particular individual or community. The easiest approach may be to consult with the group or individual you are servicing before offering, preparing or buying food of any description. To avoid an uncomfortable situation - if food is purchased, it should not be opened but rather be made available to the group whilst still sealed in its original packaging. Similarly with cutlery and crockery, it is simplest to offer disposable paper/plastic plates, plastic cups and cutlery. Offering these in their packaging would not be viewed in a negative light.



The preceding sections may help to highlight why traditional learning delivery methods and environments need adaptation for the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish community. The following section outlines areas where accommodation can be made in order to ensure that training provision is as accessible as possible.

### Classroom Structure (gender) and Learning Content

Classes and courses should be delivered by the same gender group to single gender groups, i.e. either all-male or all-female classes.

Content, course material and assessment tasks need to be tailored in consideration of the following:

- Literacy skill levels
- Limited exposure to secular education and popular culture
- Modesty in course language and content
- Home environment - since most Ultra-Orthodox men and women may live in crowded situations with a lot of distractions, it may affect their ability to complete home assessments on time.

NB: this does not imply that the content should be “dumbed down” but rather adjusted for cultural and religious sensitivities.

### Wearing Appropriate Dress for Teaching staff

Teachers should be dressed in appropriately modest clothing: Men should ideally wear pants and a shirt, and women should wear knee length skirts (or longer) with a high-cut neck top and long or three-quarter length sleeves. Tight-fitting clothing should be avoided where possible.

### Timetabling (days, time of day, holy days)

Recommended scheduling:

Monday-Friday:  
Schedule during normal business hours and avoid programs on Friday afternoons.

Sunday-Thursday:  
Evening sessions from 7:00pm-9:30pm may be well received.

Jewish Festivals:

Avoid sessions on Jewish festivals; give consideration for days leading up to festivals as well. Either avoid sessions on the days immediately prior or make allowances for an earlier finish time.

### Access - Location

For greater uptake, classes should be located in the municipalities of Glen Eira, Bayside and Port Phillip, preferably closer to main community areas such as Ripponlea or St Kilda East.



### Technology

- When computers are made available they should be in a centralised setting and screens clearly visible for third parties
- Computers need to have unfavourable content restricted. This can be achieved by “locking down” browsers with filters and previewing websites to be utilised during course delivery
- The community has a technology volunteer group called TAG, the Technology Awareness Group, which may be contacted for assistance in setting up appropriate filters for training purposes.  
Email: themelbournetag@gmail.com

### Catering

- Only kosher food can be provided
- All raw, uncut fruit or vegetables are acceptable
- Disposable cutlery and crockery is recommended
- Tea and coffee-making facilities can be provided, confirm with a participant that the tea, coffee and milk is acceptably kosher
- List of caterers who can assist with morning-tea or lunch requirements:

Phone: (03) 9532 9000  
catering@eshel.com.au

Phone: (03) 9555 3255  
catering@kosherclassique.com.au

Phone: (03) 9523 6614  
www.spotoncafe.com



If you'd like more information or wish to discuss your needs, please contact us:

Jewish Care (Victoria) Inc  
619 St Kilda Road  
Melbourne Victoria 3004

Telephone: (03) 8517 5999  
Email: [info@jewishcare.org.au](mailto:info@jewishcare.org.au)  
[www.jewishcare.org.au](http://www.jewishcare.org.au)



### Our Values

תּוֹנ *chesed kindness*  
משפּחה *mishpacha family*  
דֶרֶךְ אֶרֶץ *derech erez respect*  
צְדָקָה *tzedakah charity*



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