



GCSE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES B

8063/2Y: Perspectives on Faith (Judaism)

Report on the Examination

8063

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General comments

As with last year's exam, there was a wide range in performance. Responses from the most able students displayed impressive maturity. Their answers revealed a profound level of understanding and sophisticated skills of analysis and evaluation. Equally gratifying was the genuine attempt made by many less able students to tackle all or most of the questions. The question that proved the most challenging was 1.4, the question on the Shekhinah. Almost 16% of students did not attempt this.

Many students started their answers to 1.5 and 2.5 by telling the examiner what they were going to write about in their answers, ie they were going to argue 'for' the statement, then they were going to give points disagreeing with it and then finally come to a conclusion. Some also wrote a sentence at the end of each paragraph, stating that this showed agreement or disagreement with the statement. This does not add to the quality of a response. Centres might wish to discourage these practices to enable better use of examination time.

One major issue this year was the frequency of Christian content in students' answers to a wide range of questions. Sometimes it was a brief reference, eg Jews going to the synagogue for Mass. Often, however, development of points could not be credited because it consisted of reference to the life and teaching of Jesus. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus occurred fairly often in answers to both 1.3 and 1.5. Some students included secular arguments in their AO2 answers. These are not usually relevant on the religions papers.

Another major issue was handwriting. Students with virtually illegible handwriting penalise themselves as sometimes key words cannot be deciphered. This may affect marks for content. Assessment of SPaG may sometimes also be affected, as although handwriting is not one of the criteria, it can be very difficult to make an accurate judgement on spelling and punctuation. Some students would certainly have benefitted from access to a computer or a scribe.

One final general point concerns the use of additional pages. Some students who used these wrote their answers to both papers, ie Judaism and either Themes or Textual Studies on the same sheet. Please would centres remind students not to do this. They should use separate additional pages for the two papers they take.

Question 1: Beliefs

1.1 was answered correctly by almost all students. Those who answered incorrectly mostly opted for 'mitzvah'.

The question on the covenant with Abraham (1.2) proved to be more challenging. Many students confused it with the Sinai covenant. A wide range of points was creditable, as all accounts of covenants made with Abraham were included in the mark scheme. Circumcision, which was often given as an answer, was not credited as this was not one of the 'promises that God made'. Depending on the interpretation of it, circumcision was either a condition or a seal of the Abrahamic covenant.

The question on beliefs about life after death (1.3) was answered very well by most students. 'Contrasting beliefs' did not have to be opposing beliefs, though most approached the question in this way. There was some confusion of Sheol with Purgatory. Some answers also related to mourning customs rather than to beliefs about life after death.

The question that was least well answered on the paper was 1.4. Many students did not understand the concept of Shekhinah. Some thought it was an object, often confusing it with the Ark of the Covenant. Others thought it referred to the Messiah. There were, however, some excellent responses. Those who referred to Moses' experience of the burning bush (Exodus 3), to the pillar of cloud and fire accompanying the Israelites at the Exodus (Exodus 14), to the connection of the Shekhinah with the tabernacle (Exodus 33) or to Isaiah's vision in the Temple (Isaiah 6) easily picked up all 5 marks. Some students linked it to the ner tamid in the synagogue. Several students pointed out that the Hebrew word 'Shekinah' is grammatically feminine, and they commented on the possible significance of this.

There were some interesting responses to 1.5. A very common quotation was 'love your neighbour', though often it was cited as one of the Ten Commandments. For the most part, however, students did attempt to show that quotation's relevance to the question. Some pointed out that kindness is one of the key moral principles. Many students considered justice, healing the world and saving life, sometimes as covered by the idea of kindness, sometimes as an alternative view of a Jew's most pressing duty. Some students contrasted the first four with the final six of the Ten Commandments, often seeing the latter as exemplification of kindness and the former as giving the key priority for Jews. They contrasted the duty of kindness with the duty to worship God, as seen in honouring the Sabbath. Many less able students were able to produce Level 2 responses and some were awarded Level 3, giving reasonable development of a range of views. There were, however, a significant number of responses that referred to the life and teaching of Jesus and this sometimes affected the Level that was awarded. There were also some less effective responses relating to kindness in very general terms. These rarely moved beyond Level 1 in attainment.

Question 2: Practices

2.1 was answered correctly by the majority of students who knew the meaning of 'Kosher'.

There was fairly wide misreading of 2.2. A significant number of students wrote answers that referred to the Torah rather than the Tenakh, but since the Tenakh contains the Torah, many of these responses could still receive credit. Relatively few students referred to the different types of literature contained in the Tenakh. Some students struggled to give two reasons and simply repeated the first using different words.

One of the best answered questions was 2.3. Apart from those who confused it with Brit Milah, students were often able to give two developed points about the influence of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony on a Jewish boy's life. For the development mark to be awarded, the focus had to be on influence. Those who simply described elements of the ceremony gained at most only 2 marks.

Surprisingly, almost 14% of students did not attempt 2.4. Possibly they did not understand the word 'ritual', although it is a word used in the specification, but the rest of the question should have enabled them to work out what was required. Timing did not seem to be the issue, since almost all students attempted 2.5. The stamping on the glass, the chuppah and the ketubah were the rituals most often chosen for explanation. There were two main weaknesses in the answers given. The first was that there were many references to promising to stay together 'until death do us part'. The Christian ceremony was clearly in mind. The other weakness was that few answers included an appropriate reference to scripture. The most common of the relevant references was that which related to leaving father and mother and becoming one flesh. This was often tied into the practice of yichud (the couple spending a short time of privacy together before the start of the wedding feast).

The final question (2.5) was answered very well by many students, though some lost the focus of the question and wrote about the advantages of worship in the home as opposed to the synagogue, or about whether the separation of women from men in Orthodox synagogues was an act of discrimination. Most students referred to a range of ways in which the synagogue was used for community activities. A number also understood the significance of the word 'shul', which is the name given by many Orthodox Jews to the synagogue. A few students wrote of the importance of the synagogue as giving security and the ability to be open about and share one's faith. Many responses were awarded Level 4.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.