



Is *She* or Isn't *She*?

Jew-spotting. We all do it, to some degree. We all know what points to make. Some have a desperate urge to know *immediately* when they meet someone Jewish or not? Sometimes I drop in key words – Golders Green, Woody Allen – to see if I get a reaction. It's a code, right?

The latest pressing concern amongst my friends – apart from resurgent dinner-party antisemitism, and the question of Michael Howard's mother's footwear (little gold slippers, supposedly) – is 'Is Roman Abromovich Jewish?' Until we had an answer, the jury was truly out: some felt *too flashy*, others liked the idea of an informal ethnic association with his evident success.

I once had a job where I had a five-year conversation with a work colleague, a New York Jew, hinging on the question: is Rhoda Jewish? Rhoda was the Business Development Director. Forties, blonde, well turned out, serious case of the sparkly-clothes gene. Suddenly get an urgent call to attend a wedding? Just need to re-apply lipstick, and she's there.

The Out Jews in the office mulled over the question. Are there any non-Jews called Rhoda? Unlikely – point to us. Does she take the day off on Yom Kippur? Carefully arranged observations tell us no – point to her. Overdressed every day? Point to us.

Eventually events conspired to inform us. Her mother was dying. Someone mentioned to me that the biggest collective managerial concern was what was going to happen when she died; the fact that Rhoda's mother was Jewish obviously meant that the funeral would be held the next day.

A friend of mine, his boss whispers under his breath as they arrive at every meeting, *unzerer*. He's in property. Of course, occasionally he has to whisper *nisht unzerer*. This is the same friend, incidentally, who believes that the *Jewish Chronicle* would be a lot easier to read if all the news was reported on a good-for-the-Jews bad-for-the-Jews basis.

After I'd been in business for a while, I felt an urge to explore the oak-panelled halls of the longstanding British institutions. I set myself the challenge of infiltrating the Establishment.

I had a gezillion interviews. OK, eight. (Point to me – prone to exaggeration. No one in my family has ever been ill, they've been desperately ill. It doesn't rain, it pours. My childhood marched to the beat of Oh!!

Careful! Terrible!) But I digress (another point to me).

In my fourth interview I go into a meeting room, followed by the interviewer. It's posh, *Englischer*, china teacups and individually wrapped biscuits. Mine host offers to be mother; I accept. 'With milk?' he asks. I say no. 'Just had a meat meal?' he replies. I say no, actually I just don't drink milk. Of course lactose intolerance is another sure sign, but he didn't know that. Even so, he gets the prize for the most obscure hello-I'm-Jewish gesture.

When I finally get the job, he takes me to one side. Dressed in his pinstripe suit and braces and Pink's shirt and what-ho accent he *passes* very well. I imagine that when he gets home to Stanmore of an evening he puts the accent back in the collar-stud box and talks like a regular person.

'We're very excited about having you on board. Very entrepreneurial. Very . . . dynamic. Very, er, straight-talking. All terrific, of course, but it would be good if we, er, weren't so upfront about being' – he drops his voice to the hushed tones generally reserved for discussing terminal illness – *'Jewish'*.

I've developed the concept for a new technology which could change the face of *Yiddisher* smalltalk. A utility that you can download to your handheld/PDA gadgetry, JewishGeography v2.3. It works like this: when you meet someone new, you beam your Palms at each other, it merge-purges your address books, and comes up with the 36 people you know in common. You then work through them, in alphabetical order, saving a huge amount of wasted time on people you don't actually both know. Of course, there's the perennial multiple Jonny Cohen/David Levy problem: is that the Raincoat Cohens or the Deli Cohens? JGv2.3 has a website version-controlling these multiple personalities: JonnyCohenUK23. Simple.

Are there any prizes to be had? I think the challenge is balancing the fun of working out the *landsleit*-status of everyone you meet with being comfortable with who you really are. Now tell me, how many points do you get for that?