

HOW TO SURF THE WEB AS A GOOD REFORM JEW

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www.google.com is your best friend and your worst enemy. When searching for Jewish resources on the internet it is important to remember that anyone has the power to create a website which you may stumble across. And religious groups, organisations (both legitimate and illegitimate) and individuals have posted many pages of information which you may arrive at as a result of your search. There are therefore a number of important rules to remember when using the internet to search for Jewish resources.

SIX RULES FOR SAFE SURFING:

- **Rule Number 1:** Use known or recommended websites It is good to build up a list of websites which you use as a first port of call when searching for Jewish material on the internet. While a Google search may be the quickest way of finding a large number of resources, it is always better to go to websites which you know and trust. In this way it is worth checking the websites of organisations which you already have a relationship with, or which have been recommended to you by members of the synagogue staff.

Some examples: Searching for general Jewish material: www.myjewishlearning.com
Searching for specifically Reform Jewish information: www.urj.org. Searching for information about a figure in Jewish history: www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org. However, sometimes the websites which you know, and which have been recommended will not provide you with the information you require.

- **Rule Number 2:** Check who funds/runs the website. Most websites with information about Jewish resources will have a page which either includes about the organisation whose website it is, or about the organisation which funds the website. If it mentions organisations which you are aware of, for or good or for bad, that will give you an indication of the agenda which the website represents and where it falls on the Jewish spectrum. Alternatively the website may make mention of organisations or individuals who have funded it, which will also provide you with information about any agendas.

Some examples: If you end up on www.weeklydvar.com you will find that the author is Orthodox. If you find your way to www.moshiach.com you will see that the site has links with Luibavitch.

- **Rule Number 3:** Who are the Rabbis writing for the site A lot of the Jewish websites will have a section which includes a list of the Rabbis who contribute to the site. In these cases it is worth checking where the Rabbis studied to discover whether the website represents a plurality of Jewish opinions or one specific stream. If there are no women Rabbis represented it is likely that the website has some form of orthodox affiliation. It may also be worth checking if this Rabbi has connections to any groups or organisations (one example is that the person may have spoken at a Limmud conference) which have a pluralist Jewish agenda.

Some examples: If you visit www.askmoses.com and look at their Rabbis it is clear that most of their Rabbis are linked to Chabad-Lubavitch. If you are on www.jewish.com you will see that the Rabbis come from a variety of Jewish religious streams.

- **Rule Number 4:** Look at what websites are included on the links page Websites will most often link to other websites which they have a relationship with, or with which they share some sort of agenda. In this way by looking at the links included on the website you may be able to gain some indication of what Jewish perspective and

voice is being represented on the website. If you see it linking to other organisations which you have a relationship with, it should be a good indication that this is a good website for you to use.

Some examples: When looking at the links from www.myjewishlearning.com there are websites representing organisations and denominations across the Jewish spectrum.

- **Rule Number 5:** What is the tone of the website. When visiting a website it is important to approach it with a critical eye before trusting what is included on it. In this way it is important to consider the tone of the website from the outset. Does it make reference to the various denominations within Judaism, if so is this done in a way which is open-minded or negative towards one or other stream. Judging these elements of a website will provide an indication of its author's perspective. With the tone in mind it is also important to consider the references it makes to various elements of Jewish life, and what this reveals about the possible agenda it may have.

Some examples: When reading an article: 'Get me to the Church on time' on www.aish.com it becomes clear that the article has a very clear anti-Reform tone.

- **Rule Number 6:** What references are there to the Messiah/Saviour Quite often when searching for Jewish subject matter through a search engine such as google you will be directed to a website which is associated with some form of missionary activity towards Jews. Often these websites have an agenda which suggests that it is possible to be Jewish and worship Jesus at the same time. If the website makes reference to Jesus and the idea that the Jewish saviour has come then you should be wary.

Some examples: If you find your way to www.beth-messiah.com you will find lots of references to Jesus and the Messiah and the fact that this is a group which believes Jesus is the Messiah (they are therefore Christians and not Jews). If you visit www.messianic.com you will see that it is for Jews who follow Yeshua (Jesus).