

# Worldviews and the Pan Berkshire Syllabus Saga

Rebbetzin Dr Shira Batya Lewin Solomons

[Shira@JCoB.org](mailto:Shira@JCoB.org)

Managing Director, JCoB Education Ltd

[Schools.JCoB.org/](http://Schools.JCoB.org/)

Community Director, Jewish Community of Berkshire

[JCoB.org](http://JCoB.org)

[shirabatya.substack.com](http://shirabatya.substack.com)



# The Problem

- New syllabus for Autumn 2025
- Six Councils. Joint Syllabus
- Major problems with new syllabus
- Problems come directly from “Religion and Worldviews” framework
- All Berkshire Jewish reps objected to the syllabus. Orthodox and Reform Jews united.
- Forced me to look into the Worldviews movement.
- Is Worldviews really a step forwards compared to what we were doing?

# How to Respond

1. **Not a fringe syllabus.** RE advisors not fringe individuals.  
Mistakes are likely to be repeated in other syllabi.  
One of primary authors is now in a very high position in NATRE.
2. If Worldviews is unstoppable, **how to maintain the integrity of Judasim RE?**

## Why Worldviews is a problem for RE Judaism

1. Teaching religions as cohesive entities is “old-fashioned” or “reductive”.  
Promotion of “messy” RE.
2. Limited class hours, especially for Judaism.  
Students may end up knowing nothing coherent about us.  
That is dangerous.

# Not the whole story

This is a short 20 minute presentation. Not the whole story.

Apologies in advance for information overload. A very complex Problem.

Detailed seminar on Sunday 7:30pm, with time for discussion.

Email [SHIRA@JCOB.ORG](mailto:SHIRA@JCOB.ORG)

Recording will be made available for those who cannot attend.

# Berkshire Syllabus Story 1

June 2024: new [proposed syllabus](#) circulated among the six SACREs in Berkshire  
Based on the new “Religion and Worldviews” framework.

Jewish and Hindu representatives in Berkshire had major concerns with the proposal.

1. focus on propositional belief (like Scientific claims)  
no mention of faith as faith (believing in rather than believing that a fact is true)  
Does not work for Judaism or Hinduism: not sets of viewpoints but ways of life, belonging.
2. Neglect of group identity / belonging  
Backwards step compared to believing / behaving / belonging.
3. Judaism content ignored completely advice from Judaism reps
4. Activities encouraged students to make judgments about the beliefs of others  
Years 5 and 6 in which instructed to rank beliefs by “how reasonable” or “how likely”  
Cardinal rule of RE: We are not judging the beliefs of others.
5. Teaching students to conduct surveys to gather “data” – like little sociologists.

## Berkshire Syllabus Story 2: “Consultation”

- Hindus and Jews sent documents outlining our concerns in June / July.
- Worked together and recommended more appropriate key questions consistent for Judaism and Hinduism that worked for all faiths.
- Meeting with RE advisors in July, detailing our many concerns.
- Thought this would be the first of several meetings. Hoped to arrive at a consensus syllabus.
- RE advisors could not understand that we are subject experts on our own religions.  
(Note: All four Judaism reps in Berkshire are also educators.)
- Assured verbally that our recommended Judaism content and our recommended key questions would be adopted.
- Final [draft](#) of the syllabus in September. Informed it could no longer be revised.  
Syllabus pushed through the ASC meetings in the autumn including Reading where it was approved without the support of Group A. (mess)

# Berkshire Syllabus Story 3: Radical Changes

Some improvements in the final draft. Ranking of beliefs was removed. **BUT**

1. Judaism content radically changed without consulting us.
2. Key questions (the ones we recommended) used for other religions but not for Judaism  
Key questions for Judaism are inferior to those for other religions.
3. Removing all mention of “Israel”, including removing the term “Children of Israel”
4. Shifting the focus of KS1: excessive focus on Abraham.  
We had requested the story of how we came to be called the Children of Israel.  
Reverting to a focus on a founding individual (World Religions Paradigm).  
No other minor religion was treated this way, only Judaism.
5. UKS2 focus shifted to the difference between movements in Judaism
  - Almost no time allocated to learning substantive Judaism.
  - Directly against the wishes of Jewish reps. We felt that differences between movements are not important, should be raised only as relevant to avoid stereotyping because *limited time*
  - No other religion was treated this way (emphasising what divides people rather than what unites them)

# Berkshire Syllabus Story 4: Jews Don't Count

- We objected but were over-ruled as “no time”. Syllabus was forced through.
- Two meeting set for yom tov.  
Meeting on Rosh Hashanah cancelled last minute after BoD intervened!
- Atmosphere that Jews do not count.  
We are not experts in our own religion and should defer to the “experts”
- One advisor even hinted that we should keep shtum as otherwise Judaism might be taken out of the syllabus completely.
- Remember, this is not a fringe syllabus.  
One syllabus author is now top of NATRE.
- We were told that this syllabus was standard, based on the “Worldviews” framework.
- Whole experience left us very upset. Left me feeling physically sick.



# Origin of Worldviews

## Post-Modern Critique of World Religions Paradigm:

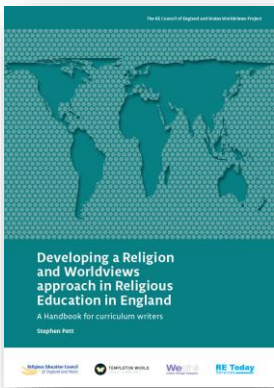
- World Religions Paradigm  
treated religions as self-contained, sometimes stagnant, **belief systems**
- Religions and religion are colonialist concepts (based on power) **“Decolonise RE”**

## Ninian Smart (1980s)

- Major figure in the World Religions paradigm.
- 1. Stop trying to define religion (because all definitions are reductive)
- 2. “Worldviews” – concept to include both religions and nonreligions that are like religion
- Phenomenology: Observe characteristics of religions. Don’t define them.
- Many dimensions of religion, all **centred around beliefs**, viewpoints. Thus religions are **worldviews**.
- Avoid narratives. “dispassionate study”

Note some key features of 'world religions' questions:

- the focus tends to be on the communication of information, transmitting a form of settled knowledge ('textbook' information)
- they tend to be abstract and context-free, as if there are answers that might apply universally
- the answers may contain diversity, but the implication is that there is a form of correct answer.



Handbook p.63 © REC

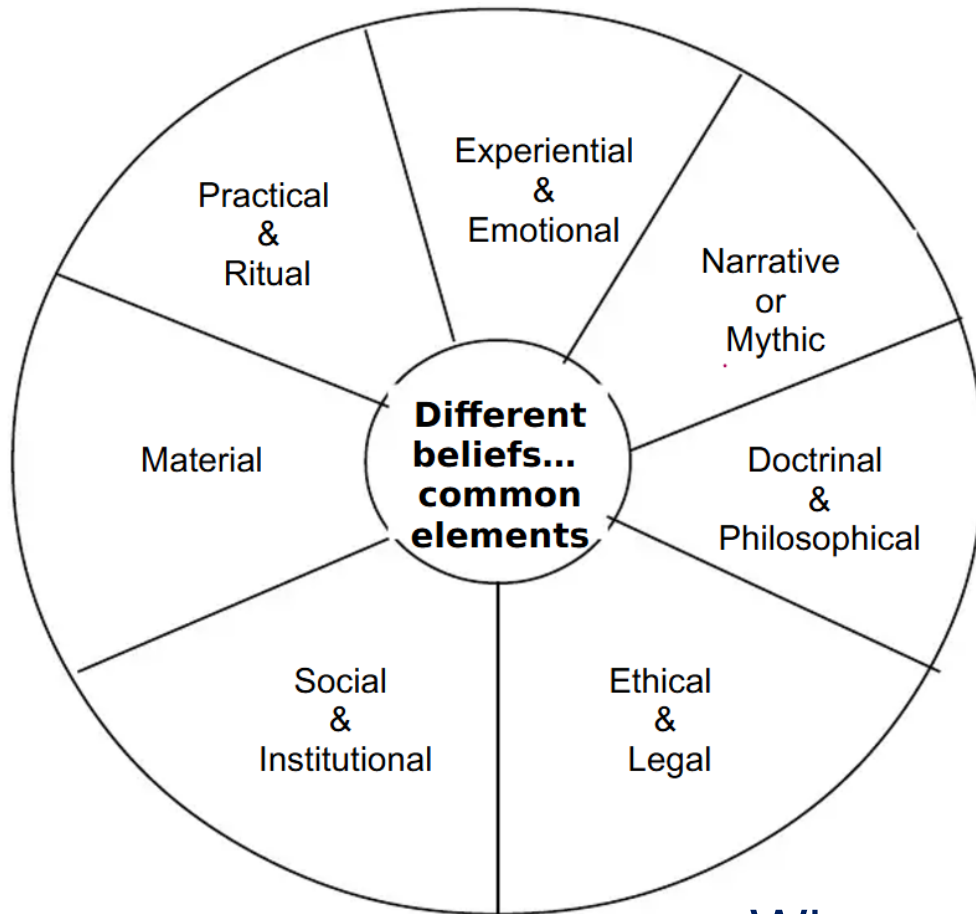
A religion and worldviews approach is looking more for questions that:

- include an **interpretive element** (e.g. how do *these people* understand and apply *this*?)
- offer a **clear context** (e.g. how do *these two people/groups* respond at *an identified time and place*, and why?)
- recognise that there are **different answers that are valid** (e.g. different individuals, groups, or traditions may have different responses, and these may change across time and place)
- include an **evaluative element**, recognising that different answers may be acceptable in different contexts.

Presentation by Angela Hill,  
Wokingham SACRE, June 2024

“The modern study of religion is about the last of these motives: **the systems of belief** which, through symbols and actions, mobilize the feelings and wills of human beings.”

-- Ninian Smart



# Ninian Smart

“The study of religions and secular worldviews – what I have termed “worldview analysis” – tries to depict the history and **nature of the beliefs and symbols** which form a deep part of the structure of human consciousness and society.” -- Ninian Smart

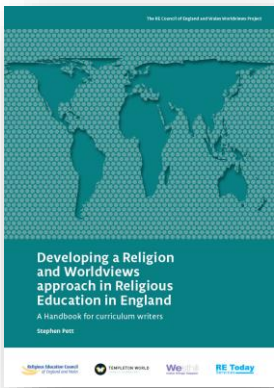
On scholars within religions: “**They are themselves part of the data.** Thus, though the **Pope** is the authority for Catholics, others may know more about religions, including Christianity, than he does. For example, **it is my job, as a religious scholar, to understand religion; it is his, as a religious leader, to be religion.**” (p. 4)

Who are the authorities now?

The scholars who study religion dispassionately!

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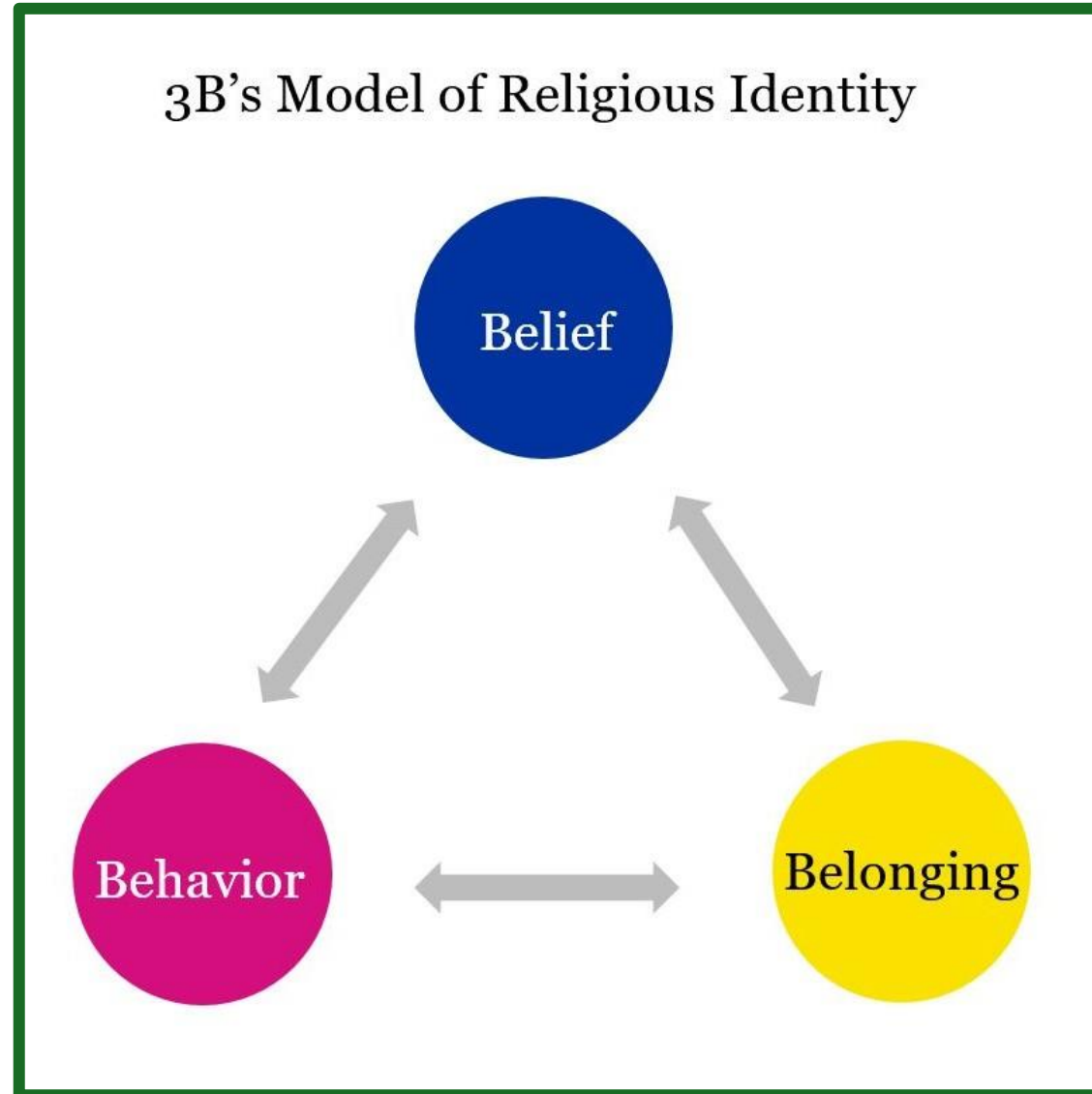
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# Believing / Behaving / Belonging

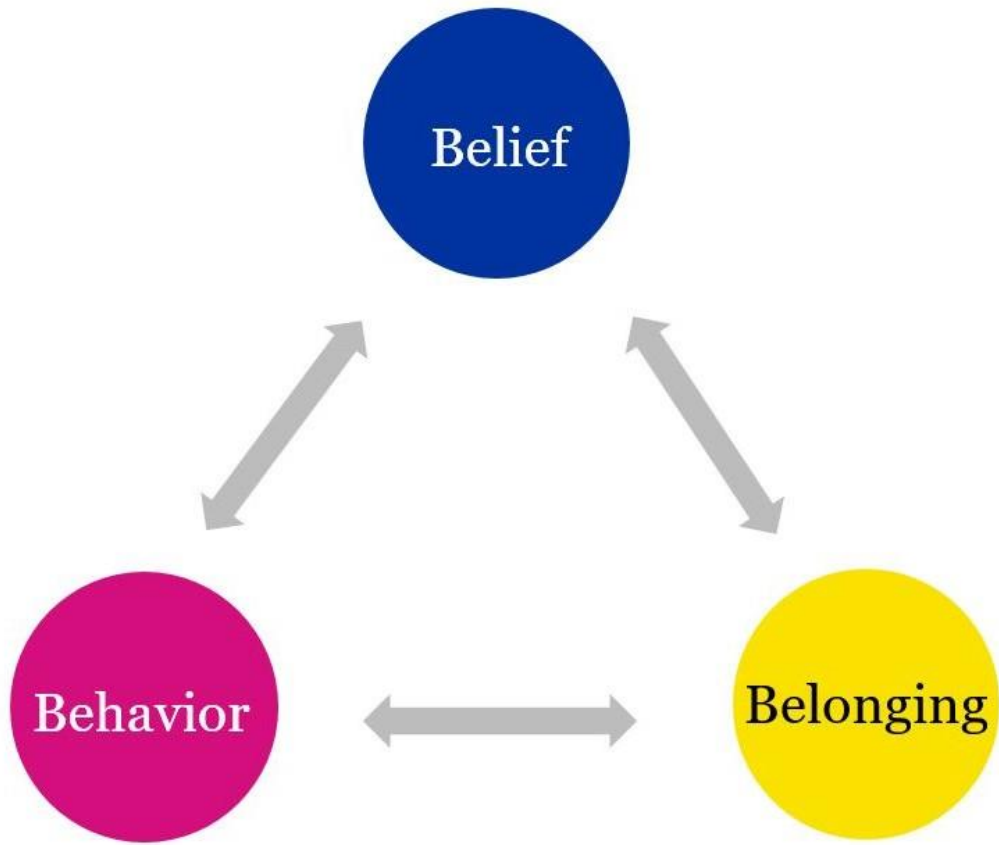
(2018-2023 Berkshire Syllabus)



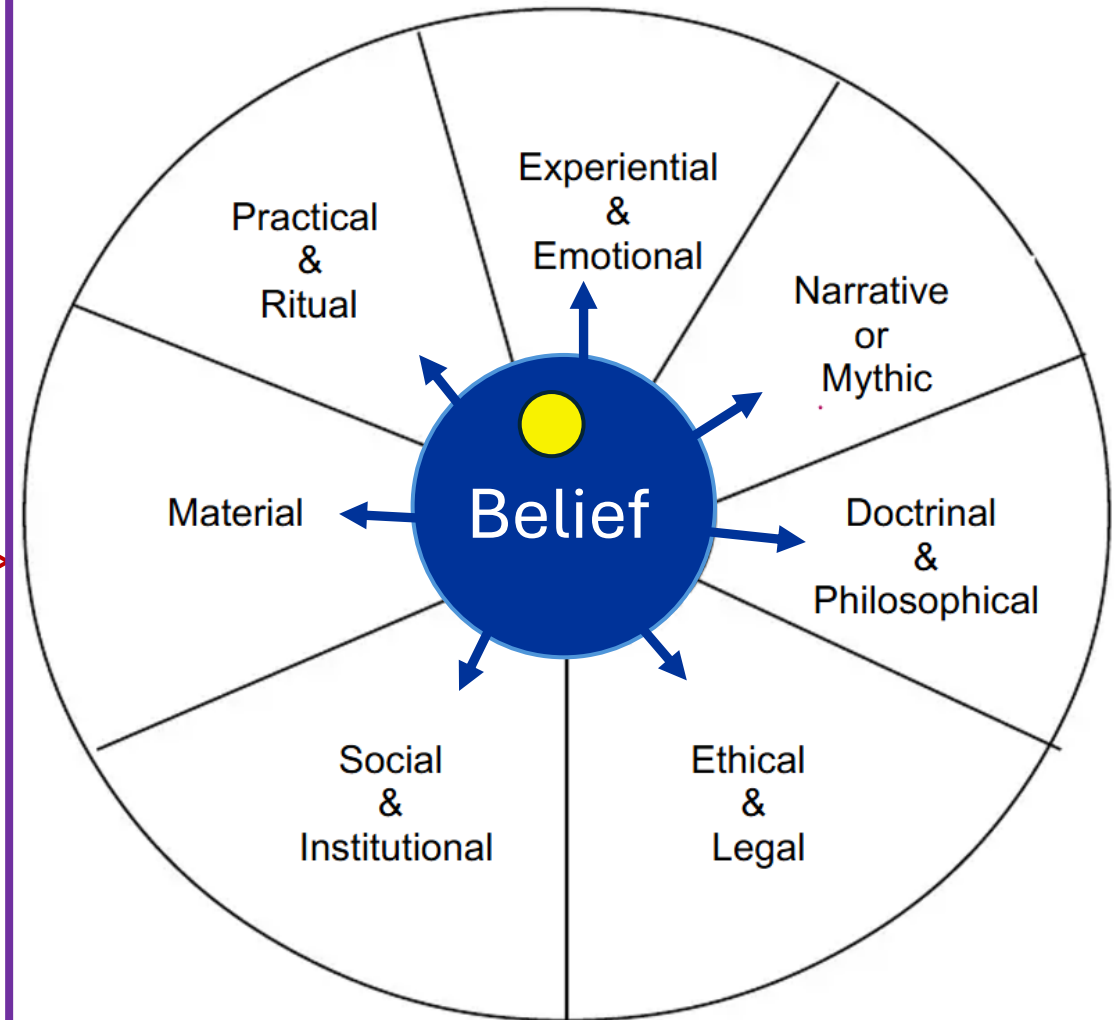
# Believing / Behaving / Belonging

(2018-2023 Berkshire Syllabus)

## 3B's Model of Religious Identity



# Worldviews



“Religious and other worldviews.... Because they are **views about the world** and about the whole of life...”  
-- Ninian Smart

# Worldviews Framework for RE 1

## Shift of focus

- from understanding religions as cohesive well-defined entities,
- to an academic subject that focuses on developing the “personal worldview” of students
- while they explore the complexity of how religious and nonreligious worldviews work

## 2018 CORE Report:

A **worldview** is a person’s way of understanding, experiencing and responding to the world. It can be described as a philosophy of life or an approach to life. This includes **how a person understands the nature of reality and their own place in the world**. A person’s worldview is likely to influence and be influenced by their beliefs, values, behaviours, experiences, identities and commitments.

**PROBLEM:** religions = worldviews = views = beliefs

What about those seven dimensions of religion?

**SOLUTION:** Divide the definition into two.



# Worldviews Framework for RE 2

SOLUTION: Divide the definition into two.

## (2024 RE Council Handbook)

A person's **personal worldview** describes and shapes how they encounter interpret, understand and engage with the world. A person may have a coherent and considered framework for answering questions about the nature of ultimate reality, knowledge, truth and ethics, or they may have never given such questions much thought – but they still have a worldview, including the **beliefs, convictions, values and assumptions** that influence and shape their thinking and living.

An **organised worldview** can be understood as a 'more or less coherent and established system with certain (written and unwritten) **sources, traditions, values, rituals, ideals, or dogmas**' (from van der Kooij et al. 2013).

**Does this fix things?**



# Personal Worldviews / Critical RE

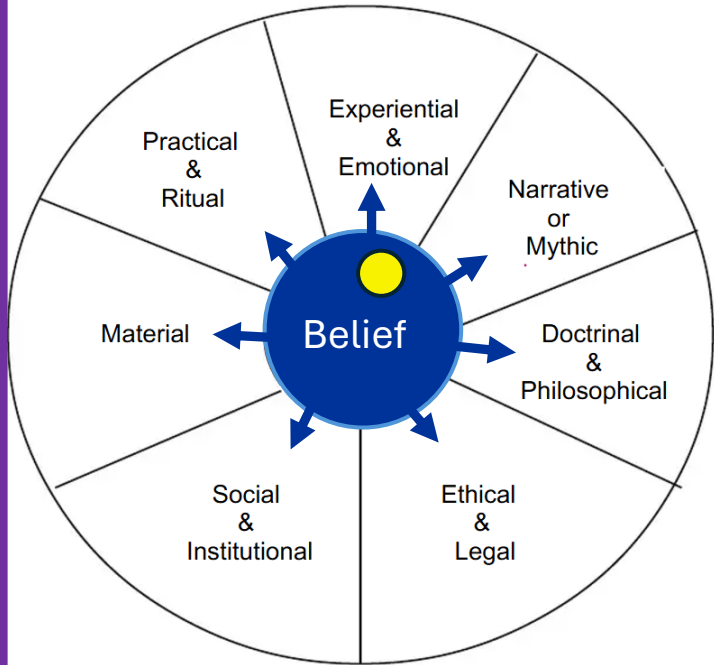
- **Worldview** now means more than one thing at once. No definition of worldview.
- *Are teachers expected to understand that organised worldviews are not views?*
- Most RE teachers have very little subject knowledge!
- **In practice, worldview is really being understood to mean view of the world.**
- This explains the focus on propositional beliefs.  
Removes the cardinal rule of RE that we do not engage in persuasion
- It is now all about developing the viewpoint of the child.
- **Personal worldview based on “critical RE”.** (ranking beliefs etc.)

# The Problem

- A. Worldviews has an inherent bias that treats belief (viewpoint) as primary.
- B. Focus on diversity that deconstructs religions and denies their coherent existence. It should be *up to us to decide* if our religion is being taught too reductively.
- C. False postmodern claim that you can avoid (1) narratives and (2) authority.
- D. This disproportionately affects religions such as Judaism because *limited time*.
  - You cannot teach without (1) narratives. You cannot teach without (2) authority.
  - Opportunism. Who gets to insert their priorities into RE?
  - RE to promote external narratives -- for example “white fragility” in “antiracist RE”

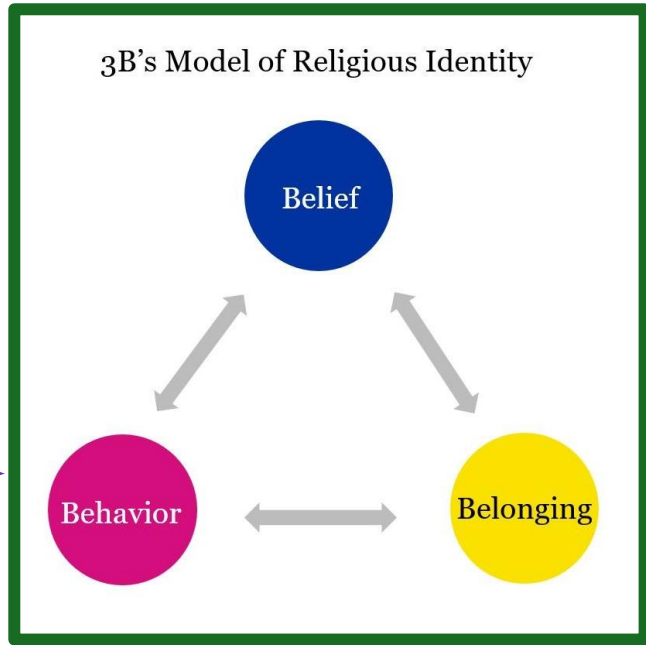
**Judaism is being recolonised in the name of decolonisation.**

# World Religions



- Christianity
  - Judaism
  - Islam
  - Hinduism
  - Sikhism
  - Budhism
- Theology**  
**Critical RE?**

# Believing / Behaving / Belonging



- Christianity
- Islam
- Judaism
- Hinduism
- Sikhism
- Budhism
- Humanism?

**Multiculturalism / Pluralism**

# Worldviews

**Personal worldview**

**Critical RE**

**"Decolonise RE"**

**How Worldviews Work / Sociology**

**Philosophy and Theology**

**"Everyone has a worldview."**

**"Lived experience" of the individual**

Debate / Politicised **Narratives**

**Authorities** on Religion and Worldviews

Christian Worldviews      Christianity?

Nonreligious Worldviews      Humanism

Muslim Worldviews      Islam?

Hindu Worldviews / Dharma

Jewish worldviews / Judaisms

Sikhi Worldviews / Dharma      Buddhist Worldviews



# What do we do?

- We need to control the narrative about Judaism.  
We need to be treated as authorities on Judaism.  
We need to be treated as real partners with syllabus authors, not as just data!
- Webinar on Sunday 7:30pm will look at this more slowly and in detail.
- SHIRA@JCOB.ORG

# Introducing the National Statement of Entitlement

Content	Engagement	Position
<p><b>a. Nature/formation/ expression</b> What is meant by worldview and how people’s worldviews are formed and expressed through a complex mix of influences and experiences</p> <p><b>b. Organised/individual</b> How people’s individual worldviews relate to wider, organised or institutional worldviews</p> <p><b>c. Contexts</b> How worldviews have contexts, reflecting time and place, are highly diverse, and feature continuity and change.</p> <p><b>d. Meaning and purpose</b> How worldviews may offer responses to fundamental questions raised by human experience</p> <p><b>e. Values, commitments and morality</b> How worldviews may provide guidance on how to live a good life</p> <p><b>f. Influence and power</b> How worldviews influence, and are influenced by, people and societies</p>	<p><b>g. Ways of knowing</b> The field of study of worldviews is to be explored using diverse ways of knowing.</p> <p><b>h. Lived experience</b> The field of study of worldviews is to include a focus on the lived experience of people</p> <p><b>i. Dialogue/interpretation</b> The field of study of worldviews is to be shown as a dynamic area of debate.</p>	<p><b>j. Personal worldviews: reflexivity</b> Pupils will reflect on and develop their personal worldviews in the light of their study.</p> <p><b>k. Personal worldviews: impact</b> Pupils will reflect on how their worldviews affect their learning</p>

‘ways of knowing’

personal knowledge

Presentation by Ed Pawson to Jewish SACRE reps, May 2024

substantive knowledge

# Introducing the National Statement of Entitlement

## Content

### a. **Nature/formation/ expression**

What is meant by worldview and how people's worldviews are formed and expressed through a complex mix of influences and experiences

### b. **Organised/individual**

How people's individual worldviews relate to wider, organised or institutional worldviews

### c. **Contexts**

How worldviews have contexts, reflecting time and place, are highly diverse, and feature continuity and change.

Belief,  
Sociology, Politics

### d. **Meaning and purpose**

How worldviews may offer responses to fundamental questions raised by human experience

### e. **Values, commitments and morality**

How worldviews may provide guidance on how to live a good life

### f. **Influence and power**

How worldviews influence, and are influenced by, people and societies

## Engagement

### g. **Ways of knowing**

The field of study of worldviews is to be explored using diverse ways of knowing.

Belief-focused

### h. **Lived experience**

The field of study of worldviews is to include a focus on the lived experience of people

Individual

### i. **Dialogue/interpretation**

The field of study of worldviews is to be shown as a dynamic area of debate.

Philosophy / Critical RE

## Position

### j. **Personal worldviews: reflexivity**

Pupils will reflect on and develop their personal worldviews in the light of their study.

### k. **Personal worldviews: impact**

Pupils will reflect on how their worldviews affect their learning

Individual / Critical RE

## An RW approach will:

Introduce pupils to the rich diversity of religion and non-religion, locally and globally, as a key part of understanding the world, what it means to be human, and how they might respond

Stimulate pupils' curiosity about, and interest in, this diversity of worldviews, both religious and non-religious

Expand upon how worldviews work, and how different worldviews, religious and non-religious, influence individuals, communities and society

Develop pupils' awareness that learning about worldviews involves interpreting the significance and meaning of information they study

Develop pupils' appreciation of the complexity of worldviews, and pupils' sensitivity to the nature of religious language and experience

Induct pupils into the academic processes and methods by which we can study religion and religious and non-religious worldviews

Enable pupils, by the end of their studies, to identify positions and presuppositions of different academic disciplines and their implications for understanding

Presentation by Angela Hill,  
Wokingham SACRE, June 2024

Give pupils opportunities to explore the relationship between religious and non-religious worldviews and literature, culture and the arts

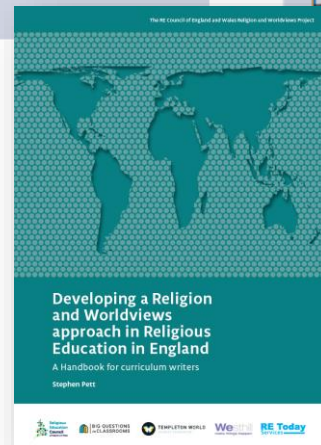
Include pupils in the enterprise of interrogating the sources of their own developing worldviews and how they may benefit from exploring the profound and complex religious and non-religious heritage of humanity

Give opportunities for pupils to consider how they might respond to the way the world is, and play a part in how they might want the world to be in the future

Provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on the relationship between their personal worldviews and the content studied, equipping them to develop their own informed responses in the light of their learning

Equip pupils with the knowledge, understanding and attributes to make scholarly and reflexive judgements about religion and worldviews

Prepare pupils for active citizenship as adults in a world where diversity of views on religion and worldviews is increasing.



Handbook p.27 © REC



# Using NSE to develop questions and construct units of work

Here are some examples of common questions explored in RE, in world religions paradigm mode

EYFS

- What happens at a wedding or when a baby is born?
- What happens at a festival?
- What can we learn from stories from different religions?

Presentation by Ed Pawson to  
Jewish SACRE reps, May 2024

KS1

- Why are some stories/places sacred?
- What festivals are important in Judaism and Islam?

LKS2

- What do different religions teach about God?
- What is the sacred text in Islam and how is it used?
- What do religious codes say about right and wrong?

UKS2

- What do Christians believe about Jesus?
- Why do people go on pilgrimage and what impact does it have?
- What are the key beliefs and values of Sikhism and how are these expressed in the Gurdwara?

KS3

- What does Islam/Hinduism teach about life after death?
- Is there a God? What and why do people believe?
- Are religions sources of peace or causes of conflict?



# A worldviews approach to questioning

Presentation by Ed Pawson to  
Jewish SACRE reps, May 2024

- EYFS
  - How do different people welcome a new baby into the world?
  - How do different people celebrate Christmas/Easter in our community? Around the world?
  - What stories are important in our school community?
- KS1
  - Why is the story of Rama and Sita special or sacred to Hindus in Britain and India, and what do they learn from it?
  - How do Jews/ Muslims in our area celebrate Hanukkah/Eid and why are they special times?
- LKS2
  - Where do Muslims/Christians find out about God, and do they all agree what God is like?
  - What role does the Torah play in the lives of at least three Jewish people, and why?
  - What is the 'golden rule', where is it from, and how is it put into practice by people from different religious and non-religious worldviews?
- UKS2
  - How and why does the life and teaching of Jesus influence the lives of Christians and their communities in different ways today?
  - What is the role and impact of the Gurdwara on the lives of Sikhs and on local communities in our area/Britain?
  - How far does Humanism function as an organised non-religious worldview?
- KS3
  - Who believes in life after death, who doesn't, and what difference does it make to how they live?
  - How have different Christians understood the idea of Jesus as God? How is Jesus viewed in other worldviews?
  - How and why have Christians, Muslims and/or Buddhists played a role in conflict and peace in the 21st Century?