

# Dissenting Orthodox Jew Izzy Posen to speak at Secularism 2019

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The National Secular Society is pleased to announce that Izzy Posen, who dissented from his strict upbringing in an ultra-Orthodox Jewish community, will speak at its Secularism 2019 conference.

Izzy, who will address the religious abuse of children's rights, is the sixth confirmed speaker for the [conference](#), which takes place on Saturday 18 May at The Tower Hotel in London. Tickets for the conference are [on sale now](#).

Izzy grew up in the Chasidic community and attended an illegal, unregistered school where corporal punishment was routinely used, particularly to silence children who asked questions. He is now president of Bristol University's Free Speech Society.

In an interview with [The Telegraph](#) he described his time at Talmud Torah Tashbar School, which he attended from the age of seven, as "child abuse".

"The worst aspect was definitely the hitting. I was cheeky so I was hit a lot. A wooden cooking spoon was always on the table and it was used daily."

He said the school was held in a "very run down" disused synagogue and his classroom for five years was a cloakroom with blacked out windows.

"Sitting for five years in the same classroom that is tiny and cramped – that is like sitting in a prison cell."

The school did not teach secular subjects and English was never spoken. He taught himself English at the age of 18 and is now a physics and philosophy student.

In an interview with the [BBC](#) last month he said: "I still identify as a Jew. I see lots of value in being Jewish and practising Jewish culture. I just don't believe in the religious claims."

"Leaving a very restrictive community is a very difficult thing. It's not an easy journey. But I would say it's worth it."

He also recently appeared on BBC Radio 4's [Sunday](#) programme and the [Godless Spellchecker](#) podcast.

NSS chief executive Stephen Evans said he was "very much looking forward to hearing from Izzy Posen".

"Izzy's remarkable story will shine a light on some of the shocking ways that unregistered schools deny children's rights and restrict opportunities to dissent. These details tend to be under-reported and we're very fortunate that someone so eloquent is willing to take the brave decision to speak out."

"His decision to attend our conference does a significant service to those whose lives are severely restricted by the unquestioning culture of some closed religious communities. His decision to teach himself English and secular subjects and become an advocate for free speech at university will also act as a source of inspiration."

Izzy will join a distinguished line-up of speakers including medical ethicist Dr Brian Earp, the lead commissioner for countering extremism Sara Khan, Gita Sahgal of the Centre for Secular Space and UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief Dr Ahmed Shaheed.

Rachel Laser, the CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, will deliver the keynote address.

The NSS is also running a podcast series, [Exploring Religious Freedom](#), in the run-up to the conference.

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## Secularism 2019: Reclaiming Religious Freedom

This conference will serve to highlight that true "religious freedom" means freedom of belief for people of all religions and none, and will also explore the limits of religious freedom when it impedes on other human rights, including bodily autonomy, equality and freedom of expression.

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