

There's no doubt that the Jewish people have enemies. But we don't need to seek extra ones. Nor do we have to respond to every inconvenience as if it's a crisis.

From the way in which some of our leaders or columnists are talking, it sounds as if Qantas is a newly paid-up member of the international anti-Jewish conspiracy. The airline's misdemeanour is to have formed an alliance with Emirates, and hence to route flights to Europe via Dubai. This is a commercial decision, which Qantas says will achieve the understandable aim of cutting costs, and yet some react as if it's an anti-Semitic attack.

For many, there will be no effect at all. The new arrangements will make no difference to those wishing to fly to Israel. We can still connect to an El Al flight, via a variety of stopovers in South-East Asia (since we are still waiting for the day when Israel's national airline can fly from the UAE itself). The perceived problem is that Israelis, or Australians with Israeli stamps in their passports, will find a cold welcome, or worse, when they make a transit stop in Dubai on their way to London or Paris.

I profess no special knowledge of the air travel industry, but if my experience is anything to go by, a stopover in Dubai is not scary at all.

In 2006, I was to be interviewed in Melbourne for a job and so my wife and I had to make what seemed like the vast trek from London. Emirates offered the cheapest and most convenient ticket and, after checking that previous visits to Israel would not pose a problem, and that kosher food would be available on board, we made the booking.

Despite the check-in assistant telling us that we would have to find another airline because of the passport issue (resolved by a quick word with the supervisor) and then telling us that the food was kosher, or rather "it's all Halal, which is the same thing" (another word with the supervisor, and insufficient time for a detailed instruction in the laws of kashrut to explain the error) there were indeed no issues on the very comfortable flight. The only clue that we were being hosted by representatives of the Arab world was the extra information on the "flight progress" screen, amidst the usual "time to destination" and "altitude" data, showing the direction of Mecca for those who wished to pray. If only El Al would provide such a service for its religious passengers!

Nevertheless we remained a little nervous anticipating our reception in Dubai itself but in the event, there was no need for concern. Despite all the discussion when booking the flight and again at the airport, not once during the entire transit process were the passports even inspected. There was no way anyone would have even known we were Jewish, apart from my kippah and tzitzit, or my wearing a tallit and tefillin and praying for half an hour in the middle of the departure lounge.

Dubai airport even provided a uniquely Jewish amenity. This was the during the first days of a total ban on hand luggage on all flights out of London and we could take into the cabin, and hence into the stopover, nothing other than the clothes on our backs. Amongst the many inconveniences that this created was the absence of a Talmud volume for my daily study. But the internet and printers in the airport came to my rescue, and I wondered if that was the first occasion that a page of Talmud had been printed in the UAE.

Thus Emirates provided a pleasant flight with all the necessary Jewish facilities, even to this regular visitor to Israel (and passing the job interview made the journey successful).

For some, Qantas's partnership with Emirates creates more problems than mere inconveniences. There may be issues of principle; some are understandably reluctant to patronise the national airline of a country that does not recognise Israel's existence. Others may fear serious disruption to their travel and therefore it would be preferable to have official confirmation that there is no ban on Israelis, or visitors to Israel, entering Dubai, as the ECAJ is requesting. Arrangements should be guaranteed in the event of a delay in transit and the need to leave the airport. It is likely that these concerns can be resolved by Qantas, inspired by the commercial sense of the two airlines, who obviously want to attract customers.

But these issues do not constitute an attack on Jews, or Israel. When there are enough real problems affecting our community and our homeland, it's to nobody's benefit to invent some more.