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Empathetic Guidelines for the Ethnographic Study of Jewish Children in Britain

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Ethnographic Research among Jewish Children

The study of Jewish communities, both of adults and children, by Jewish researchers is no new thing. The most recent numerical analysis by Schmool and Cohen (1991) of the state of British Jewry is a case in point. This is the most recent of a series of studies by the Research Department of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and seeks to explore the nature and size of Jewish communities in Britain. The distinction the authors adopted between households and individuals makes it difficult to gain a total picture of the numerical base of Anglo-Jewry, but the booklet contains a wealth of helpful detail of the respective proportions of the various sub-groups within the Jewish population.

The study of Jews by non-Jews is, however, a somewhat less common occurrence. Moreover, an examination of Jewish children that includes photography and the recording of their voices by non-Jews in home, school, shul (Yiddish for synagogue), and cheder (religion school) clearly calls for further explanation.

The current investigations that led to the writing of this article arise from the work of the Religious Education and Community Project in the Department of Arts Education of the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom. The Project currently features an ethnographic study which was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council from 1990-1993 and bears the reference number R000232489. Its central aim is to explore the transmission of religion and culture from parents and teachers to children in four different religious traditions: Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism.

In the case of Judaism 39 children aged 7-13, living in the Midlands, were interviewed in their day schools and 10 families were then selected for more detailed research in their homes, religion schools and synagogues. Further information about the Religious Education and Community Project may be obtained from its Director, Robert Jackson, Department of Arts Education, University of Warwick, Coventry. CV4 7AL. U.K. The present article focuses on the research carried out with these Jewish children in a large city in the English Midlands.

The approach adopted by the team engaged in the study featured the observation of the children in a range of different contexts, together with interviews with parents, teachers and synagogue officials. Some of the children were further observed in religion schools, in and on the way to synagogue services and at festivals and youth activities. A comparable study of Hindu children has already taken place¹ and a schedule of questions, based on those used by Kim Knott at Leeds (1992: pp53-56) has now been developed for parallel use with Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh children. This includes a variety of 'trigger' questions on weekday and weekend activities, celebrations and rites of passage, religious and moral issues and attitudes, and the influence of relatives, friends, religious leaders, scriptures, etc. on the child's beliefs, practices and relationships.

In each case the use of camera and audio cassette recorder has been an important feature of the research, particularly in the school and home based interviews. The use of these with Jewish children at religion school and day school has proved straightforward, but photographic work and the use of any electric recording device on shabbas (the sabbath day) are subject to major constraints. These will be discussed later.

Participant Observation of Jews by Jews

As mentioned above, previous British research into Jewish communities has been undertaken almost exclusively by members of the Jewish faith (Schmool and Cohen 1991). The research

officer of the London-based Board of Deputies of British Jews drew attention to this aspect of Jewish scholarship in an address to a research seminar at the Centre for Research into Ethnic Relations at the University of Warwick. Her paper on 'Questions of Jewish Identity', (Marlena Schmool at the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, the University of Warwick, May 7th, 1991) stressed the value of American research in this field, but emphasised how unhealthy it was for Judaism that it lacked external and impartial appraisal. (For a more detailed and statesmanlike consideration of the varying viewpoints on issues of Jewish identity that compete for support today, see Chapter 6 'What Is a Jew ?' in Sacks 1991(a) (pp97-122).

What is true in the statistical and verbal fields of which she was principally talking is even more relevant when one is making permanent records that can in principle be shared with others outside the families concerned. Many minority communities are understandably extremely nervous of the dangers associated with 'the pictures in print' and 'the recorded word' that can easily lead to identification and consequent discrimination, especially when these are to be used by those who are not followers of the tradition.

This of course is not a peculiarly British phenomenon. Much American research into Judaism that has taken place has clearly been carried out by 'insiders' rather than by 'outsiders'. Photographic surveys of certain complex subjects such as the sukkah, the hut erected in the garden or balcony for the eight day festival of Sukkoth, and taped interviews for television and radio programmes are a case in point. Many of these provide such a range of detailed insights that it is clear they have been produced or at least inspired by 'insiders' with a deep personal knowledge of the tradition and of the regulations that govern its customs and conduct.

Curiosity and Suspicion

The investigations conducted by Heilman in the United States are relevant here. In his study of synagogue life (1973) he argued that the level of his acceptance by the Modern Orthodox community he studied depended largely upon his legitimacy as a member of that community, albeit an externalised research one. In his later work (Heilman 1983) he uses similar techniques to those he developed earlier in an attempt to study traditional learning circles as they operated within Orthodox Jewish communities. Furthermore Heilman's membership of the tradition was not of itself enough to gain him access to the inner secrets of the 'gossip cliques' that operate in most synagogue circles. It was only after he had for a considerable time taken a full share in the life of the local synagogue and in their celebrations that he was accepted as an insider. It was some years before he was given information of a confidential (and potentially damaging) nature. Even then he was still chivvied and teased by friends and acquaintances within the community about the treatment they were likely to receive when he was writing up what he had learnt from and about them. They could never forget that he was a professional researcher.

The Sympathetic Outsider

At the same time it must be borne in mind that the committed observer, the insider who shares in the community's activities, is often regarded with curiosity or suspicion by members and adherents, who may perceive in any newcomers an opportunity for fresh conversation but may be equally likely to see them as a threat to established relationships. The 'inside' visitor of this nature falls in a different category from the obvious outsider to the faith, the 'unsecret spy', whether with or without camera and recorder, who is successful in disarming suspicion and hostility by appearing to be quite harmless and to present no threat.

It is true, of course, that the outsider needs to take great care in the early stages of research to make good relationships with those being studied since any researcher's motives are likely to be scrutinised closely by the community under survey. As Collier and Collier state:

'The photographic fieldworker's ... research takes place in full public view. Photography offers no covert methods for researching the community.'(1986: 25)

(See also pages 106-107, for a fuller justification of the role of photography in community

research.)

On the other hand, although it may not conform to what one would normally expect, there is some evidence to suggest that the 'insightful outsider' will often achieve results of a different nature (though by no means necessarily a superior one) from those that arise during official research carried out by committed members who operate from within the culture or faith.

Larson makes the same point about gaining the support of those being studied when she refers to her practice of photographing

'alongside the videomaker as much as possible so that I could hear and follow the directions from the wedding party as to who and what were the most important to photograph.'(1988: 423)

Indeed it is often the case that an experienced and sympathetic outsider, whether armed with a piece of apparatus or not, who knows enough to avoid offending inbred sensitivities, may be seen as less of a threat than one born into the faith or converted to a specific denomination. In particular it is easier for a non- Jew to be seen as neutral in Jewish 'denominational' terms and therefore less likely to be thought of as tied to and aligned with one particular viewpoint within the tradition.

Such independence from denominational bias is particularly important in the British educational system where the study of a range of different traditions and of varying religious and denominational viewpoints is encouraged, and indeed in some form is mandatory by law in state funded schools. It presupposes that the teacher will operate from an impartial and educational standpoint and will avoid proselytising as a committed member of any particular viewpoint if/when it comes under consideration. (Since the 1988 Education Reform Act the relationship between the study of Christianity and that of other religious traditions has been clarified at a national level, though each local authority is still able to develop its own syllabus and strategy within certain clearly defined limits. The works of Hull (1989) and Jackson (1990) give further information on the interpretation of the Act.)

During the research into Jewish nurture that gave rise to the present article this freedom from rejection (akin to that described by Larson above) was frequently evident in verbal and personal contexts, and there was very little that was denied to the team in respect of access to community activities. In terms of visual and audio recording there was indeed permission for activity amounting to virtually total freedom within many parameters, though at the same time there were definite and inflexible restrictions within others. It is the nature of these permissions and prohibitions that will be the focus of much of what is written below.

Disadvantages and Dangers

There are a number of disadvantages involved in the use of photography and recording devices in research which are linked particularly to the Jewish tradition. The first of these relates to the danger of producing dramatic or exotic material that can reinforce prejudice rather than allay it.

Kosmin and Levy showed in their survey of Judaism in the London Borough of Redbridge (1983: 41-42) how anti-Jewish prejudice was a potent factor in the personal experience of many British Jews. They encounter antagonism in their social activities, from their neighbours, while at work, and most of all when at school. While our present research did not seek to measure this in the same statistical way, it established clearly that the pupils we interviewed were very conscious of hostile attitudes from some of the non-Jewish children they encountered both socially and at school.

In consequence we gained the impression that had we not had the welcome and support we received from senior teaching staff and synagogue officials, the taking of photographs and tape recordings of festival preparations and sabbath simulations might well have been viewed with some suspicion by those we sought to interview as a potential source of misinterpretation or misinformation, providing material without safeguards that could

prevent ist misuse by racist groups.

In particular we were made aware that a preoccupation with exotic selections of material can easily turn into a fixation with the whimsical or a trivialisation of the spiritual, resulting often in an unintentional heightening of such prejudice. None of these trends is calculated to improve community relations.

By contrast the value of making exact records of all that is seen and done is that it provides the ethnographer with material for a genuinely balanced view of the communities being researched, and particularly of what the 'insiders' hold to be important in their traditions. Concentration, for example, on certain rituals such as those commonly associated with corporate prayer can distort just as easily as it can illustrate, whereas a visual record of everyday life in the home may be equally as effective and more realistic in its presentation of what is important in the tradition as seen by its members.

Then there is the danger of producing stereotypical images that may imply that all Jews act in the way portrayed. There are many non-observant or home-focused members of the tradition who feel inaccurately depicted if Judaism is only portrayed in worship and festival at the synagogue. The frequency of the visits made during the research to the local Jewish primary school and the various synagogues and homes involved led to our being particularly aware of the variety of approaches present within the tradition. The detailed nature of the study that was thereby involved brought out the dangers of stereotyping in a way that perhaps a journalist or an educational photographer attending a single event to collect material might overlook. This is one of the main strengths of using ethnographic methods, time consuming though they be, in studying such traditions. Ethnographers are fortunate to be in an ideal position to gain a detailed overall picture of a complex tradition and of the local communities that are involved in its constitution.

Practical Difficulties

Next, there are a number of practical difficulties that affect any camera or recorder bearing observer of Jewish communities. These relate particularly to the behaviour of practising Jews during the sabbath and the regulations that affect the behaviour of those who follow the precepts of the Torah (the Jewish law, based on the five books of Moses) throughout its duration. Orthodox Jews are stricter than Progressives in this respect, but in both cases there is a wide variety of practice, ranging from those who try to follow every precept as rigorously as they can to those who regard the traditional pattern of observance as outdated and prefer to honour the spirit rather than the letter of the Torah. Kashrut (purity regulations relating to food and clothing, etc.) and shabbas observance are the areas where there is the greatest variety of practice.

First there is the prohibition of carrying during the hours of shabbas. This is taken by the strictly observant, the very 'frum', to the lengths where they will not even carry a house key from Friday sunset to Saturday nightfall. Heilman tells in his careful observation of relevant detail how some find a way round this by fashioning a key into a tie pin or a hair clasp which they wear so as not to be deemed to carry anything with them.

'These are kosher as they are worn and not carried. They indicate ornamental and ritualised use as well, since they are worn even when someone is at home to open the door. So their use indicates the wearer's halachic virtuosity and his knowledge of how insiders dress.' (1973: 60-61)

In our research in the Midlands region of the U.K. such strictness was usually concealed and keys were worn out of sight by being tied round the waist or elsewhere. Some Jewish women appeared to carry handbags on their shoulders on shabbas, though by no means all would have been happy to be photographed carrying them - if the use of cameras on shabbas had been permitted.

Another example relates to a Bar Mitzvah and shows in this quotation from a nine year old girl about a ceremony she attended how careful the observant can be about even minor matters at busy times.

'I don't get to catch any sweets when they are thrown down from upstairs at a Bar Mitzvah. You

see, we are not allowed to carry, so on the Friday morning we will probably put the sweets, like, there's a little drawer under the chair, so we put the sweets under the chair and we get them out and we chuck them down. It's just like a custom really. My Mum says I can keep some for myself. And the good thing is that if my brother gets on my nerves the night before I probably could just about aim one for his head. I wouldn't really do it to my brother, but I probably would to my cousin - he gets on my nerves some of the time.' (Nine year old Orthodox child).

For the student of Judaism who is an observant Jew the carrying of a camera or recorder to synagogue on shabbas is clearly impossible, and even carrying one to photograph outside the synagogue is not acceptable. The non-Jewish researcher may not be tied to quite the same extent, but it does not make for empathetic relationships with those who are the subject of such studies if the customs of the tradition are flouted. At the same time we discovered several cases where those who were most particular were careful not to let their degree of scrupulousness adversely affect their view of less observant Jews. However much they might detest the customs followed by the latter, they would nevertheless refuse to condemn them as people. The following record from my field notes illustrates this point.

'You are most welcome to join us on Saturday morning and to walk to shul with us. We leave at about 9.45 ... Yes, of course you may drive here and leave your car at our house or in the car park over the road. You are not bound by our regulations ... No, I don't mind if my Jewish neighbours see you driving up to my house or parking in my garden. They all know I don't drive on shabbas and in any case we try to ignore what our friends do if it differs from our own practice.' (Orthodox family with four children, heavily involved in synagogue life).

At the same time it is wiser in the interests of building good relationships to follow the customs of those one is researching wherever this is possible, and since to carry a camera or recorder while wearing a yarmulka (skull cap worn by male Jews for all religious activities) would have contravened Jewish custom, it was judged best on shabbas visits during the period of research to don the headcovering before leaving the car and to leave the apparatus behind.

The regulation about carrying is not the only one that renders photography on the Sabbath a problem. Since lighting a fire is prohibited and the operation of a car engine and the turning on or off of an electric current all involve something akin to lighting a fire, observant Jews would not be happy to engage in such activity themselves on shabbas, and would be less than eager to see a non-Jewish visitor flout their custom too ostentatiously in matters affecting their worship. Getting a camera or a film crew to a synagogue to take pictures of a Sabbath day service accordingly produces the most severe difficulties for those who wish to observe and record the central act of worship in the Jewish faith.

Compromise: its Strengths and Weaknesses

There are a number of ways round this difficulty that allow for some measure of photography in certain cases. One is to simulate the activity on a weekday or Sunday when shabbas regulations are inoperative. Apart from the lack of authenticity and the problem of finding sufficient participants, this is an acceptable compromise. There appeared to be no intrinsic objection to such simulations on the part of the community, and indeed the concept of a 'model' Seder (the meal eaten at home by Jewish families on the evening of the Passover festival) is used as a teaching vehicle for non-Jews in many synagogues. Furthermore the practice of the Jewish school we visited of simulating shabbas (and Pesach) meals early on Friday afternoon gave additional evidence of acceptable precedents within the local community. Simulation for educational purposes of any description appeared to be

particularly well received within the communities we visited.

It is an interesting but vexed question whether children can celebrate a festival such as this in a school, or whether any activity of this nature is a simulation of an educational nature as opposed to a religious celebration. The issue is further complicated by the nature of the school, and some would argue that while a celebration is not possible in a school run by the state, it may be perfectly legitimate in a voluntary school controlled by a religious body. For further discussion of this issue see Woodward (1991: 2).

Another method that might occasionally allow discreet photography is to work with a Liberal or Reform (Progressive) synagogue, where regulations are sometimes less strictly observed and people drive to shul as a matter of course. Care is needed even here, however, since many variations of viewpoint occur in such synagogues, and some members, including one family where the wife was a convert, attended there only because their marriage prevented them from worshipping as a family at an Orthodox and observant shul. Nor do the majority of Progressive Jews like to be thought of as careless of obedience to the regulations of the Scriptures.

A further example of the same scrupulousness came in an interview with a family whose members drove regularly to shul to a moderately observant synagogue. The father narrated in some detail how he and his sons walk the several miles on those sabbath mornings when one of them is to be 'called up' for the reading of the Torah, a signal honour for which they prefer to be in a situation where they have not contravened the stricter customs of more observant Jews. It is also true that what is accepted on one occasion by a particular section of the local community may well be viewed differently on another day when different members are present.

Another possibility which permitted photography within the synagogue on a religious occasion was recalled by one of the rabbis (religious teachers) who was interviewed. He had been known to the researcher for a period of over ten years and it was this to a large extent which enabled a relationship to emerge where hospitality was given, festival celebrations were shared, and invitations to speak to each other's communities had been extended.

The incident in question related to the occasion when Central Television was invited to film a ceremony that took place on a Sunday afternoon when a new scroll was being installed. It was this incident, in fact, which made it natural for the particular synagogue where the ceremony was filmed to be used so much in our research. The relationships forged on the earlier occasion served well when the focus on children became the centre of activity. The ceremony filmed was to be included in Central's Believe It or Not schools programme on 'Sacred Writings (Jewish and Sikh)', part of a series of 36 15-minute programmes designed for pupils aged 10-15 (available on four VHS videotapes from Central Independent Television plc, Central House, Broad Street, Birmingham. B1 2JP, UK.)

The Ark where the scrolls of the Torah live was opened and the scrolls were all brought out and danced around the synagogue, a practice that normally happens only once a year on the joyful festival of Simchat Torah. A wedding canopy called a huppah was set up in the courtyard and the leaders danced with the new scroll beneath its shelter. Because it was neither sabbath nor set festival, photography of everything was permitted, even of the writing in by the scribe of the final letters of the scroll (which he had previously inked in as an outline) in the name of various members of the synagogue. This was a relaxed but significant occasion for the large numbers of the congregation who attended.

A further course that could be followed in theory, though I have never yet heard of its being done, is to obtain a hand operated camera, cine or still, which is independent of electricity. If this were taken in the previous day and mounted on a fixed tripod, and if any extra lighting deemed necessary were operated by a preset time switch, this would probably accord with rabbinical interpretation and the halachic precepts of the Jewish (religious) law. The welcome it would receive from synagogue officials and members is questionable, since other less fastidious explorers might well quote this example as a precedent, but it is interesting to explore such methods of 'beating the system', and it is not out of line with certain developments in lighting and heating that many Jewish families operate regularly during the course of shabbas. Indeed a method as flexible as this would harmonise with the attitude advocated by Collier and Collier:

'There is the dynamic possibility that a less rigid approach to recording can draw upon the unexpected and spontaneous

happening.' (1986: 165)

Loyalty to Principle

If such difficult situations can on rare occasions be faced successfully, they nevertheless raise important questions about the religious principles of those observed and the issues involved when the devout are asked to compromise on certain aspects of their faith that are important to them.

In the example given above, for instance, the observant might well assert that the carrying of a camera was a small and insignificant issue and that non-Jewish observers need not be hampered by Jewish scruples but could be allowed to photograph on shabbas in shul as and when they pleased. Such an attitude could even be defended as a generous and charitable approach.

This was not, however, the policy that was taken by any of the Jewish communities with which we met. Even though their attitude to shabbas was a positive and joyful one, and they wished it to be known as such, the restrictive regulations that relate to agreed sabbath observance were publicly acknowledged and adhered to with fairly strict formality.

There was inevitably some variety in their adherence to the letter of the law and this is one of the stumbling blocks that currently prevent two Orthodox communities of varying degrees of strictness in the centre and south of the city from uniting, even though finance and common sense indicate they should do so. In the course of our research neither the strict shul with the modern building to which everyone walks nor the less rigid synagogue with a dignified but ageing structure to which most people now drive (even though the car park is closed on shabbas) would allow a camera or tape recorder to be used on shabbas, as was made plain on the first approaches undertaken by the Project team to the synagogue officials.

More surprising was the fact that a similar stand was taken by the rabbi of the local Progressive synagogue when approached for permission to film a Bar Mitzvah initiation ceremony scheduled to take place on a Saturday morning.

This factor stands out in even greater contrast when one relates it to the high status Jewish communities afford to education. In this respect it was noteworthy that the staff of the strictest shul in the area welcomed us most warmly to their cheder on Sunday mornings and allowed both photography and tape recording, even of such private activities as a Bat Chayil (girls' initiation ceremony) preparation class conducted by the rebbitzin, (the rabbi's wife), and the rabbi refereeing the football match at mid-morning break time.

From Principle to Practice

The significance of an attitude where such loyalty to principle is observed can be examined from several viewpoints, but in each case compromise would seem to present the least satisfactory solution. Three such attitudes may be worth exploring here.

First must come the tranquillity of the day for the observant. The intrusion of any photographer in an act of worship can easily disturb devotion and distract attention from its rightful focus. The fact that many Jews themselves talk and chatter throughout all but the most important parts of the service is a separate issue - it does not interfere with the devotion of the devout in the way that a stranger's contravention of standard practice would.

Even the presence of a man without a headcovering, or, in Hasidic circles, a woman without a hat, may lead to anger and a rebuke, and some synagogues make it clear that the visits of parties of students from universities and colleges, even without cameras, are less than desirable at their shabbas morning services because of the distraction their presence all too easily brings.

Secondly there is an implication of loyalty to the Torah itself. In Jewish eyes the shabbas regulations are not of human origin but are divinely inspired and owe their origin to the prescriptions, albeit in embryonic form, of the scriptures themselves. The very continuity of the Jews as a people is held to stem largely from their observance of what the Torah

prescribes in areas such as kashrut, ritual purity and shabbas observance.<2> Any action that might imperil the supremacy of the Torah as the yardstick of conduct is obviously anathema to them, whether it be performed by Jewish 'insider' or gentile 'outsider'. The presence of a camera or tape recorder at shul on shabbas would clearly be seen as an attack on the authority of the scriptures.

In third place is the Jewish emphasis on morality, where daily conduct and ritual practice are seen in terms of absolutes and finalities, and deep unease is voiced about the casual attitudes adopted by other communities, whose permissive approach is regarded with a concern verging on the scornful. In the words of the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, Dr. Jonathan Sacks:

'The sages, saints and prophets ... were concerned with ends rather than means, with moral imperatives rather than economic interests, and with duties rather than rights.' (1991(b): 12-13)

Compromise on issues of principle such as these is seen as a bad augury for the future and appears to be shunned throughout the Jewish tradition at all times.

Conclusions

It will be clear from the above comments that although ethnographic study is only one way forward in the exploration of minority traditions in Britain, it is one that has certain advantages. While ethnography inevitably involves interpretation (Geertz 1983), it combines its efforts to achieve objectivity with a sound platform for empathetic approaches by outsiders. It bases its approach on system and method while encouraging flexibility. It accumulates authentic records of scenes viewed and words spoken, while encouraging the subjects to express in their own words and actions the thoughts and responses that express their deepest feelings. The interplay of such personal experience with the values and practices of Jewish 'membership groups' locates personal experience in the wider aspects of the Jewish tradition.

In the case of Judaism ethnography attempts to bring objectivity to issues of prejudice and stereotyping. Its interpretations can be utilised both by those born and brought up inside the tradition and by outsiders whose experience of contacts with insiders is sufficient to give them a degree of empathy with those they study. The results may well be different in the two situations, just as their interests and objectives are likely to be, but the end product in each case should present a fair and unbiased interpretation.

A number of difficulties and dangers present themselves, and great care is always necessary to steer a steady course between the multi-headed Scylla of the exotic and the swirling Charybdean whirlpool that stereotypes all it sucks into its embrace as observant or hasidic or Orthodox or even religious. Fortunately Judaism, like many of the traditions ethnographers choose to study, is remarkably resilient and variegated, and it is this which makes its adults a truly fascinating subject for study and its children such a pleasure to observe.

NOTES

1. The Religious Education and Community Project began with two studies of Hindu children in the West Midlands of the UK. From these have emerged a number of articles in books and academic journals by Jackson (1989a), Nesbitt (1990a) and (1990b), Nesbitt and Jackson (1988) and (1990), curriculum materials for use in schools by Jackson (1989b) and Jackson and Nesbitt (1990), and a major forthcoming book, Hindu Children in Britain by Jackson and Nesbitt.

2. For a useful account of kashrut and what is involved in keeping kosher see Glinert (1985: 31-40).

GLOSSARY

Ark - the cupboard in the eastern wall of the synagogue which contains the Torah scrolls.

Bar Mitzvah - ceremony undergone by Jewish boys of thirteen and a day when they read in public from the Torah in Hebrew to mark their coming of age as an adult.

Bat Chayil or Bat Mitzvah - a ceremony where girls aged twelve and a day or more are welcomed as adults and may read some portion of scripture to a congregation.

C.E. or Common Era -the phrase frequently used by Jews, Humanists and others to avoid the Christian implications of A.D. Similarly they employ B.C.E., Before the Common Era, to avoid referring to this period of time as Before Christ.

Cheder (also Heder) - religion school, generally held on a Sunday morning but also on certain weekdays after day school. Teachers are paid for their duties and the quality of teaching is often of a high order.

Frum - observant. Most often used as a comparative or superlative expression to denote the level of observance associated with the individual or community described.

Halachic - relating to legal aspects of Jewish practice and belief.

Hasid (plural: Hasidim, adj. Hasidic) - a pious Jew, very observant of Torah regulations, often linked with others in communities of a mystical nature that follow the leadership of a particular rabbi.

Huppah - canopy. Jewish weddings take place under a canopy, often out of doors. The most common have four posts supporting a cloth cover, but there is much variety of type and style.

Kashrut - see kosher. The regulations of kashrut affect particularly the preparation and presentation of food in accordance with rabbinical interpretation of the Torah.

Kosher - pure, edible, according to Jewish law and tradition.

Liberal - see Non-Orthodox

Non-Orthodox - Liberal, Reform, Progressive, Conservative; various groupings of non-Orthodox Jews, who interpret the Torah with differing degrees of liberality in the light of present day life and scholarship.

Orthodox - the main grouping of Jews in Israel and Britain, as opposed to Conservative and Progressive groups which are powerful and widespread in the United States and Canada. They observe the regulations of the Torah closely, though with varying degrees of strictness.

Pesach - Passover. The festival of freedom, held in the spring, recalls the deliverance of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. It is marked by the cleansing of the house from all yeast containing substances and the eating of a family meal (Seder) with ceremonial foods, rituals and songs.

Progressive - see Non-Orthodox

Rabbi - teacher. One trained in the Torah and regarded with great esteem by fellow Jews, often but not necessarily having a role in the conduct of synagogue services and the leadership of a local community.

Rabbinical - pertaining to a rabbi. A body of teaching has grown up associated with the Talmud and its interpretation and stemming from various groupings of famous rabbis.

Rebbitzin - wife of a rabbi. Often has an important role in the community and frequently teaches the Bat Chayil class at a cheder.

Reform - see Non-Orthodox

Right-Wing - in popular terms synagogues where all members are halachically observant have become known in Britain as Right- Wing. The remaining majority of Ashkenazi Orthodox synagogues are grouped as 'Central Orthodox'. (Schmool and Cohen, 1991: 3).

Seder - the ceremonial meal held on the first two nights of the eight day festival of Pesach, (q.v.).

Shabbas - sabbath. Both shabbas and shabbos are currently used by Jewish people and are far more common than sabbath, which is largely reserved for formal announcements and literary usage.

Shul - colloquial Yiddish term for synagogue.

Simchat Torah - the Rejoicing of the Law. A one day festival that follows Sukkoth (q.v.) when the scrolls of the Torah are all removed from the ark and danced around the bimah (the reading desk). It marks the end of one cycle of Torah readings and the beginning of the cycle over again.

Sukkah (plural: sukkoth) - a shelter or hut with a partly open roof, used in the eight day festival of Sukkoth which recalls the tribulations of the early Hebrews in their wandering in the wilderness on the way from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Talmud - the rabbinic commentaries on Torah produced by the fifth century of the Common Era (vide C.E.). While Orthodox Jews generally expect to follow many of the precepts of the Talmud, it is the Right-Wing Orthodox who seek to observe them in their entirety.

Torah - the Jewish Law. Technically the five books of Moses, though the phrase is also used for the whole of the Jewish Bible and its teaching.

Yarmulkah - also capel and kippah - circular skull cap worn by male Jews in synagogue and on other occasions when engaged in any activity that may have religious overtones, e.g. praying, studying Torah or Talmud, eating.

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Biographical details

Peter Woodward, a former secondary school teacher and college lecturer, has worked with young people and teachers in churches, schools, colleges and universities in various parts of England, most notably as General Inspector of Schools with the City of Birmingham Education Department, and as Research Fellow in the Department of Education of the University of Cambridge and the Department of Arts Education in the University of Warwick. He has specialised in the study of world religions, travelling widely and visiting Jewish communities in Israel, Canada, Tunisia, Morocco and Yugoslavia in doing so. He is a former Chairperson of the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education, a national body in the U.K. concerned with the development of the study of religions as a viable educational field in schools and colleges. He has acted for many years as adviser and scriptwriter to an extensive, nationally networked television series, Central Independent Television's multi-faith educational presentation, Believe It or Not, and is currently involved in planning two further series of programmes for use in schools.

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