

# Emil Schorsch on his Duties as a Rabbi in Hannover (Retrospective Account, 1975)

## Abstract

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Emil Schorsch (1899-1982) was appointed the second rabbi of the Jewish community in Hannover in 1927. He had previously studied and completed his doctorate in Breslau (Wrocław) and Tübingen and trained as a rabbi in Breslau. Schorsch did a lot of youth and community work in Hannover and, among other things, modernized religious education for Jewish children and youth. During the November pogroms, he was imprisoned in Buchenwald concentration camp, but was released after ten days as he had an English visa. Schorsch and his family then fled to England and later emigrated to the United States, where Schorsch resumed his work as a rabbi in a Jewish community in Pottstown, PA.

In 1975, Emil Schorsch wrote a manuscript about the Jewish community in Hannover in the years before the destruction of its synagogue by the National Socialists in 1938. In this excerpt, Schorsch describes his duties as a rabbi with regard to providing religious instruction for Jewish children and youth in Hannover. He attributes what he sees as the mixed success of the lessons to the attitudes of the parents towards the Jewish faith. In his view, many parents were members of the Jewish community because of social traditions and conventions, but less out of a deeper religious conviction.

## Source

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According to my contract, my duties as rabbi in Hannover included the “Department for Religious Instruction,” giving sermons in the synagogue, the supervision of *kashrut*, and the directorship of the community library. The supervision of religious instruction at first caused much work but was, for the most part, a clearly defined task. We formed twenty-eight religion classes for the some 650 Jewish pupils of the primary and secondary schools in Hannover. For the primary school classes we had a special religion school on Lützowstrasse, where the community building was located. These pupils had no difficulty attending religious instruction twice during the week and on Sunday morning. For the pupils of the secondary schools it was more difficult because there were relatively few Jewish pupils in each school. Thus we gave up the idea of establishing classes in the different secondary schools, but instead combined these pupils in the afternoon in one of these schools, which had been selected for that purpose.

The result was not good. The pupils had the feeling that the entire matter of religious instruction did not have to be taken seriously. It was very difficult to fight the resulting irregularity of class attendance. We had, of course, worked out a curriculum, and all questions connected with religious instruction were discussed in special teachers’ meetings. We even introduced meetings of all teachers of the province of Hannover, and they were very well attended. Nevertheless, there was no use pretending that religious instruction- Hebrew as well as the historical and theoretical components- contributed much to heightening Jewish religious consciousness. The reason was that one can hardly expect to influence the personality if the family life of the pupils is inconsistent with the goal of instruction. And there could be no doubt that only to a small extent did the Jewish religion serve as the model for the parents’ life, perhaps not only to the degree that seemed necessary to them for the sake of public appearances, although they scarcely gave this much thought. [...]

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Source: *Jewish Life in Germany, Memoirs from Three Centuries*, edited by Monika Richarz. Translated by Stella P. Rosenfeld and Sidney Rosenfeld. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, pp. 333–34.

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