



## **It's a Tradition! (Part 1 of 2): Some 300 years of Minhag Anglia (Anglo-Jewish Custom)**

by Simon Goulden, Educational Consultant to the United Synagogue.

Chief Rabbi Hertz, in his 1941 commentary to the Authorised Daily Prayer Book, refers to a takanah (rule) of 1722 in the Great Synagogue, which later became a founding community of the United Synagogue (in 1870). The ruling states: "The minhag (custom system) of this Synagogue shall be the Polish minhag, as used in Hamburg". The laws of the New Synagogue, another founding community, stated that the "form of service and prayer shall be conformable to minhag Poland as already established". These rules have formed the format of United Synagogue services that we know today.

Other highlights of the Great Synagogue's rules included:

### **TISHREI TASKS**

The takanot stated that the selection of Chatan Torah and Chatan Bereshit was made in a surprisingly democratic manner. On the first day of Succot, after the Hallel prayer, lots were drawn by the presiding parnas (financial representative) and gabbai (warden) from a ballot box placed on the bimah. After the Torah reading, a special mi'sheberach prayer was made, naming the successful candidate. If he declined the honour, he was obligated – as in other frequently mentioned instances – to pay a specified fine. There is no suggestion that this rule is to be re-introduced into the United Synagogue today!

By 1790, the Great Synagogue required that on Hoshanah Rabba (the 7th day of Succot) seven Torah scrolls were to be taken onto the bimah during the seven circuits. On the night and the morning of Simchat Torah, only three scrolls were to be taken for the hakafot (encircling the bimah). The number of people to be called up to the Torah on Simchat Torah was to be limited to only 14, including the Chatanim, Cohen, Levy and Maftir. Likewise, the making of a mi'sheberach for excessive amounts of charitable donations was prohibited, as the immediate result of such excess was to cause unholy levity and commotion in the synagogue. Clearly the elders of The Great Synagogue were keen to avoid that sort of thing.

### **LET'S EAT!**

There were also some rules of general religious significance, such as the obligation to contribute to the Matzah Fund for the poor, to be paid in the month of Adar, and to the Etrog Fund, to be paid in Elul. The rules also required that those importing kosher foodstuffs needing a hechsher, such as meat or cheese from abroad for example, had to obtain a certificate from the Av Bet Din, without which such goods could not be sold in the community.

These articles are based on 'Torat Haminhagim – Studies of the Nusach Ha'Tefillah and other Minhagim of the United Synagogue London', by Dayan Dr Lerner, one of the most academically gifted Dayanim of the London Beth Din in the late 20th century.

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