

Shorshei Minhag Ashkenaz

Minhag Ashkenaz: Sources and Roots



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By

Rabbi Binyomin Shlomo Hamburger

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**In celebration and honor
of our husband, father, grandfather
and great grandfather**

OTTO PRETSFELDER

**Who has lovingly shared with us
his special appreciation for the minhagim
and traditions of Ashkenaz**

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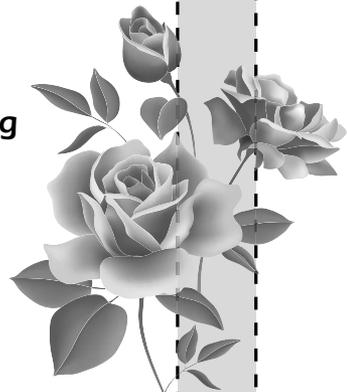


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Introduction

“If there is any spiritual matter that you do not understand,” Lakewood Yeshiva *Mashgi’ach* Rav Matityahu Salomon once advised, “do not be in a hurry to ridicule it.” The *Mashgi’ach* proceeded to present an original proof to support his admonition: “As we know, over the years it became common to poke fun at the customs of the ‘Yekkes’, until someone proceeded to show the world that it is specifically the ‘Yekkes’ who continue the ancient traditions, and that their customs originated during the time of the Ge'onim and *Rishonim*.”¹ With this brief comment, Rav Salomon succinctly summed up the change in the general public attitude toward the heritage of German Jewry. This change has come about as a direct result of the publication of the series *Shorshei Minhag Ashkenaz*.

This series was begun during a period in which the spiritual culture of German Jews was declining and disappearing. The parent generation was shrinking from year to year, and their descendants gradually drifted away from their rich past. Few of them were aware of the great *yeshivot* that had existed in Germany for many generations; only a small number knew of the many thousands of outstanding *Ashkenazic* scholars or referred to their hundreds of books on *Talmud*, *Midrash*, *Halakha* and *Musar*. Only rare individuals preserved a small percentage of the *Ashkenazic* customs and the ancient, sacred *halakhic* traditions, as a kind of dim memory of their parents' and grandparents' homes.

¹ Related by those who attended his lecture in Gateshead on the last day of Pesach, 2008.

This growing trend distressed a number of prominent individuals of German descent who were still familiar with the glorious customs of German Jewry. Rav Pinchas Kohn (1867-1942), the Rabbi of Ansbach, was a towering figure. He was a prominent disciple of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, and an expert in all areas of the Torah, who earned the respect and reverence of the leading rabbis across the spectrum of the Torah world. During the Nazi era, he emigrated to Israel and settled in Jerusalem, where he sought to continue the ancient German traditions. As he embarked on this campaign, and observed that the younger generation cavalierly disregarded their parents' customs, he lamented: "My heart aches inside me over this, that they abandon the ancient customs dating back to the beginning of Jewish settlement in Europe, adopting instead foreign, more recent customs!"²

Reactions like this were typical of the German rabbis of that period. Thus, for example, Rav Yonah Merzbach (1900-1981), Rabbi of Darmstadt and teacher in *Yeshivat Kol Torah* in Jerusalem, presented the German Jews living in Israel with the penetrating, question: "Who was it who allowed those from Germany to betray their customs and change them?"³ Upon observing the blatant disregard for their ancestors' traditions, Rav Merzbach bemoaned: "Believe me, the disregard for something so sacred is adversely affecting my health."⁴

² From a letter written by Rabbi Yehuda Rieder, dated 27 *Tishrei*, 5765, where he noted, "My father's uncle was Rabbi Pinchas Kohn *zt"l*, the Rabbi of Ansbach, and this is how he expressed his anguish to my father."

³ Manuscript of *Kuntras Minhagim* in the possession of the Rav Merzbach's family.

⁴ Heard from Rabbi Nissan Yehuda Leib Shub *shelit"l*.

There were, however, individuals who resisted this trend, who did not long to be “like everyone else” and did not seek the convenience of renouncing their ancient customs. Rav Yechiel Michel Schlesinger (1898-1949), *Dayan* in Frankfurt am Main who later served as the *Rosh Yeshiva* of Jerusalem’s *Yeshivat Kol Torah*, insisted on adhering to his traditions even while studying at the Mir *Yeshiva* in Lithuania. His peers related one particularly striking example:

By the time he arrived in Mir, his reputation had already spread throughout the *yeshiva* world. But everyone was surprised when he came for the *shacharit* service wrapped in a *tallit*, in accordance with the German custom, although he was not married. There were other German students in the *yeshiva*, but they followed the local custom. The *ga’on* Rav Yechiel Michel, however, did not stray from his forefathers’ custom.⁵

His decision to follow his family traditions even while studying in Lithuania received the explicit approval of his renowned mentor, Rav Yosef Zvi Dushinsky (1868-1949), rabbi of Galanta and Khust, and later of Jerusalem’s *Edah Hacharedit*. He commented to Rav Schlesinger’s nephew who came to study in his *yeshiva* in Jerusalem, “You will undoubtedly see new customs here in Jerusalem, **but do not change a thing from all that you saw in your father’s home, for his practices came from his illustrious father’s home, which**

⁵ *Eish Tamid: Sefer Zikaron La’kadosh Eliezer Schlesinger*, Jerusalem, 1989, p. 826.

came from his father's home, and they are more ancient than the practices you see here."⁶

The situation improved only slightly in the Diaspora after the Holocaust. A number of communities made discernible efforts to preserve the German tradition, but most German Jews were scattered in remote areas, far from these communities. And even these communities underwent a process of decline as the younger generation began gradually, but consistently, to leave both the communities and their customs, adopting different lifestyles from their parents, either because of convenience or because of a sense of inferiority.

Most rabbis found no basis for allowing the abandonment of the ancient German tradition. For example, a couple planning to get married were unsure whether they wanted their ceremony to follow the German custom dating back to the *Rishonim*, with a *tallit* spread over the bride and groom. They turned to Rav Ya'akov Kaminetzky (1891-1986), who replied as follows: "It is definitely proper to follow the German custom. It is a calamity for *Kelal Yisrael* that people do not follow their ancestral tradition, mistakenly thinking that they are more 'frumm' and rise to greater heights of 'tzidkus' [piety] by rejecting accepted customs. This is the destruction of our generation!"⁷ Rav Ya'akov openly cherished the German tradition. One of his students became engaged to a girl from a German Jewish family, and when the student told him the

⁶ Rabbi Elyakim Schlesinger, *Kuntrus Lema'an Yeid'u Doroteikhem*, 1991, p. 12.

⁷ Related by Rabbi Asher Jacobs *shelit"a*, who heard the comment directly from Rav Kaminetzky.

news, Rav Yaakov exclaimed, "The German Jews have the most ancient tradition!"⁸

To those who questioned whether this is in fact the case, Rav Shimon Schwab (1909-1995), Rabbi of New York's *Kehal Adas Yeshurun*, said the following:

"As far as our own *Kehilla* is concerned we may very well consider ourselves as the successor to the old קהילות קדושות of Western Europe, the perpetrators of the thousand year old sacred מנהג אשכנז and the faithful pupils of the saintly חכמי אשכנז in general and of Rabbi S. R. Hirsch זצ"ל in particular.

It follows that we keep aloft this banner and that we keep our precious heritage forever close to our hearts. From the days of Rashi and the Tosafists to the time of R. Moshe Sofer and R. Ya'akov "Jokef" Ettlinger there has been an uninterrupted chain of tradition which was transmitted into the post-Ghetto world by the blessed genius of Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, his co-workers and followers. It is for this compelling reason that we treasure our traditional pronunciation of the sacred tongue, our age-old melodies, our סליחות and פיוטים, which have withstood the onslaught of time and turbulence. We embrace these time-honored forms and expressions which were dear to our forebearers and we cling to their inherited Jewish way of life and we to teach it to our children with love...

⁸ Related by the bride's mother, Mrs. Wurzbarger from Washington Heights, New York.

It is the essential function of our *Kehilla* to gear all its energies להחזיר עטרה ליושנה, to return this “crown to its ancient glory,” to bring forth the most noble and lofty possibilities which lie hidden in our heritage to its utmost potential; in line with the justified observation of the saintly *Chatam Sofer*: התורה היא ירושה לנו בני אשכנז.⁹

In response to the *Chassidic* trend that spread through Eastern Europe to substitute *nusach Ashkenaz* with *nusach Sefarad*, the *Chatam Sofer* pointed to the uncontested authority of our *Rishonim*, representatives of the Franco-German tradition: “All the scholars of France – Rashi, the Tosafists, Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg, the Rosh and the Tur – all prayed according to the *Ashkenazic* tradition.” In a touch of sarcasm, he added, “...and their prayers still ascended to the heavens.” The *Chatam Sofer* then proceeded to add to this list: “The great Rabbi Shimon, whose hymns were selected by the *Ari-zal*... himself, prayed *Ashkenazic* in Mainz, and I saw his grave. The author of *U’netaneh Tokef*, too – his house is still there.” ...¹⁰ To further substantiate his claims, he presented the statement of the Rosh, who settled in Spain to flee the deadly persecutions in his German homeland.

These are the words of the Rosh in a responsum¹¹, cited by the *Beit Yosef* in *Tur Yoreh Dei’a*, end of *siman* 82, regarding the signs [of *kashrut*] in fowl. The Rosh was then in Toledo, Spain, and he wrote as follows: “You

⁹ Rav Shimon Schwab, *Selected Writings*, Lakewood, NJ, 1988, pp. 17, 62-63.

¹⁰ *Shu”t Chatam Sofer*, O.C. 16.

¹¹ *Shu”t Ha-Rosh*, 20:20.

must know that I do not eat on the basis of their (*Sephardic*) tradition, because I adhere to our tradition and the heritage of our forefathers, the sages of *Ashkenaz*, to whom the Torah came as an inheritance from their forefathers since the days of the [Temple's] destruction, as well as the heritage of our forefathers, our rabbis in France, more so than the heritage of the residents of this country."

We have much to learn as well about the spiritual tradition of *Ashkenaz* from the following comments of Rabbi El'azar of Worms (1160-1237), author of the *Rokei'ach*, regarding the proper text for prayer:

"I, El'azar Hakatan, received the prayer text from my father and master, Yehuda son of Kalonymos son of Moshe, son of our Rabbi Yehuda son of our Rabbi Kalonymos son of our Rabbi Moshe son of our Rabbi Kalonymos son of our Rabbi Yehuda.

I have also received [this tradition] from Rabbienu Yehuda *Hechasid*, as he received it from his father Rabbienu Shemuel *Ha-kadosh HeFFchasid*, as he received it from Rabbienu Ela'zar the cantor in Speyer...as Rabbenu Kalonymos the Elder instructed him.

And Rabbienu Kalonymos the Elder received [this tradition] from his father, Rabbienu Yitzchak, and Rabbienu Yitzchak received it from his father, Rabbienu Ela'zar the Great, son of Rabbi Yitzchak son of Rabbi Yehoshua son of Rabbi Abun – this is Rabbi Abun the

grandfather of Rabbeinu Shimon the Great of Mainz. And Rabbeinu El'azar the Great, learned Torah in the presence of [his uncle] Rabbeinu Shimon the Great...

They received the secret of the prayer text, and the other secrets, rabbi from rabbi until Ibn Aharon, son of Rabbi Shemu'el the Prince who came from Babylonia...

Behold, my witnesses are in the heavens that we have not spoken of these matters for our honor or for the honor of our ancestors, but rather so that no sinner shall dispute us. For one who disputes this is akin to one who disputes the words of the Torah given at Sinai. For we have received the secret of the prayers, from rabbi to rabbi, transmitted through the prophets, elders and pious ones and the Men of the Great Assembly who instituted the prayers. **And one who adds or detracts one letter or one word – woe unto him in this world and the next!** For one may neither add nor detract, for they did not institute a single word or even a single letter for naught."¹²

The inevitable conclusion that emerges from the comments of the *Rokei'ach* and his mentors, the German pietists, is that one may not stray one iota from the *Ashkenazic* liturgical tradition. Later, the *Ari-zal* [Rabbi Yitzchak Luria], (1534-1572) issued a similar ruling, forbidding *Ashkenazic* Jews from abandoning their ancestral tradition:

¹² *Peirushei Siddur Ha-tefila Le-Rokei'ach*, Jerusalem, 1992, vol. 1, p. 229.

"There are many differences between the prayer books in the traditions of Spain, Catalonia, *Ashkenaz* and the like. Now with regard to this issue my master z"l told me that there are in the heavens twelve windows corresponding to the twelve tribes, and the prayer of each tribe rises through the gate especially designated for it, and these are the twelve gates mentioned at the end of *Yechezkel*.¹³ Now there is no doubt that if the prayers of all the tribes were the same, there would be no need for twelve windows and gates, with each gate having its own path. Certainly, then, it must be that since their prayers differ from one another, special gates are needed for each and every tribe, for the prayer service must be in accordance with the root and source of the souls of that tribe. Therefore, **it is proper for each person to adhere to the custom of the prayer service according to his forefathers' custom** for we do not know who is from this tribe and who is from that tribe. And since one's forefathers adhered to a certain custom, perhaps he is from that tribe for whom that custom is appropriate – and now if he seeks to change his practice, but his prayer will not be effective since it can no longer ascend upward in the path of that [prayer] service.¹⁴

The ancient *Ashkenazic* tradition was preserved in the traditionalist German communities until the Second World War,

¹³ *Yechezkel* 48:31-34.

¹⁴ Rav Chayim Vital, *Sha'ar Ha-kavanot – Derushei Aleinu Le-shabei'ach Ve-nusach Ha-tefila*, 1.

when it was dealt the harshest blow in its long history. However, “the Eternal One of Israel shall not deceive” (*Samuel I* 15:29). While it appeared that the *Ashkenazic* tradition was lost in Israel, it has been reawakened through the activities of Machon Moreshes Ashkenaz.

Rabbi Asher ben Sha’ul of Lunel (12th century), composed his *Sefer Ha-minhagot* (“Book of Customs”) in which he began “writing the customs that the earlier generations observed and were enacted by the earlier and later rabbis, for I have seen...people disregarding them, **because they do not know their reason.**”¹⁵ Similarly, the presentation of the sources underlying German customs in the series *Shorshei Minhag Ashkenaz* has allowed many people to bring an end to the unwarranted ridicule which they had endured. This series will consist of many volumes, only four of which have been published to date. *Machon Moreshes Ashkenaz* has also prepared a more concise treatise to summarize the practical aspects of the customs.

Already several years ago, a distinguished scholar, descending from the rabbi of Würzburg, Rav Yitzchak Dov Halevi Bamberger, expressed the need for such a project:

“Today, a hodgepodge of customs has emerged, to the point where it is difficult for one to know which is the German custom and which is the Polish custom, and so on, unless he had looked carefully into the matter. And so, when one does not know what to do, he opens the *Mishna Berura* and sees what is written there, without

¹⁵ *Sefer Ha-minhagot*, Jerusalem, 1988, p. 9.

giving thought to the fact that although this is the view of the *Mishna Berura*, the custom of his home and birthplace was different... The primary cause for the gradual loss of the German customs is that they are not all concentrated in a single place. **If somebody would have published a work in which all the German customs were collected, I am sure that this would have yielded very positive results, and that this would have led to the renewal and strengthening of the original German customs.**"¹⁶

Machon Moreshes Ashkenaz was founded some thirty years ago. Its main purpose has been to research, archive, preserve and disseminate the over one thousand years old magnificent heritage of *Ashkenaz*. Foremost in this effort has been the publication of the series "*Shorshei Minhag Ashkenaz*", which provides a detailed review and analysis of the origins and particulars of the German-Jewish customs and traditions. The series currently is comprised of four (4) volumes. These volumes have been written in Hebrew, and thus are inaccessible to a significant segment of descendants of what was once the glorious German-Jewish community.

In order to make this work more widely accessible we are publishing this book which translates into English the summary of each chapter of the first four volumes of *Shorshei Minhag Ashkenaz*. We hope that this will be of interest and assistance

¹⁶ Rav Yitzchak Adler, "*Al Minhagei Ashkenaz*", in jubilee volume of Congregation *Ahavat Torah* in Haifa, Haifa, 1990, p. 49.

not only to members of the German Jewish community but to all those who have an interest in the rich heritage of *Ashkenaz*.

We would like to take this opportunity and thank the generous donors who facilitated this endeavor, and we sincerely hope that in the future, the *Machon* will be able to publish other important works in English.

The Pronunciation of the *Cholam* Vowel

Four pronunciations of the *cholam* prevailed among *Ashkenazi* Jews in recent generations up to the time of the Holocaust: two in Eastern Europe and two in Western Europe. The table below illustrates these four pronunciations in both English and German as well as in the *Ashkenazi* pronunciation of *Lashon HaKodesh*

Region of Diaspora	Accent in Ashkenazi pronunciation	Accent in German diacritic	Accent in English
Poland, Austria-Hungary	<i>komatz chirik</i> - יאַץ	O ⁱ	[t]oy
Lithuania, Russia	<i>segol chirik</i> - יאַץ	Ae ⁱ	[p]ay
Northern Germany, Holland	<i>patach shuruk</i> - יאַץ	A ^u	[h]ow
Southern Germany, Switzerland, France, Latvia, England, North America	<i>komatz shuruk</i> - יאַץ	O ^u	[g]o

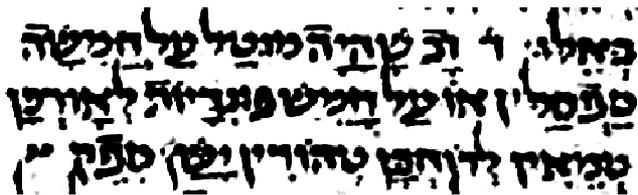
Since the destruction of European Jewry during the Holocaust, two pronunciations of the *cholam* have been gradually disappearing: the Lithuanian-Russian pronunciation and the North-German one. Today, among *Ashkenazim*, we hear mainly the *cholam* of Southern Germany, which is common in English-speaking countries, and the Polish *cholam*, which is widespread in all countries.

Which is the pronunciation to which Jews of *Ashkenazi* descent should cling? Which is the original, most accurate pronunciation? Common sense

would dictate that the *Ashkenazi* pronunciation was best preserved in *Ashkenaz* (i.e. Germany) as has been proven to be the case with regards to other *minhagim* and traditions that can be traced back through the study of the works of the *Rishonim* and *Achronim*. Indeed, the ancient pronunciation of the *cholam*, which was lost to most Jews of other European countries, was preserved in Southern and Western Germany.

This tradition pronounces the *cholam* as a long "o" sound (as in the word "go"), a pronunciation that accommodates the grammatical rules established by the leading grammarians, and even has a basis in the *Talmud*. The *Gemara* in *Masekhet Berakhot* requires that while reciting *shema* one separates between two adjacent words if the first ends with the sound with which the second begins (such as between the words על לבבך), so they do not sound like a single word. One example given by the *Gemara* is the two words אותו וזכרתם, implying that unless a pause is made, these two words would sound like a single word. Such a concern arises only if the *cholam* vowel at the end of אותו is pronounced as a long "o" sound, like "go", or alternatvely like "[h]ow".

Further evidence for this pronunciation is found in the writings of the early German scholars, who used the *cholam* in place of the *kamatz*. In addition, Rashi refers to the *cholam* with the term מלאפום, which literally means "full mouth," indicating that one must open his mouth wide to pronounce this sound. This can also be verified by comparing the *cholam* with corresponding vowels in other Semitic languages. Similar pronunciations have been preserved among ancient, Near-Eastern Jewish communities.



Punctuated German *Mishnayot* of the 13th century
using *cholam* in place of *kamatz*

The great classical grammarians Rabbi Yehuda ben David Hayyuj (10th Century), Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra (1092-1164) and Rabbi David Kimche, the *Radak*, (1160-1235) have passed down a number of rules that will help us discern the basic characteristics of the *choulom*. We will quote the main guidelines as summarized by Rabbi David Yitzchoki, *shlita*:¹

1. There exist five long vowels whose pronunciations are long and drawn-out and, correspondingly, five short vowels whose pronunciations are short and abrupt: The pairs are: *kamatz gadol* - *patach*; *tzerei* - *segol*; *cholam* - *kamatz katan*; *shuruk* - *kubutz*; *chirik gadol* - *chirik katan*. The *cholam* is a long vowel and its corollary, the short vowel, is *kamatz katan*.²
2. The pronunciation of each long vowel is similar to its corresponding short vowel, only stronger.³
3. Each long vowel carries with it the subtle, vowel-less pronunciation of any of the following three letters: *aleph*, *vav* and *yud*. That is, the *kamatz gadol* ends with a subtle ‘*aleph*’ sound. The *tzerei* and *chirik gadol* end with a subtle ‘*yud*’ sound—which is why these vowels are often followed by a vowel-less ‘*yud*’. And the *shuruk* and *cholam* end with a subtle ‘*vav*’—which is why these vowels are often followed by a vowel-less ‘*vav*’, pronounced somewhat like a ‘w’.⁴

¹ In his article “בטוויי החולם לאור כללי הדקדוק”.

² See משנה ברורה, סי' ס"א ס"ק ל"ו; רד"ק, ספר המכלול, דפוס ליק, קלו ע"א.

³ רד"ק *ibid*. This is also the opinion of the majority of grammarians.

⁴ רד"ק *ibid*. The ר"ן quotes רבי יהודה חיוג as saying the same. See ע"י עין יעקב, יומא ד ע"א ע"א. רבי אברהם אבן עזרא. ע"א writes at the beginning of ‘*Sefer Tzachus*’ that “There should never be a *dagesh* after the *cholam* only a silent *nach*. It is really pronounced like a ‘*vav*’ but not always written that way since we rely on the way it is pronounced.”

The Vilna *Ga'on* favored the South German pronunciation, and writes this explicitly in his works. Several *halakhic* authorities and leading figures of the *musar* movement in Lithuania followed the *Gaon's* position, in contrast to the Lithuanian custom to pronounce the *cholam* as a *tzeirei* (a long "a" sound). Polish communities originally pronounced the *cholam* as a long "o" sound, but later the pronunciation of several vowels in Poland underwent significant changes, including the pronunciation of the *cholam*.

ח

משנת הנריא

משמעות אלא בראש התיבה, והכך הימים בראש התיבה ובסופה (ב).
 ג) אותיות האמטיות נוספות לפעמים להקטין הענין (א). ופעמים לצרך
 השם, הנגזר בן הפעלים (ג). ופעמים שלא לצרך כלל (ג).
 נשלם שער האותיות

שער התנועות

א) עשר תנועות הן, חמש גדולות חמש קטנות תולדותיהן. ואלה הן
 חמש התנועות הגדולות: אָ אַ קָ אֵ אִ וְתולדותיהן אֶ אִי וְשם סתם. אָאִי חֵק גדול,
 ותולדותיהן אֶ וְשם חֵק קטן. אָאִי צִי, ותולדותיהן אֶ וְשם סגל. אָאִי סלאפוס,
 ותולדותיהן אֶ וְשם שֵׁק. אָאִי חֵלֶם, ותולדותיהן אֶ וְשם קָמֶן חֵפֶן; ויש עוד נקודה
 אחת נקראת בשם שְׁנָא ואיננה נקראת בשם תנועה (א). שני מיני שוא יש,
 שוא נע ושוא נח. שוא נע הוֹט אל התנועה שאחריה, שוא נח הוֹט אל התנועה
 שלפניו, והוא נכול התנועה שלפניו (ב).

The description of the *cholam* in *Mishnat Ha'Gra*
 written by the Vilna *Ga'on*

Approximately two hundred years ago in northern Germany, the custom developed to pronounce the *cholam* as an "ow" sound (as in the English word "how"), and this custom reached the Orthodox community of Frankfurt am Main through the indirect influence of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch. However, many communities in southern Germany and nearby regions preserved the original German pronunciation.

In Anglo-Saxon countries, the long "o" sound became the widespread pronunciation supported by the surrounding English language. After the Holocaust, however, many children and grandchildren of German Jews were subject to unwarranted ridicule for their pronunciation, and thus adopted one of the other pronunciations.

The Torah luminaries of *Ashkenaz* – not only those who lived in Germany throughout their lives, but even those who lived in other countries as well – held on to their pronunciation of the *cholam*. The accent with which the *Chatham Sofer*, Rav Moshe Sofer (1762-1839), spoke *Lashon HaKodesh* was the same as the one he was accustomed to from his parents and grandparents back in Frankfurt, including the *cholam* which he pronounced like the Jews of *Ashkenaz*. That is how he spoke, *davened* and delivered his *shi'urim* throughout the many years he lived in Hungary. The same was true of a number of other great Torah leaders who left Germany.



**The world conference – *Knesia Gedola* – of *Agudat Yisrael* in Mariánské Lázně 1937
Behind the top table a big banner with the Yekkish transliteration:
KENESSIO GEDAULO**

There have been some who complained about the discomfort they experience when pronouncing the words as their parents did. Rav Shimon Schwab, Rav of *Khal Adath Jeshurun* in Washington Heights, Manhattan (1909-1995), drew attention to this phenomenon and took it to task:

“It is human nature that minorities are embarrassed by the masses and that is why the few German Jews that are left today are embarrassed by those who poke fun at their pronunciation. Many of them have already changed from their parents’ tradition and their pronunciation of *Lashon HaKodesh*, which has been passed down from generation to generation. They have deserted the ‘small jars’ (i.e. the embellishments), the tunes, and traditions that were passed down to them from their ancestors, pious Jews who preserved their holy heritage for more than a thousand years.”⁵

To those who shy away from the pronunciation of their ancestors, on the basis that it would be more modest not to stand out because of their differences, Rav Schwab expressed the opposite point of view:

“To be humble does not mean to be shy... It also applies to those who lead the divine worship in a House of Prayer. To act as *sheli'ach tzibbur*, even for one *tefillah*, means to lead the congregation in prayer... Therefore, he must make an effort to read the passages clearly, audibly, pleasantly and with dignity. That means to first become acquainted with the traditional tunes and **to accentuate each word with the traditional pronunciation**. If the would-be *chazzan* is unable to do so, humility should prompt him to decline. But if he is at all capable, he should consider it a sacred

⁵ From a letter written by Rabbi Shimon Schwab, *zt"l*, to ‘*Machon Moreshes Ashkenaz*’, dated 1st of *Rosh Chodesh Tammuz* 5749.

assignment to stand before the *amud* and to offer the prayers of the congregation with proper devotion and without display of arrogance.⁶

Rav Ya'akov Kaminetzky (1891-1986) who, himself, read *Kri'ath Shema* with the *cholam* of *Ashkenaz* once wrote to a close acquaintance who wished to publish clarification of the correct accents and pronunciation, that he would have to put up with the reality that people will mock and discredit him: "Certainly, your words will not be accepted by the entire public," wrote Rav Ya'akov. "Yet, if even some people acknowledge it, it is worthwhile. *Chazal* explain⁷ the words of the *posuk*,⁸ 'כי זה כל האדם' – For that is all of man' that the entire world was created for individuals. In truth, being that today there are so many different communities where both the *Sefaradic* and *Ashkenazi* pronunciations are used publicly, a person who pronounces some of the letters or vowels differently from the accepted pronunciation has nothing to be embarrassed of."⁹

Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, *shlita*, ruled regularly that people of German or Anglo-Saxon background should continue to follow the way of pronunciation of their ancestors or families, explaining firstly, that one "should not forsake the teachings of your mother", and furthermore because the *cholam* as pronounced by Jews of *Ashkenaz* is the most grammatically correct and therefore the most ideal.

Those *bnei Torah* who were educated in today's *yeshivot* do not conform to the Lithuanian *cholam* but to the Polish one. This comes to show that their choice of pronunciation is due not to an understanding of the subject, but merely the wish to follow their peers. They all chose the same *yeshivish* style which has become widespread only in this generation.

⁶ Rav Shimon Schwab, Selected Writings, Lakewood 1988, p. 207.

⁷ ברכות ו ע"ב; שבת ל ע"ב

⁸ קהלת יב, יג

⁹ From R' Ya'akov Kaminetzky's approbation of R' Yehoshua Ovadia Bresler's booklet, *Safah Berurah*, on the pronunciation of *Lashon HaKodesh*, Brooklyn, 5742.

My Rebbi, the late *Mashgi'ach* Rav Shlomo Wolbe, was asked more than once whether it is appropriate for people who descend from *Ashkenaz* to change their pronunciation to the one prevalent in *yeshivot* today. Rav Wolbe would typically reply that one should stick to the pronunciation of *Ashkenaz*. He encouraged those who adhered to this pronunciation explaining that this was, in fact, the preferred *yeshivish* pronunciation, seeing that the masters of the Lithuanian *Musar* movement educated in Kelm adopted this pronunciation.