

**Mojsze Asz**

## **Some “Regulations” of the Bygone “Tailors' Society”**

In an article (by Mojsze Asz) in the “*Częstochower Zeitung*” No.4, dated 24<sup>th</sup> January 1936, the following regulations were printed.

(Unfortunately, there is no explanation as to why clauses 1-2 were not published):

3) No member of the Society may encroach upon his fellows by taking their work or competing with them. Any member not adhering to this rule will not only be ousted from the Society, but will also be fined.

4) Cap-makers may not take on any tailoring assignments, and vice-versa.

A great quarrel arose in connection to the fifth regulation. The tailors had requested permission from the *Kehilla* to pray (especially on Shabbes and on holidays) in their [separate] synagogue, in order to have the proceeds of the donations pledged. *Kehilla* leaders did not wish to agree, since the construction of the [Main] Synagogue, which had only been completed three years earlier - in 5570 (1810) - had left the *Kehilla* with large debts to pay off. Therefore, at the inauguration of the [Main] Synagogue (which took place that same year), a decision was made not to allow the existence of any other prayer-houses, and that all must worship at the [Main] Synagogue. *Kehilla* leaders were of the opinion that permitting the tailors to have their own synagogue was against *Khilla* regulations, as well as posing a threat to the community. A compromise was finally reached and the following regulation was formulated:

5) The “Tailors’ Society” is permitted by the [Chief] Rabbi and the *Kehilla* leaders to leave the [Main] Synagogue for the Torah Reading<sup>1</sup> and to read separately, but they must return after the reading to the [Main] Synagogue to attend the *Musaf* prayer service.

6) Only members of the “Tailors’ Society” are permitted to be present at their reading - other worshippers are not to be allowed entry.

7) The room, where the tailors hold their weekly reading, must be clean. The Torah scroll must be kept in an appropriate place.

Great arguments arose regarding the following point: How much *Kehilla* tax should the “Tailor’s Society” pay? The fledgling *Kehilla* was, at the time, not yet legally recognised by the State and thus did not possess the right to impose compulsory taxes. Considering that the *Kehilla* was in need of money, a “Great Charity” [fund] was created, of which each Jewish resident was required to be a member and to which they were required to pay a specific annual amount, which qualified as a voluntary donation. The heads of the *Kehilla* demanded that the tailors’ guarantee that they would continue being members of the “Great Charity” and pay their membership fees down to the last *grosz*.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: Donations are pledged during the Torah Reading.]

The tailors desired to be freed of the “Great Charity”, for their association’s sake. Their representative, Leibale Szenker, who regarded himself as a scholar, based the tailors’ standpoint on a verse from Scripture and argued that, when our ancestor Abraham created the world’s first Jewish community, he vowed not to take any payments from tailors, saying, “*I have lifted up mine hand [etc.], that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelace and that I will not take any thing that is thine*” [Genesis 14:22-23]. “*From a thread*” – a tailor; “*even to a shoelace*” – a cobbler; “*and that I will not take any thing that is thine*” - I shall impose no tax upon you.

“Therefore”, continued Leibel, “You too, the founding fathers of the Częstochowa community, must uphold Grandfather Reb<sup>2</sup> Abraham’s oath and make the “Tailors’ Society” exempt from tax.” But he received a fitting rebuttal from the *Kehilla* President Juda Frenkel, who explained that the fact that Our Father Abraham did not wish to levy the tailors<sup>3</sup> did not create any excessive honours for them. Because Abraham, who was “*very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold*” [Genesis 13:2], a very wealthy man, who took in a great many guests, reckoned that it would not be worthwhile for him to take fees from them, that they should not then offer up any opinions: “*Lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich*” [Genesis, 14:23]. With us, however, in our newly-baked community, there are no philanthropists and hosts the likes of Our Grandfather, and yet we must have money, and thus cannot make you exempt.

After many discussions and negotiations, the following regulations were established:

8) In order that the municipal “Great Charity” receive no damage by the establishment of the “Tailors’ Society”, this Society takes upon itself to pay the “Great Charity” three ducats (Red [złoty]) a year - the first instalment in the month of Cheshvan and the second in Iyyar. The “Great Charity” must issue receipts for the moneys paid.

9) Should the *Kehilla* receive authorisation from the State to impose a compulsory tax on the Jewish population, and the municipal taxes of the members of the Tailors’ Society be found to amount to more than three ducats, every one of them must make up the difference between the sum he paid the “Tailors’ Society” and his part [of the official tax].

10) Should the instalments to the “Great Charity” not be scrupulously paid, the tailors will lose their right to conduct their own Torah Reading.

This is how our grandfathers used to settle their communal affairs among themselves in the olden days!

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<sup>2</sup> [TN: “ויידן ר' אברהם” in the original Yiddish; a transparent ploy by the clever scholarly journalist to poke a bit of fun at the uneducated tailor, as if he considered the Patriarch Abraham a rather recent ancestor, whom he might touchingly call “Dear Granddad”.]

<sup>3</sup> [TN: This is by no means the accepted interpretation of the verses; he was playing along with Leibel’s own rendering of the Scripture, which was also obviously meant in jest, to make his point.]