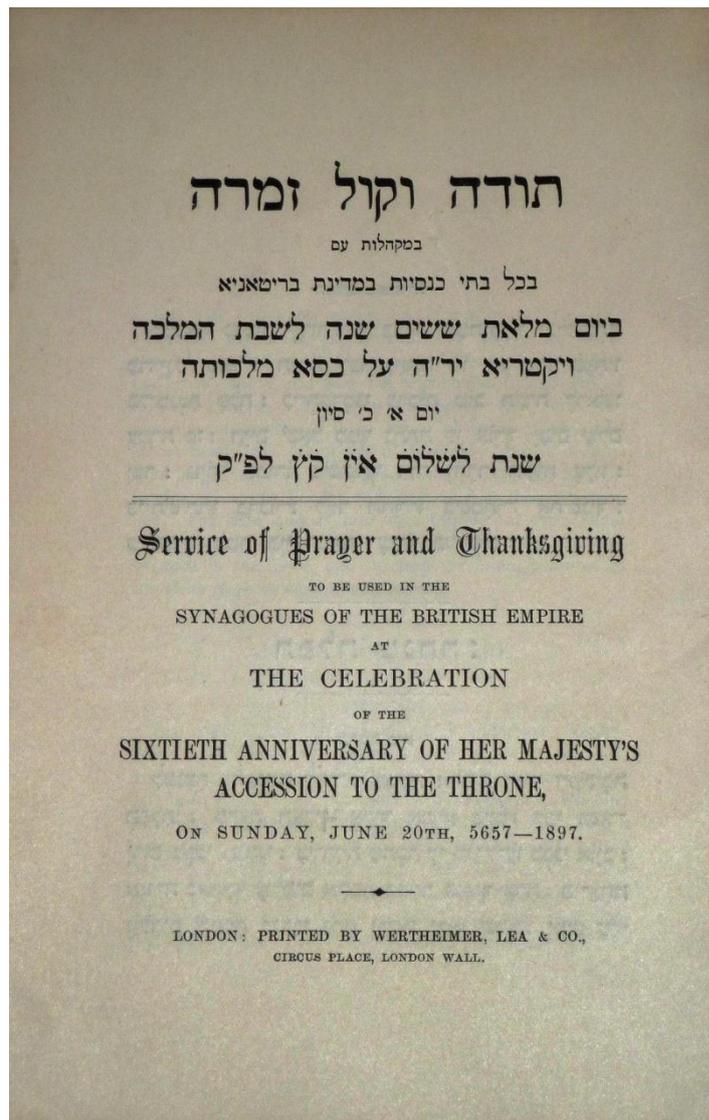


Queen Elizabeth II, Diamond Jubilee, June 2 – 5, 2012

A Brief History of the Prayer for the Welfare of the Royal Family

‘Seek the Peace of the City to which I have carried you in exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because in its peace you shall find peace’ Jeremiah, 29:7

‘Pray for the welfare of the government, for if not for the fear of it, people would swallow one another alive.’ Pirkei Avot, Ethics of the Fathers, 3:2



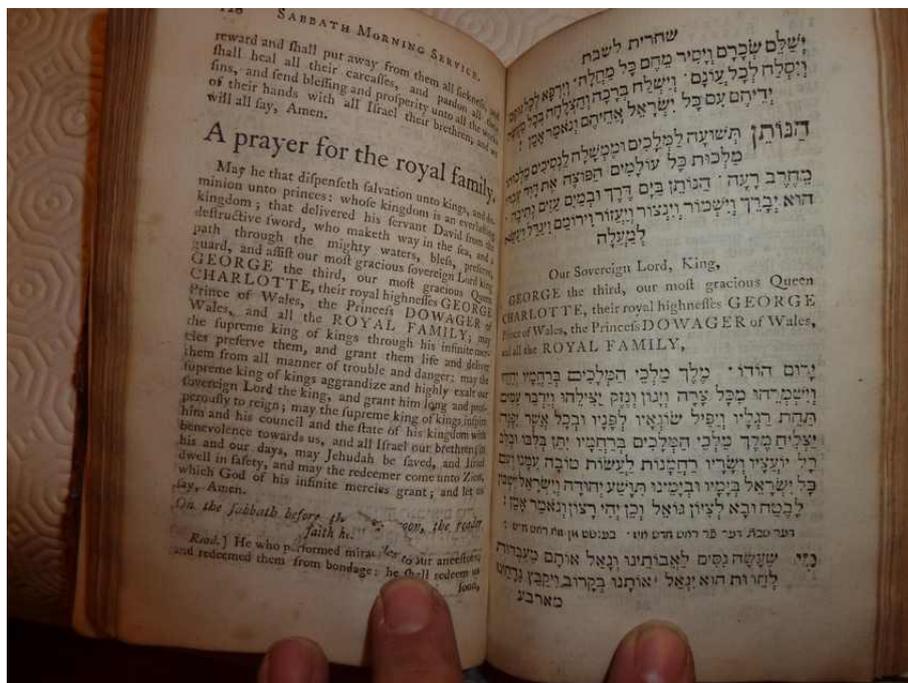
Queen Victoria was the first English monarch to celebrate her Diamond Jubilee, and on Sunday, June 20th 1897, synagogues throughout the British Empire held a Service of Prayer and Thanksgiving in her honour. In June 2012, Anglo-Jewry will once again celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of a reigning monarch and United Synagogue congregations will honour the Queen with a prayer composed by the Chief Rabbi. This short essay puts a selection of prayers for the Royal Family into historical context and explains their variations.

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Since the re-admission of the Jews into England in 1656, British Jewry has enjoyed a positive relationship with the monarchy. Interestingly, in Samuel Pepys' diary entry of October 14th 1663, he describes his visit to the Creechurch Lane Synagogue for Sephardi Jews on the Festival of Simchat Torah, (Rejoicing of the Law):

and in the end they had a prayer for the King, which they pronounced his name in Portugall; but the prayer like the rest in Hebrew. ¹

While his description of the chaotic scenes that follow are perhaps better well known, clearly his observation that the King was honoured was considered noteworthy.



History and Evolution of the Weekly Prayer for the Royal Family

According to Rabbi JH Hertz (1872-1946), the UK Chief Rabbi from 1913 - 1946, both Philo and Josephus spoke of prayers that were regularly offered for the welfare of the Roman Emperor by the Jewish community in Palestine. The earliest known Jewish formulation for a royal family is from 11th Century Worms:

‘May He who blessed our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob bless our exalted Kaiser. May he bless and prosper his undertakings; establish his throne in justice so that righteousness rule in the land; and grant life and peace to him and his seed after him. And let us say Amen.’

(Dr J H Hertz, Authorised Daily Prayer Book, London, 1947, p. 504)

¹ They were recent immigrants and spoke Portuguese.

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The custom of reading a prayer for the welfare of the ruler became incorporated into the medieval halachic codes, notably the Abudraham, a code of Jewish law focused on prayer where it is written 'After the reading of the Law And it is customary to bless the King.....' (p. 136). In 1642, during the troubled times of King Charles 1st, Queen Henrietta Maria travelled to the Continent to rouse support for her husband. She visited the Amsterdam Synagogue and after a prayer for the rulers of the Netherlands, she was surprised to hear a prayer for her own Royal House.

Leon De Modena's important work 'The History and Rites, Customs and Manner of Life of the Present Jews Throughout the World' was first published in Italian and translated into English in 1650 by Edmund Chimead. De Modena describes a 'Solemn Benediction for the Prince of the State under which they live.'

In 1651 the St. John Embassy was sent on diplomatic business to the Netherlands. On a visit to the synagogue, Menasseh Ben Israel (1604-1657), the prominent Rabbi, author and printer who lived in Amsterdam and helped facilitate the re-admission of the Jews to England, states in his *Vindiciae Judaearum*:

our nation entertained him with musick and all expressions of gladness, and also pronounced a blessing not only upon his honour, then present but on the whole Commonwealth of England, for that they were a people in league and amity. (p.5)

Further, in 1655 Menasseh Ben Israel issued his 'Humble Addresses' which includes the first, complete English version of the prayer for the head of state.

In 1665, the first English prayer for an English King appears in a pamphlet written by Jacob Judah Leon, titled, 'A Relation of the most memorable things in the Tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Salomon.' It includes the verse

He that sends deliverance to Kings, and giveth Dominion to Princes...He himself blesse, [sic] preserve, assist, make great, and more and more Exalt our Gracious Lord CHARLES the II. King and Protector of England, Scotland France and Ireland. ...

The 1810 edition of the New Year volume of David Levi's Festival Prayer books, published in London, offers a heartfelt prayer:

He who dispenseth salvation unto kings, and dominion unto princes; whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; who delivered David from the destructive sword; who maketh a way in the sea, and a path through the mighty waters. May he bless, preserve, guard, assist, exalt and highly aggrandize, our most gracious Sovereign Lord, King GEORGE, the Third, our most amiable Queen CHARLOTTE, his Royal Highness GEORGE, Prince of Wales, and all the ROYAL FAMILY. May the Supreme King of kings, through his infinite mercy preserve them, and grant them life, and deliver them from all manner of danger. May the Supreme King of kings, through his infinite mercy, exalt, and highly aggrandize him, and grant him long and prosperously to reign. May the Supreme King of kings, through his infinite mercy, inspire him and all his counsellors, and nobles, with benevolence to us, and all Israel our brethren. In his days and in ours, may Judah be saved, and Israel dwell in safety; and may the Redeemer come unto Zion, which God in his infinite mercy grant; and let us say, Amen.

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The prayer has gone through various iterations. In the 1943 edition of Chief Rabbi Hertz's Authorised Daily Prayer Book, he traces some of the changes. For example, he writes

in 1895 the British Rabbinate was induced to modify the words *put compassion into the Queen's heart* and this was replaced by "*May the supreme King of kings in his mercy put a spirit of wisdom and understanding into her heart.....*"

This was considered to be more appropriate as the monarch was no longer an autocrat whose whim and mood determined the welfare of the Jews.

In 1935, Chief Rabbi Hertz felt that the prayer should be made more universal. He replaced

that they may uphold the peace of the realm, advance the welfare of the nation, and deal kindly and truly with all Israel

-with-

in his days and in ours may our Heavenly Father spread the protection of peace over all the dwellers on earth.

In Keter Shem Tov, the major work by Rabbi Shemtov Gaguine (1884-1953) Head of the Sephardi Beth Din in London, he writes about the liturgical customs and ceremonies of Anglo-Jewry. He notes that in London the custom is to bless the Sovereign every Sabbath and holiday. The prayer was read in Hebrew except for the names of the sovereign and the royal family which were read in the vernacular.

In fact, to this day, a prayer for the welfare of the Royal Family is recited every Sabbath morning at a pivotal moment in the prayer service, just after the Reading of the Torah and before Musaf, the additional service for the Sabbath. The rabbinate has also initiated special prayers for the monarch at significant life-cycle events including births, deaths, coronations, and at times of ill health or during a war. While other Jewish communities, particularly in Germany and the Netherlands, have written prayers for their respective monarchies, no other community has been as prolific as Anglo-Jewry.

The following is the most recent version read out in United Synagogues across the UK

He who gives salvation to kings and dominions unto princes, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom – may he bless

Our Sovereign Lady, Queen Elizabeth,
Philip, Duke of Edinburgh,
Charles, Prince of Wales,
And all the Royal Family.

May the supreme King of kings in His mercy preserve the Queen in life, guard her and deliver her from all trouble and sorrow. May He put a spirit of wisdom and understanding into her heart and into the hearts of all her counsellors, that they may uphold the peace of the realm, advance the welfare of the nation, and deal kindly and justly with all the House of Israel. In her days and in ours may our Heavenly Father spread the tabernacle of peace over all the dwellers on earth; and may the redeemer come unto Zion; and let us say Amen.

A Note on Orders of Service and Sermons

Cecil Roth (1899-1970) one of the leading historians and bibliographers of Anglo Jewry, lists some of the early sermons and orders of service relating to royalty in his famous bibliography of Anglo-Judaica, the Magna Bibliotheca Anglo-Judaica. Some of these early ones are in Spanish or Portuguese which was still used by the early Sephardi community in London. He has several entries relating to the death of King George II.

These include

Belisario (Isaac Mendes) – A sermon occasioned by the death of His Late Majesty, preached on Saturday the 29th of November, 1760, in the Synagogue of the Portuguese Jews in London. Translated from the Spanish, pp 24, 8vo. London, 1761.

and the one for the accession of King George III

Azevedo, (Moses Cohen De) – Sermon de congratulacion, sobre la felix y pacifica accesion de sa Magestad el Rey George III. a el trono destes reynos, predicado en 6 Tebet 5521, y 13 De ziembre, 1760. pp 19. 4to. London, 1761.

From the time of King George II, special prayers and sermons for royal occasions have been produced as separate pamphlets. Interestingly many of these Orders of Service include a Hebrew translation of the national anthem, God Save Our Queen. The early ones are exceedingly rare as few have survived.

On December 5th, 1805 Rabbi Solomon Hirschell gave a sermon in the Great Synagogue, Duke's Place the Day Appointed For a General Thansksgiving for the success of his majesty's fleet under Lord Nelson, Off Trafalgar.

On Sabbath June 28th Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler was hoping to give a sermon congratulating King Edward VII on his Coronation which was scheduled for June 26th, 1902. However the King was suddenly taken ill and had to undergo an emergency appendectomy operation and his words had to be replaced with a fervent prayer for the King's recovery.

More recently, Chief Rabbi, Dr J H Hertz gave a memorial sermon for King George V at the Great Synagogue in London in 1936.

Alongside these sermons are orders of service and special prayers to be inserted into the Sabbath morning prayers. Sometimes these orders of service were for special prayers to acknowledge important occasions such as the Memorial Service on the Day of the Burial of Her Majesty Queen Victoria. Others are prayers were inserted into existing services such as a *Prayer for the Recovery of His Majesty the King to be Read in the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogues (in 1928)*

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The following one is an early one recorded by Cecil Roth it is from 1789.

Thanksgiving Prayer which was read in the Great Synagogue, in Leadenhall Street, by the Rev. Moses Myers, on the joyful occasion of His Majesty's recovery, of which the following is an exact translation. fol. London, 1789. Hebrew and English.

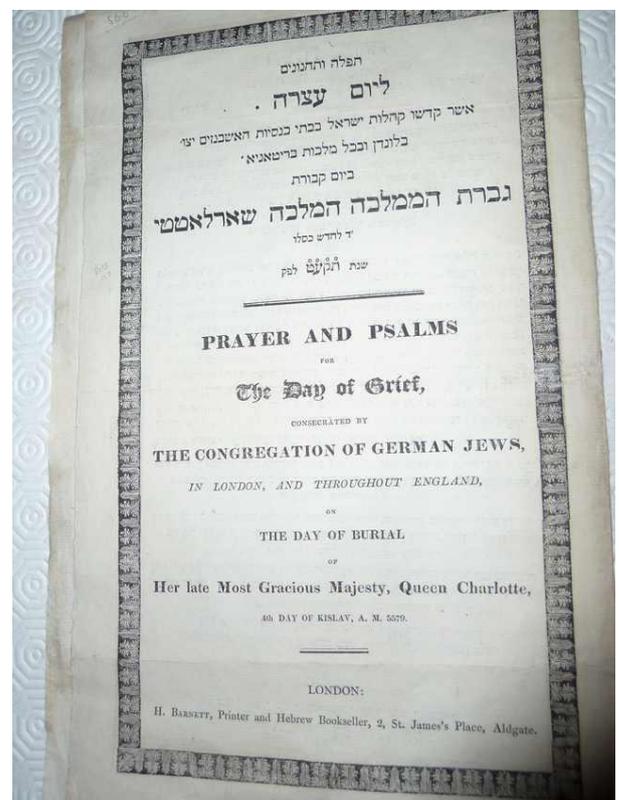
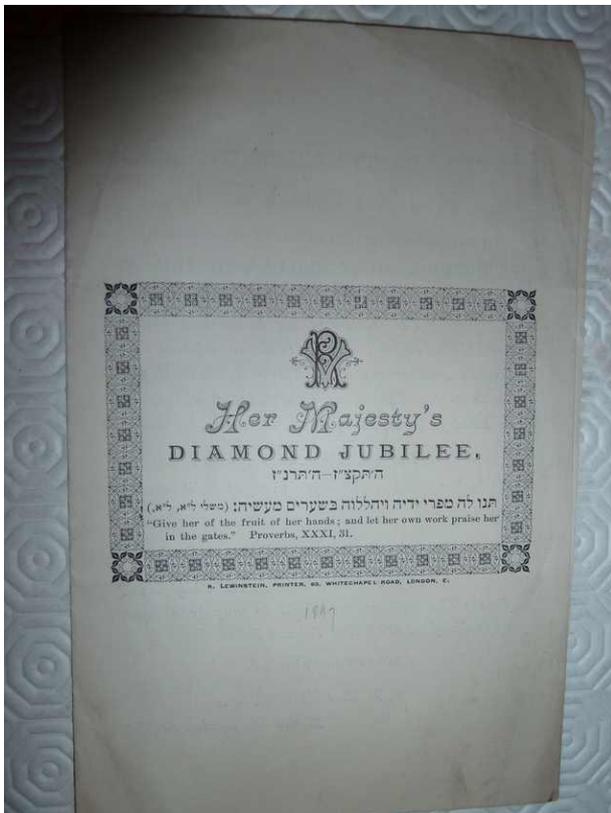
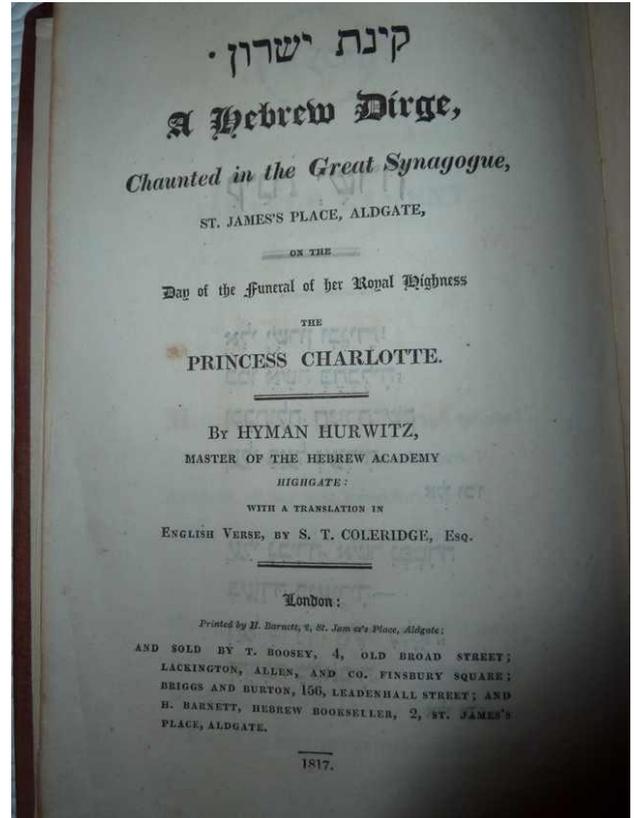
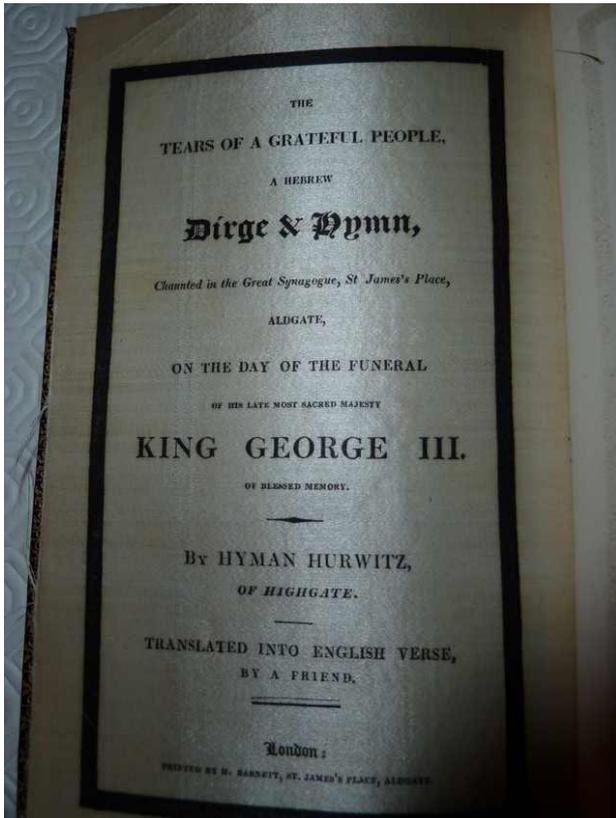
Hyman Hurwitz (1770-1844) a biblical scholar and Hebraist, wrote a special hymn and dirge to be chanted on the day of the funeral of King George III, some of which were printed on silk. On the hymn he wrote for Queen Charlotte, it says it was translated by Coleridge.

These orders of service offer a fascinating glimpse into the respect and affection felt by the Jewish community towards the monarchy. I would welcome any further comments and variations regarding any of the prayers for the Royal Family and in the near future, I hope to publish a full bibliography of these orders of service and sermons relating to the British Royal Family.

Jonathan Fishburn

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Appendix - Some interesting Orders of Service reproduced by kind permission of Professor David Latchman



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