

Chagim uMoadim

— from the Masorti Movement



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Yamim Nora'im 5778

Jewish inspirations, often stirred by memories that take us back to our individual and collective past, are very often dependent upon sounds. My childhood was spent in a middle-of-the-road Orthodox shul in a London suburb where the sounds of davening permeated my soul, to such an extent that I felt compelled in much later life to become a chazan and, specifically, to set up an educational facility for people who wanted to learn to lead t'fillot. (As a woman, this was something prohibited to me in my earlier years, of course!).

The significant sounds of the Yamim Nora'im are not only the piercing shofar blasts. The majority of Masorti congregations follow an Eastern Ashkenazic nusach rite in terms of music. The exquisite chants and melodies of the liturgical texts are saturated with musical motifs that evoke emotions different from those at other times. They are peculiar to themselves and are infused with sounds from the leyning, the Torah trop or cantillation for the mornings of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In these special motifs, or groups of notes, we can hear the bleating of the ram as its horns are caught in the thick bush. We can feel the plaintive cry of both Isaac bound on the sacrificial altar and Esau dying from lack of water in the heat as his distraught mother looks on. It is pathos.

When a person is called to the reading of the Torah on the mornings of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the blessings they recite are traditionally sung to this trop. Sadly, not too many people have retained them and they use a hurried 'minor' chant as on Shabbat and weekdays. This misses the richness of our ritual. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could revive this custom! Here is a recording of how it sounds. Listen out particularly for the opening rev'i'i on Bar'chu:

The scene of the Akeda, the Binding of Isaac, is said to be Mount Moriah, which eventually became known as Jerusalem. At the end of Yom Kippur the mood changes vividly as we rejoice in having come through, hopefully, cleansed. We are renewed and ready for another year.

L'shanah Haba'ah Biy'rushalayim!

Chazan Jaclyn Chernett
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Jaclyn Chernett, chazan, educator and musicologist, is the Founder and Director of Studies of the European Academy for Jewish Liturgy, 'an academy without walls' teaching inspired leaders of Synagogue prayer around the world and across denominations. She is a Vice-President of Masorti Judaism.

Jaclyn Chernett is the first Jewish woman in the UK to be ordained as a Chazan.



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in partnership with the World Zionist Organization*

