



Hazzanut

AT THE MASORTI MOVEMENT

The Hazzan and his tasks

In Talmudic times, the hazzan was in charge of various functions, such as taking out the Torah for its reading, playing the Shofar to announce the beginning of Shabbat and of the different festivities, and also perform, in some cases, as the officiant at the religious services.

At that moment, there wasn't a permanent chazan, and any member of the kehila could fulfill that role. It's wasn't until the time of the Gueonim that the hazzan started to be a permanent sheliach tzibur (emissary of the kehila). The desire to enrich prayers with music was starting to appear within the kehilot.

We consider the golden era for chazanut from the end of the XIX century to World War II. This period was marked by the appearance of the great interpreters (chazanim) such as Gerson Sirota, Iosele Rosemblat, Mordejai Herschman, etc. After the war, we could name Moche Kusewitzky and his brothers, Leib Glantz, etc. From biblical time we can find the expression of the religious feeling by chants and poetry. In the Temple of Jerusalem, the music and poetic composition were of great importance.

Nowadays, especially with the appearance of the Masorti Movement, the hazzan has different tasks, more connected with teaching, as opposed to being only summoned to direct religious services. In most kehilot, he must act as a More (teacher) and instruct children that are preparing for their Bar/Bat Mitzva, and in Talmud Tora, and at the same time, he is in charge of the musical activities like the preparation and direction of choirs for various occasions such as religious services, and cultural and social events.

Personally, I lived two very different experiences in the last forty years in regards to the role of the hazzan and chazanut in Argentina.

In the seventies I had the opportunity, after many and arduous auditions and exams strictly of nusach hatefila, to be a part of the Kehilah of Paso Street, which, at the time, was the place where people could listen and enjoy the purest and most traditional liturgy. It was only a synagogue (an orthodox one), where I had to participate in the religious and ceremonial services that required liturgical music. A choir also participated in the services, composed only by male voices.

There was practically no participation from the congregants. They came to listen to the Cantor and the choir, because the liturgical compositions resembled symphonies.

On the year 1990 I entered the Kehilah Benei Tikva, where the services were very different. The participation of the congregation has a fundamental role, and the hazzan doesn't just sing the tefilot, but fulfills a teaching role, instructing in both Judaism and music.

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