

Hazzanut

AT THE MASORTI MOVEMENT

The validity of the Hazzanut

Is the Hazzan an essential tool in the Tfilot? Is the role of the Hazzan really necessary or is it simply to "beautify" the religious services? Is our Kehila mature enough to accept a woman leading prayers?

I asked myself these questions and some others over and over again before starting my studies at the Bet-Asaf Institute of the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary.

Of course, before starting my studies I was already working as a Hazzanit, and although it was unusual to see a woman in the pulpit, I was sometimes "allowed" to guide the Tfila. I am very grateful for those early days because, paying attention, you can learn a lot while being a second Hazzanit, or member of the choir.

The mixture of singing and liturgy fascinated me, but my doubts remained; there was a huge resistance but, in most cases, it was due to the simple rejection of change, since very few objections were actually argued. Precisely for that reason, I decided to pursue my calling. Time has ways of putting things in their place and new trends, if supported on solid foundations, tend to succeed.

As Jews we do not need a guide for our prayers, not even a Rabbi is necessary for that; we simply must take the initiative to connect with the Lord and say Tfila.

That simple and unique moment of the Jew with his Siddur in hand, walking towards the Beit Kneset to meet the minian, has become more and more rare in the last century, and with each generation, we find ourselves with a Kehila filled with feelings and the intention to maintain our traditions but, in many cases, little knowledge about them.

There, seeing the need to pray in community, to continue with our ancient traditions, is where I understood more than ever that the role of the Hazzan is important, as a Moreh, as a Shaliach Tzibur and from the song, as a form of spiritual connection.

So it was that after three years of study at the Bet-Asaf Institute that I became the first woman to graduate as a Hazzanit.

Fortunately, ten years after getting my degree, I'm not the only one, and I hope that in the near future many more will join this profession, that, as a teacher once told me, it's more like a spiritual office than a profession.

To maintain, humbly, the legacy that has been left by the great Hazzanut, such as Gershon Sirota, Moshe Kousevitzky, Pinchik, Iosele Rosenblat and the endless list of Argentinean Hazzanim that in the last 50 years have inhabited the temples around the world, is a beautiful and daily challenge.

The question of the maturity of our Kehila to accept a woman in the pulpit is still open, but we have come a long way, and in these times it is quite common to hear women leading the Tfilot in our conservative kehilot.

I dream and struggle for those who still do not accept it within the Masorti Movement (I exclude from the analysis other religious movements) to understand that our faith is far from being a dogma and that constant evolution and adaptation to changes and new trends, of course without compromising our core values, is what enabled us to stay and survive for ever and ever.

Hazzanit Natalia Arazi
Congregation Bet-Am Medinath Israel
Buenos Aires, Argentina



With support from the WZO.