

In the sixteenth century, Moses Mintz of Hamburg said that the ideal Sh'liach Tzibur -should be "blameless in character, humble, a general favorite and married; should be able to read easily and understand all the books "of the Holy Scriptures; be the first to enter and the last to leave the house of God, and strive to attain the highest degree of devotion in his prayers. He should dress neatly and wear a long garment and knee breeches. And he should not look about him nor under his mantle. And he shouldn't move his hands restlessly but he should keep them folded neatly. And outside God's house, he should avoid sowing any seeds of anger or hatred against himself by keeping aloof from all communal disputes."

that's one big challenge--but not the important one.

The challenge in this century will determine our liturgical future.

The *Sh'liach Tzibur* (Community Representative) came out of an era when there were few prayer books. One person who knew was appointed to lead, perhaps to chant since melody held memory longer. One could be *yotzeh* (fulfill one's obligation) by saying amen to what the *Shatz* (*Sh'liach Tzibur*) was saying or chanting. So you have the tradition of אמן (Amen) and שמו ברך הו'א וברך שמו with the *Sh'liach Tzibur* interacting with the assembled congregation as one responsive unit.

Larry Hoffman recounts;

Once upon a time, there was a guru in the mountains of Asia who gathered around him a band of monks dedicated to prayer. The guru owned a cat, which he loved deeply. He took the cat with him everywhere, even to morning prayer. When the disciples complained that the cat's prowling distracted them, the guru bought a leash and tied the cat to a post at the entrance to the prayer room. Years later, when the guru died, his disciples continued to care for the cat. But, as they say, cats have nine lives, so the cat outlived even the disciples. By then the disciples had their own disciples, who began caring for the cat, but without recalling anymore why the cat was present during prayer. When the cat's leash wore out, they knitted another one in the sacred colors of the sky and the earth; and when the post wore down, they built a beautiful new one that they began calling the sacred cat stand. During this third generation of disciples, the cat died, and the disciples wasted no time in buying another sacred cat to accompany them in prayer. Their worship was

eventually expanded to include the sacred actions of tying the cat to the leash and affixing the leash to the sacred cat stand.¹

We live in a different time.

We have lost the art of public worship. We have failed.

The Challenge before us

What are our sacred cats ?

We are a praying community honoring the symbols of the past. What part of those symbols still live? Which of them can be given new life? Which are irretrievably dead in this era?

What we will be included and what we will be omitted

WE MUST DECIDE AND KNOW

That Torah needs to be taught but the worship service is not a classroom

That Music is crucial but prayer is not a concert

That Singing is needed but worship is more than a songfest

That Words are to be read but worship is more than reading

That Hebrew is indispensable, but it alone is not enough

That Aesthetics are crucial, but it is not art for arts sake

That responsive reading is deadly and must be transformed to responsive prayer

That Repetition is intrinsic to ritual and that obsessive repetition can kill the spirit.

¹ Lawrence A. Hoffman, The Art of Public Prayer; Not for Clergy Only SkyLight Paths Publishing Woodstock VT 1999

That Cantor and Rabbi are Performers- yet worship is not a show

That Cantor and Rabbi and congregation must be a single balanced responsive entity. One missing part destroys the whole enterprise.

That room must be made for silent prayer and that the silence not be empty.

That we need to be loyal to the past, and not give the past a veto

That if you can't do it in two hours- you can't do it in 2 1/2

And paradoxically that longer is not better. except when it is

Knowing that timing is everything-

That finding the balance of a right length of time for prayer-not too much, not too little is like being a tightrope walker, maintaining one's balance by constant movement back and forth.

That without Community we are finished and yet we must make room for each individual's uniqueness

That we must use the intellect in creating a worship- so that words that come from the heart may enter the heart.

That we must create a worship experience recognizably Jewish in all its parts, without the sacred cats of the past.

That we will have occasional success sometimes by mistake

That these are the challenges of a Cantor, and/or a Rabbi, of a congregation.

It is hard work, that each has volunteered to do.

שליח צבור שמעריך בתפילתו כדי שישמעו שקולו ערב,
אם הוא מחמת ששמח בלבו על שנותן הודאה לשם, יתברך
בנעימה, תבוא עליו ברכה. והוא שיתפלל בכובד ראש ועומד
באימה ויראה, אבל אם מתכוון להשמיע קולו, ושמח בקולו,
הרי זה מגונה

What about a *Sh'liach Tzibur* who lengthens his prayer that the congregation may hear his beautiful voice.

If it is because he is happy at heart that he is thanking God--May he be blessed with pleasantness, May blessing pursue him. On the condition that he pray seriously and stand in awe and fear of his Maker.

But if his intention is to have his voice heard and he has pride in his voice that is to be detested.

The question is that of the inner heart. Is this person real?

In addition to a beautiful voice a cantor needs to have a big Heart, marked by graciousness, sensitivity, openness to new learnings and new experience. and a tad of humility and a willingness to learn and courage to move in new directions .

The greatest triumph a cantor can have is helping create a true worship service. May your part in worship go from your tender heart and touch our *n'shamah* that together we might move the heart of the ever living God of Israel That He may in turn purify our hearts to worship Him in Truth.

וטהר לבנו לעבדך באמת