

## "Halacha Sources" Highlights - Qualities a "Chazzan" for the Yamim Nora'im Should Have

**Question:** In what way is it proper to be particular regarding the qualities of a "chazzan" who is to represent the congregation during the special services of the *Yamim Nora'im* [the "High Holy Days"] (such as those of *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur* - and even the "*selichos*" [i.e. penitential] supplications)?

**Answer:** We have to draw a distinction here. There is a separate issue of what state *the relations between the "chazzan" and the congregation* need to be in; here, on the other hand, we focus on the proper qualities for the "chazzan" to have *himself*. Having clarified that, we will divide our discussion into three steps:

- (1) qualities which the Gemara says are those needed for a "chazzan" to be a "fitting" one,
- (2) how the authorities apply these requirements to the *Yamim Nora'im*,
- (3) additional details.

### Part 1: Qualities Which The Gemara Says Are Those Needed for a "Chazzan" to be a "Fitting" One

The Gemara in *Ta'anis* (16a-b) discusses the choosing of the "chazzan" who is to lead the special prayer services on fast days declared over lack of rain:

*The Baraisa teaches:* Even if there is someone [exceptionally] elderly or learned present, only "a competent person" should be sent "down before the platform" [i.e. to be the "chazzan"]. Who is "competent"? R' Yehudah said: [Someone who is] occupied [with children to support] and does not have [enough to feed them], and who has [involvement of his own at] work in the fields, and whose house is empty, and whose reputation is pleasing, and who is "lowly of knees" [i.e. a humble person (Rashi)], and who is pleasing to the people [which (as noted) is not our subject], and who has a melodiousness [i.e. his prayers "draw out" the heart (Rashi)], and whose voice is agreeable, and who is expert [enough] to say [publicly the words of] the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings [as they appear in the services (Rashi)] - and to teach [the words of] the Midrash, the Halacha, and the Aggadic teachings, and who is thoroughly expert in the brachos [i.e. the prayers themselves].

*The Gemara asks:* Aren't "having children to support but not enough to feed them" and "whose house is empty" the same thing?

*Rav Chisda explains:* It means that his "house" [i.e. his family] is "empty" of [reputation-staining] transgressions.

*And as for "whose reputation is pleasing", Abbaye explains:* This means that he did not earn an evil reputation [even (Rashi)] in his youth.

*The Gemara then cites the pasuk (Yirmiyah 12:8): "My inheritance [i.e. the people of Israel] was unto Me like a lion in the forest - it 'gave at Me' with its voice - therefore I despised it."*

*And the phrase "It 'gave at Me' with its voice" was explained [by Mar Zutra bar Tuvia in the name of Rav or R' Chama in the name of R' Elazar]: It refers to a "chazzan" who is not "fitting" being sent "down before the platform" [i.e. to lead the prayer services].*

In summary, we have three general qualifications (excluding, of course, those which are relevant specifically in the case of a lack of rain): The "chazzan" should be: (1) **Expert** in the material (and especially its Torah sources [the *Mishnah Berurah* brings an additional point - that someone who is generally unaccustomed to Torah-study is invalid regardless, in line with the principle "[If someone] turns his ears [aside] from hearing [words of] Torah - even his prayers are an abomination" [*Mishlei* 28:9]), (2) **Good-sounding** (both for inspiration and in a generally agreeable sense), and **Clean-Reputationed** (including even his family and his past). [Plus, of course, the less important qualification of being (4) **Elderly and Learned.**]

#### Part 2: How the Authorities Apply These Requirements to the Yamim Nora'im [and even "Selichos"]

The *Kol Bo* [-1300, written (according to some) by *Rabbeinu Aharon* of France] (147) cites Rav Hai Gaon as saying that these qualifications apply **only** in the case of those special fast-day services, whereas for the usual prayer services it is sufficient that the "chazzan" have a "spiritually clean reputation" in the *immediate* sense, i.e. he himself must have properly repented of transgressions that he himself did which would otherwise invalidate him [such as having transgressed an oath (*Mishnah Berurah* to *siman* 53) or even having taken a court case to the secular courts in violation of the Halacha (*Mishnah Berurah* to *siman* 581)]. However (as noted by the *Darkei Moshe* [in his commentary to O.C. 53]), it is the consensus of the other authorities to disagree and to apply the Gemara's qualifications to a "chazzan" for **any** prayer service, as long as he is "appointed by the congregation" to the post [i.e. in some permanent type of way], as is codified in the *Shulchan Aruch* in the Halachos of the Early Parts of the *Shacharis* Service (O.C. 53:4).

However, even the *Kol Bo* himself (65) writes that in the *Yamim Nora'im* the *minhag* is that only the most fitting "chazzan" should be chosen. [He is clearly referring *at least* to the prayer services of "the ten days of repentance" (i.e. from *Rosh HaShanah* through *Yom Kippur*); the *Darkei Moshe* clarifies that he is in fact referring to whenever "selichos" are said - see O.C. 581:1.] Similarly, the *Ohr Zarua* [*Rabbeinu Yitzchak ben Moshe* of Vienna, ~1190 - ~1260] (1:116) writes that on *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur* the strict requirements of the special fast-day services apply, because the reason for their uniqueness is the dangerous situation in which the general community finds itself. (According to the *Kol Bo*, the shared uniqueness is that in these days the "chazzan" does not merely *repeat* the prayer but actually *leads* it [at least in part] *himself*.) In any case, even though our accepted ruling is to require the qualifications of the Gemara *throughout* the year (as above), we still have room for the distinction of the *Yamim Nora'im* to apply, for throughout the year the requirements are only applied to a "chazzan" being appointed in a permanent fashion, whereas on the *Yamim Nora'im* they are to be used even though no "permanent appointed" is being

done. (This is similar to the Tosafos in *Sukkah* 42b cited by the *Beis Yosef* in *siman* 53, which says [about a requirement not being discussed here] that it applies to a permanently-appointed "*chazzan*" [which fits the accepted rulings in *siman* 53 as the *Beis Yosef* there explains] and similarly to special fast-day services and *Yom Kippur* [i.e. even *without* a permanent appointment].)

Still, as far as the strict Halacha is concerned, although the *Rema* (581:1) writes that the congregation "should be exacting in seeking for the '*selichos*' and [also the remainder of] the prayer services of the *Yamim Nora'im* the most 'fitting' '*chazzan*' - and the greatest in Torah and good deeds - that they can find," in accordance with the above *minhag* [regarding the part about greatness in Torah and good deeds see below in "part 3"], he nevertheless rules afterwards that "all [upstanding] Jews are [essentially] valid [choices]."

### Part 3: Additional Details

The *Darkei Moshe* cites the Mordechai [*Rabbeinu* Mordechai ben Hillel, Germany, ~1250 - ~1305] and the Rokeiach [*Rabbeinu* Elazar ben Yehudah, Germany, ~1160 - 1230] as bringing a *minhag* that the "*chazzan*" for the *Yamim Nora'im* [in this case referring to *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*] be "leaders of the generation" who shield the generation [from Heavenly Prosecution]. He also cites the *Ohr Zarua* as saying the "*chazzan*" should be a G-d-fearing Torah scholar. (It seems that it is one are both of these statements which the *Rema* is codifying when he writes that one should choose "the greatest in Torah and good deeds" available.)

The *Kol Bo* says the "*chazzan*" should also be at least twenty-five years old, and preferably at least thirty, and that the *minhag* is that he should also be married. These follow from the principle that "the prayers are in place of the [sacrificial] Service," for a *Levi* had to be twenty-five to begin training for his Service [see *Chulin* 24a] (and thirty to actually enter into it [*Mishnah Berurah* - the *Kol Bo* himself gives only the explanation that a thirty-year old has a greater seriousness]), and the *kohen gadol* must be married in order to perform the Service of *Yom Kippur* [as discussed at the beginning of *Yoma* - the *Mishnah Berurah* says that having a wife is also an appropriate protection against sin (the *Gra* writes, based on *Yevamos* 37b, that the latter is in fact the reason for the former)]. The *Rema* cites this (although he does not mention the lower age preference of twenty-five at all) [the *Darkei Moshe* cites one authority as saying being married is necessary only for *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur* themselves - but in the *Rema* he makes no distinction], but the *Mishnah Berurah* says choosing "the greatest in Torah and good deeds available" outweighs these qualifications.

The *Kol Bo* says the *minhag* in some places is that the "*chazzan*" for "*selichos*" is automatically the "*chazzan*" for the prayer services of that day. The *Rema* cites this, and the *Mishnah Berurah* gives the reason as being the principle "One who begins a Mitzvah is told to finish it." (Based on this, it only applies to the *Shacharis* and *Mincha*; however, the *Mishnah Berurah* **also** brings a position that it applies to the *Ma'ariv* of the night before. He also discusses details as to whether this outweighs the right of precedence that other people may have.)

Finally, the *Mishnah Berurah* adds four points: (1) He implies that the one who is to blow the *shofar* on *Rosh HaShanah* is included as a type of "*chazzan*" in these respects. (2) He writes that [if possible] the "*chazzan*" should study the appropriate "*kavanos*" [mystical "intents" to have in mind]. (3) He

points out that a mourner - even if he is only within the *year* for his parents - should not be the "*chazzan*" on *Rosh HaShanah* or *Yom Kippur* if others are available (as is the case on any *Yom Tov*). (4) He also brings other considerations (such as bringing about disharmony) because of which it may be best that a regular year-round "*chazzan*" continue to serve during these times as well.

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