

בְּשׁוֹשׁוֹן וְעַל הָעוֹקֶץ  
זָמַר וְהִמְתִּיק  
בְּתַנּוּ הַתִּינוּקָה  
וְמוֹר אֵלַי הַטּוֹב  
עַל הָאֵשׁ הַמְבוּעֶרֶת  
עַל הַמַּיִם הַזּוֹכִים  
עַל הָאֵשׁ הַשָּׂב הַבַּיְתָה  
מִן הַמְרַחֲקִים  
עַל כָּל אֱלֹהִים עַל כָּל אֱלֹהִים  
שְׂמוֹר נָא לִי אֵלַי הַטּוֹב  
עַל הַדְּבָשׁ וְעַל הָעוֹקֶץ  
עַל הַמֶּר וְהַמְתִּיק  
שִׁיר וְרוֹע

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# Voice of the people

By VICKIE BECK  
of The Tampa Tribune

**CLEARWATER** — During these holy days, cantors' words range from joyously grateful to solemn in recognition of sin and the need for forgiveness.

"The music reflects the many emotions we feel in prayer — our joys, our sadnesses, our pleadings and our hopes," says Joy Katzen-Guthrie, cantorial soloist for Congregation Aliyah in Clearwater. "The cantor hopes to convey those messages to the Creator for each member of the congregation."

The Jewish High Holy Days began Friday with Rosh Hashanah, the New Year, and will end with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which begins Sept. 19. During this time, cantors lead several additional services, with different prayers.

"We use special prayers and prayer modes — a series of musical phrases that are distinct and repeated — during the High Holy Days," says Shimon Gewirtz, cantor of Congregation B'nai Israel in St. Petersburg. "We will chant different prayers, and the congregation will join in. We pray and ask for forgiveness and blessing, both as a community and individually."

The role of the cantor has changed over time.

"In ancient times, the cantor read from the sacred Scriptures," explains Gewirtz, who has led High Holy Days services for 45 years. "When the Jewish people were forced into exile, the synagogue took the place of the temple, and prayer took the place of sacrifice."

"And so, we moved from a sacred service — sacred means sacrifice — to a service of the heart, of prayers. As the service became more participatory, the cantor's position changed to developing the liturgy used in the synagogue. And the cantor is involved in the life-cycle events of the congregation."

Katzen-Guthrie says, "Both the rabbi and the cantor [or cantorial

soloist] are uttering the prayers and leading the congregation in worship. It is the cantor's role to bring music into that process, to move the prayers toward God."

Future cantors often study in a four-year postgraduate program that includes Judaic music, prayer and liturgy. Others take on responsibility without formal training and gain recognition as cantors over time.

The son of a cantor, Gewirtz attended a Jewish seminary for two years and cantorial school for a year.

"I love the fact that I am a keeper of the flame," he says. "If I can help the congregation achieve another level of spirituality by leading them in song, it's a wonderful feeling of gratification."

"Before the service, I try to empty my mind of extraneous thoughts, look at the prayers and focus exclusively on them. The mood of the words enters into the cantor. The fact that you are a messenger of the congregation makes you assume a different mind frame. You are not praying for yourself."

**HIS FAVORITE PRAYER** is the "Kol Nidre," the opening prayer of Yom Kippur.

"It's a very touching prayer. The melody is several hundred years old. And the same melody is chanted in every synagogue."

"We are asking God to forgive us for any vows we have broken or not been able to accomplish. The interesting part is that asking God's forgiveness does not displace our responsibility to ask forgiveness from our fellow man."

Smaller congregations may employ a part-time cantorial soloist. While qualified musically, they do not have the lengthy, formal reli-

**Cantors sing, chant and pray as messengers from Jewish congregations to God.**

gious training of a cantor. Bonnie Whitehurst has been cantorial soloist for Congregation B'nai Emmanuh in Tarpon Springs for 13 years. Although she is Catholic, Whitehurst says she feels a connection sharing in Jewish traditions. Top, Joy Katzen-Guthrie, a cantorial soloist, has led services at various synagogues in the Bay area since 1990. Above, Katzen-Guthrie rehearses with Shimon Gewirtz, cantor of Congregation B'nai Israel in St. Petersburg.

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Bonnie Whitehurst has been cantorial soloist for Congregation B'nai Emmanuh in Tarpon Springs for 13 years.

Although she is Catholic, Whitehurst feels a connection through the Judeo-Christian tradition. "Their faith is part of my faith. When I'm there, I'm honoring their traditions, rituals and music."

"It's a tremendous responsibility to help the people focus. The whole idea is to involve the congregation. On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, it's the cantor's responsibility to move the people to forgive, to accept forgiveness and to remember the dead."

**FOR KATZEN-GUTHRIE**, being a cantorial soloist seems a natural extension of her faith, as well as her years as a musician and singer. "I love to sing this music and feel blessed that so many people have commented over the years that I have enhanced the prayers for them and that they have felt closer to the synagogue and the liturgy as a result of hearing me sing."

She has led services at various synagogues in the area since 1990, including sharing duties with Whitehurst in Tarpon Springs. Katzen-Guthrie will sing for the High Holy Days at Temple Shir Shalom in Gainesville, then take over as cantorial soloist for Congregation Aliyah. "She will bring joy to our services," says Gary Brevoort, president of Congregation Aliyah.

While tradition is important, Katzen-Guthrie tries to keep the weekly prayers from becoming too routine.

"One of the worst ruts one can get into, from my perspective, is to sing the same melodies the same way week after week," she says. "Most of the prayers are repeated in every Sabbath service, but there are endless melodic settings available for each prayer."

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