

Report COZ 28: January 26, 2021

Jaclyn Chernett / Jalda Rebling



Cantor Jaclyn chernett

Cantor Jaclyn Chernett MPhil
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Nusach with Kavanah
How do we make t'fillah mean
t'fillah?
Why is this important?
How did we come to work
together on it, identifying our core
purpose? How does this purpose
and our work affect the Jewish
future?



Cantor Jalda Rebling

Video link

<https://youtu.be/qLybMMYwe4c>

Charles Heller Reports:

Nusach with Kavanah

COZ Meeting #28 January 26 2021

Cantor Jaclyn Chernett and Cantor Jalda Rebling

Geraldine introduced the featured speakers:

Jalda Rebling grew up in Berlin with her mother who was a Holocaust survivor and singer. She studied hazzanut in the USA with Cantor Jack Kessler, then returned to Berlin to found congregation Ohel HaChidusch.

Jaclyn Chernett is the first ordained female cantor in the UK and is the cantor of Congregation Kol Nefesh. She is the Founder of the European Academy for Jewish Liturgy. Jalda works closely with Jaclyn on this project.

Jalda opened the presentation by singing a nigun her mother taught her, asserting the need to combine keva (fixed parameters for text and music) with kavanah —the inner feeling, the intentions of the soul.

Jalda asked Jaclyn why she felt it necessary to become a properly ordained cantor.

Jaclyn outlined why how she became a chazzan (not a chazzanit). She grew up in an Orthodox shul in the UK and was always moved by the shul atmosphere and music. As a young girl she was moved by a particular young cantor (Martin Cooper)'s "sincere and simple davening".

She had lessons with Cantor **Steve Robins** and others in the UK, - studying for an MA at City University with **Alexander Knapp**. but there was no opportunity for a woman to be active in davening in the UK until Masorti was formed. Jaclyn was heavily involved with setting up the Masorti movement in the UK.

She felt that in order to be taken seriously as a prayer leader she should get ordination. As there is no such training in the UK, she had to commute to New York to study at the Academy of the Jewish Religion a pluralistic and non-affiliated institution. She was thrilled to be taught there by Cantor **Sol Zim** who combined knowledge of nusach with wide experience and sympathy with his congregation. She also loved studying there with Cantor **Jack Kessler**. (All four of these teachers and mentors mentioned were present at the session which totalled 43 listeners. She received her ordination in 2006 in New York. She funded the Kol Nefesh community under that umbrella.

She joined the Cantors Assembly which she felt was very important to connect her with potential students, and then formed the European Academy for Jewish Liturgy, whose acronym EAJL hints at the spirit of the eagle and the idea of kanfei sharim (wings of singers). EAJL organises retreats and summer schools to train those with minimal background who want to incorporate authentic tradition into their davening. It also teaches on a one-to-one basis according to the wishes and needs of the student. Jalda works closely with Jackie on these activities.

Jalda asked what w the purpose of setting up EAJL.

Jaclyn said it was to help individuals who wanted to set up communities mainly in Europe, but anywhere in the world, but did not know how to do that. She wanted to empower those people by offering knowledge and skills – particularly in how to hold all the souls of the community and to be aware of the needs of each person.

Her philosophy is that Tefilah is not taught, but caught. The cantor can create the atmosphere of connectedness. A congregation is made up of people with their own spiritual needs.

Jalda spoke about the importance of a fixed keva of nusach to create the proper atmosphere for each service. But also before the service starts the cantor should greet each person and ask how they are and be attuned to that persons needs and aspirations.

Jaclyn: Nusach reflects Jewish memory and experience. Jalda : To develop an awareness of nusach you start with the congregation as it is then lead them further.

Jaclyn was asked if she conducted online services during the lockdown. She cannot bring herself to lead such a service, feeling that to watch such a cantor is a kind of voyeurism. She needs the atmosphere of connectedness to a live congregation, but respects those who find solace in watching online.

During the general discussion Cantor **Stephen Robins** referred to the state of nusach in London as a problem—people only know Carlebach tunes! How do we deal with it? How can we let them sing it?

Jaclyn: Why not?! If they put their energy into Carlebach and if it does it for them? Whatever we choose we should do it to the best of our ability

Cantor Robins: Where it helps a cantor in training to understand what he is singing about he gets him to sing the passage in English – or the vernacular. This seems a startling revelation to them when they do this.

Jalda mentioned that she cannot bring herself to daven in German. Maybe future generations will feel comfortable with German.

Cantor Jack Kessler: Our davening comprises standard nusach modes and folk melodies which are not in those modes. We have to teach these as two separate components. Nusach is the context in which we insert an appropriate melody. There are young cantors today who are using this technique, introducing nusach a bit at a time to congregations that have no clue about it.

Marsha Dubrow raised the issue a congregation that loves its old melodies and will not countenance the introduction of something new to a congregation. Jaclyn suggested elting them embrace the music they love – don't take it away, but perhaps in an overflow or youth service try a new melody if the group are willing to try. Jaclyn also said that if you introduce the new melody in advance – as a 'warm up' or at a certain point, then it comes as an old friend not a new intruder. She also said that it was useful to use melodies that can be sung antiphonally (Cantor then congregation).

Jalda: Congregations today are not like those in previous generations where the same families were in the same shul for hundreds of years. We are dealing with constant migration across communities.

Alex Knapp thanked the presenters for allowing themselves to be vulnerable and open and articulate – allowing their kavanah to come shining through their presentation.

Minutes taken by Charles Heller

Chazan Jaclyn Chernett
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