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פרשת כי תצא

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לימוד הדבר תורה לזכות ר' שלום מרדכי הלוי ש"י בן רבקה לגאולה קרובה מן המיצר אל המרחב

THE SUITABLE BA'AL TEFILAH

A wealthy Yid who lived near Premishlan wanted to be the שליח צבור in the local shul for the ימים נוראים. Though the townsmen were unhappy about this, they were afraid to openly express their thoughts, and therefore decided to ask advice from the tzaddik Reb Meir of Premishlan. Hearing their concern the tzaddik calmed them, "All the ba'alei tefilah usually come to get a bracha, so it is likely that your ba'al tefilah will come as well, and I will then take care of it."

Indeed, the wealthy Yid came to Reb Meir. Upon entering the room, the tzaddik said to him, "There are three types of tefilos: One is תפלה למשה, the davening of Moshe Rabbeinu who had difficulty with his speech, yet was the father of all nevi'im and the Rebbe of all Yidden. The second type is תפלה לדוד, the davening of Dovid Hamelech, who is known as 'the pleasant singer of Yidden.' The third kind is תפלה לעניי, that of a poor man whose advantage is having a broken heart.

The tzaddik explained, "Similarly, there are three types of ba'alei tefilah: One who cannot sing but is a tzaddik, so his tefilah is similar to Moshe Rabbeinu's. Another, though not as great, is able to sing beautifully like Dovid Hamelech. The third has neither of these qualities, but is poor and brokenhearted." Reb Meir concluded, "You are not a tzaddik, you are unable to sing, and Boruch Hashem you are not poor. If you want to be a ba'al tefilah during the ימים נוראים, I will have to daven that you reach one of these three levels. You surely understand that I cannot daven for you to become a tzaddik overnight, nor one who can sing. What remains is to daven for you to become poor..." "No! No!" cried the wealthy man. "I do not want to be a ba'al tefilah."

(ספורי חסידים מועדים ע' 14)

The Gemara describes a proper שליח צבור as someone who is fluent in the words of davening and well versed in Torah, Nevi'im, and K'suvim; one who has young children and lacks the means to sustain them (for he will daven with a full and complete heart); one who owns a field which needs rain; one whose household is empty of aveiros and whose name has not been negatively tainted during his youth; one who is humble, well liked by others and has a sweet voice. In addition, it is preferable that he be a of old age.

In Shulchan Aruch it is paskened, that if someone with all of these qualities is not available, they should appoint the one among them who is the most outstanding in Torah and מעשים טובים. Furthermore, it is better to appoint a young bochur with an unpleasant voice, who understands the davening, than someone who does not, even if he has a nice voice.

(תענית ט"ז ע"א, שו"ע אדה"ז ס' נ"ג ס"ד וד')

The Gaon Reb Moshe Ravkish, known as the 'Be'er Hagola' (for his peirush on Shulchan Aruch), lived in Vilna and was very wealthy. During the pogrom years of ת"ח ות"ט, he lost all his belongings, including the extended library he had owned, and was left without a parnoso. The Gaon Reb Shabsai Kohen, the ש"ך, endeavored to find a source of income for the Be'er Hagola, and hearing that the large Shul was looking for a chazzan, he recommended him for the position. The balei-batim, however, did not want to accept him for he was not musically talented. The ש"ך negated their excuse, "It is paskened in Shulchan Aruch that a chazzan is required to be pleasant with others, have a beard, know how to learn etc. He has all these and is only missing one quality, a good voice. Should that deter you from accepting him as a Ba'al Tefilah?"

(רשימות דברים ח"ב ע' קע"ו)

When the chossid Reb Mendel Vollosov was a bochur, the chazzan Reb Yechiel Halperin asked that he to join him as a chazzan's assistant, traveling with him from one city to another as the chazzanim would do in those days. After Reb Mendel married, he found that the payment for what he was doing was insufficient, so he asked the Rebbe Rashab if he should try finding a position as an actual chazzan. The Rebbe agreed, but gave the following three conditions: He toivel before going to the amud, cover his head with his tallis while davening, and not repeat words twice as chazzanim are wont to do.

(שמועות וסיפורים ח"א ע' 118)

DAVENING WITH HISLAHAVUS

One Rosh Hashana the Tzemach Tzedek was not feeling well, so a minyan was organized in his room. After תקיעות, a chazzan was needed for Mussaf, but the yungerman who knew how to Daven according to the nussach (the customary tunes), did not want to take the position. After waiting some time, the mispallelim asked the chossid Reb Shimon Shochat to go to the amud, but he motioned with his hands (for it was after תקיעות when one is should not speak), that he does not know the nussach. The Tzemach Tzedek nevertheless motioned for him to go to the amud. As soon as Reb Shimon began to daven, he burst into tears and continued crying intensely throughout the entire tefilah. After davening, the Tzemach Tzedek said to him, "Why did you say that you could not go to the amud? You davened very well! (גאנץ גוט)"

(תשורה סיון תשס"ד)

The Frierdiker Rebbe related: In Lubavitch, the Ba'al Tefilah for the ימים נוראים was an erliche (pious) and ירא אלקים named Reb

Isser. Every night after mariv, he would lie down for a while, wake up two hours after chatzos and then learn until the morning. The Rebbe Maharash described him as having a "Head of Iron" ('איזערנע קאפ'), capable of learning eight hours straight. Reb Isser had a special nussach for the tefilos of the ימים נוראים, particularly for the סדר עבודה of Yom Kippur. When davening the words of "ואנחנו כורעים", not an eye in shul would remain dry, and when he would say "והכהנים", he would use a tune about which it was said to have been sung in the Beis Hamikdosh. While saying "כורעים", the Rebbe Maharash would sometimes, with his voice and other times with the motion of his hands, help him with the singing.

One man living in Lubavitch, known as Bere Avrohom'kes, was strong and stubborn and insisted that he will not cry during the כורעים of Chazzan Isser. Bere usually davened in another shul, but on Yom Kippur he came especially to hear the עבודה from Isser, positioning himself near the sink in the shul. When Reb Isser began singing והכהנים with great hislahavus, Bere began trembling and wailing and had to hold onto the sink to prevent himself from falling. The Rebbe Rashab said, "The התעוררות (arousal) of the mispallelim was mostly a result of my father's (the Rebbe Maharash) כוונות, not so much from the nigunim Isser sang. Nevertheless, the singing was also necessary."

Rebbetzin Rivka related: One Yom Kippur in Lubavitch, while saying the סדר עבודה, lightning struck and a fire started in one of the houses. The shul soon became filled with smoke, causing the mispallelim to think that the shul itself was on fire, so they began to run. In the עזרת נשים, the women also ran in confusion and one woman fell, breaking her foot ל"ע. The shul emptied out, except for the few mispallelim who stood around the Rebbe Maharash, for they saw that the Rebbe was not going. The Chazzan Reb Isser was in such great hislahavus from saying the עבודה, that he did not hear at all the commotion and continued his tefilah as usual, without the slightest difference.

(ספר השיחות תש"ד ע' 26, 28)

In the city of Vitebsk there was a group of intellectual yungerliet (בעלי מוחין) who had a Minyan of their own. Their Mashpia would serve as their chazzan and would daven very quietly and thoughtfully (מוחי'דיק). In the year תרכ"ז, the Mashpia came to the Rebbe Maharash for Rosh Hashana. When he entered Yechidus, the Rebbe asked him his usual question, "Where are you holding?" implying to ask where he had left off with the Tzemach Tzaddek. When the mashpia replied that he is a ba'al tefilah, the Rebbe Maharash told him, "A ba'al tefilah stands on a pedestal. If he is a proper chazzan, then he merits and brings merit to the public, but if not, he sins and brings sin upon the public."

The Mashpia later related how the Rebbe 'tickled his heart and gave him a new neshama'. When he returned to Vitebsk and davened Kabbalas Shabbos in their shul, people passing by stopped to see what had happened, for the davening was more passionate (געשמאקער) than the davening Kol Nidrei.

On another occasion the Rebbe Maharash said: "A 'ba'al tefilah' generally brings merit to the public, and a 'chazzan' generally brings sin upon the public."

(סד"ה תש"ב ע' 96)

DAVENING BEFORE HASHEM

In the Shulchan Aruch it is written: A chazzan who lengthens his singing when davening, due to his happiness in praising Hashem,

and does so with seriousness and feelings of fear and awe, should be benched. However, if he increases his singing so that his voice be heard, it is disgusting.

(ש"ע או"ח סי' נ"ג סי"ד)

The Rebbe writes to many ba'alei tefilah that it has been the custom of ba'alei tefilah throughout the generations, including גדולי ישראל, to review before Tishrei the meaning of the tefilos and the relevant midrashim.

(אגרות קודש ה"ו ע' שכ"ד)

One year, word reached the tzaddik Reb Chaim of Tzanz (author of the Divrei Chaim) that a shul chose a chazzan with a choir to lead the tefilos, and in response he wrote a sharp letter to one of his chassidim, reprimanding the head of the community. The tzaddik explained that chassidim have always been careful to choose a befitting ba'al tefilah who, with much feeling, would pour out his heart before Hashem, and not be like a singer in a concert. The Divrei Chaim continues that perhaps someone had convinced this individual that such is the way to honor Hashem, with sweet song. Yet this has not been the way of chassidus in arousing feeling for Hashem, for this type of music truly contaminates the heart of the listeners.

(שו"ת דברי חיים ה"ב סי' י"ז)

In the year תש"ה, someone asked the Friediker Rebbe why chassidim are against chazzanim and do not fuss over them. The Friediker Rebbe wrote to him: A chassidische davening is an outpour of the neshama, yearning for something higher. Chassidim are in favor of ba'alei tefilah who know before Whom they stand, appreciate the proper respect required and feel this in their heart. Such ba'alei tefilah are allowed to serve this position and are respected by chassidim. However, chassidim are against the singers, who according to torah, are forbidden to serve as chazzanim.

(אג"ק ריי"צ ה"ח ע' תע"ה)

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