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Dear Friends,

In a speech to the Cantors' Assembly many years ago, my colleague, Rabbi Brad Artson, noted:

In the Talmud, our sages pose a question, noticing that the Torah recounts an obligation to do *meleket avodah*, the work of service [Numbers 4:47]. They ask, "What is work that requires service?" The Talmud's answer is, "it is song [Arakhin 11a]." Song is a kind of work that requires service. And the ancient sages use as their *pasuk*, their proof-text: "They lifted up their voices and they sang with joy. [Isaiah 24:14]" The Cantorate is in the business of providing service, in part, through song.

The word *hazzan* appears nowhere in *Tanach*, nowhere in the canon of Holy Scripture. According to one source, the word *hazzan* used in the early rabbinic period, appears but ten times in the Mishnah. The *hazzan ha-keneset* was the superintendent, the super, of the synagogue. Over time, the role expanded to that of *shaliach tzibbur*, the emissary of the congregation, singing the service for those not fluent and confident in their own ability to represent the congregation before the Almighty.

The voice of the *hazzan* encourages the worshipper to share in intense moments of reflection, petition, entreaty, thanksgiving, joy and yes, sadness. The cantor touches the soul while reaching out to God. Everyone has an opinion about the *klei kodesh*, the sacred instruments that are Jewish clergy. The classic Yiddish "*A khazandel oyf Shabbos*" shows just how intense can be the different perspectives about a cantor as viewed through the ears of the listener.

In ancient times 15 steps led up to the Temple in Jerusalem; 15 *shirei m'aalot*, songs of ascent punctuate the book of Psalms [120-134]. Throughout her career as a *hazzan*, Cantor Leuchter has urged us to climb those steps with her, to reach deeply within ourselves to touch our souls, and invited us to join in the sacred service of God through worship. We at the Greenburgh Hebrew Center have been privileged and gifted with her voice, her passion and her professionalism. I was privileged to work with and learn from her. As she continues to ascend the steps of holiness, sharing her gifts and her commitment with others, we ask that she always go, *mi-hayil el hayil*, from strength to strength. *Shkoiyach!*

Rabbi Barry A. Kenter