

## PRESERVING AND TEACHING OUR SACRED SONGS

Last Rosh Hashanah, Wing Commander Stephen Griffiths led the high holiday shacharit services for the first time at Kol Nefesh Masorti congregation in Edgware, London. A military pilot and flying instructor, Wing Commander Griffiths had been a lay leader of various small communities in England and Europe but had no formal training in nusach. He was able to lead services using the proper nusach, thanks to his mentor, Hazzan Alan Smolen of Beth Judah Conservative Synagogue in Ventnor, New Jersey. Wing Commander Griffiths and Hazzan Smolen met through the European Academy for Jewish Liturgy.

Jews pray each day for the dispersed to be “gathered from the four corners of the earth” as the fulfillment of our dream for unity and redemption. The Conservative movement’s EAJL program brings

together people like Wing Commander Griffiths, in London, and Hazzan Smolen, in New Jersey, through the commonality of prayer, sharing the melodies of our tradition.

But there are many small Jewish communities springing up in Europe that cannot afford hazzanim to pass on those traditions. Jewish musicologist and educator Hazzan Jaclyn Chernett of Kol Nefesh Masorti – the first fully egalitarian community in the UK – envisioned a way to bridge that gap. EAJL matches laypeople who seek to lead their communities in tefillah with professional cantors, members of the Cantors Assembly, who mentor them. The teachers train the lay leaders in Torah trope and in the nusach and



melodies appropriate for each service. Each student chooses what he or she wishes to learn.

There is no question that people are hungry to learn – and let all who are hungry come and eat! It has been almost a year since EAJL was launched, with seminars in Paris and London that drew more than 60 people. Fifteen now have found mentors. Students range from neophytes with little or no knowledge to a rabbi who wants expertise in all aspects of nusach. Thanks to the Internet, students in France, Germany, Holland, Spain, and the UK are guided by teachers in Israel, the United States, Holland, and the UK. The impact is almost immediate because each service module can be learned in a few weeks. Together with the Cantors Assembly and other cultural and professional organizations, including the Jewish Music Institute, Masorti Olami, and the World Zionist Organization, EAJL is nurturing Jewish spiritual life all over the world.

EAJL’s vision is to do far more than teach just nusach. According to Hazzan Chernett, “It is the responsibility of the leader of prayer to constantly engage in personal soul searching. Only when the leader is moved and inspired will the congregation also be moved and inspired.” Therefore, mentors guide their students along their own spiritual journeys as well.

EAJL is not training for the professional cantorate, but as Wing Commander Griffiths will attest, engagement in prayer leadership is part of life-long learning and community development. It is successfully reaching those yearning to preserve the traditions of our sacred songs.

### The Law Committee has opened the door to gay inclusion. But they didn’t answer a key question: *What does a welcoming congregation look like?*

Is your institution:

- Committed to inclusion but unclear how it can be halakhically justified?
- Not sure how far to go? Needing clarity about the policy options?
- Wondering what the message should be for youth?

### We can help.

**Keshet** (a grassroots organization working for GLBT inclusion in the Jewish community) and **CLAL** (a pluralist leadership training institute, think tank, and resource center) have joined forces to help your congregation or school navigate these complex issues. We provide: Educator Trainings, Learning with Rabbi Steve Greenberg, Board Consultations, and Facilitated Community Dialogues.

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