FACILITATORS OF HOLINESS

The Re-emergence of the Temple Administrator: Development from the Levites of the Second Temple to the Modern Day Administrator

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The role of Temple Administrator was not created in the 20th century, but has historical models dating back to the Second Temple. As long as there have been institutions, they have required overseers for the business aspects of their functioning. What makes Temple Administrators different from administrators in schools, hospitals or industry is their connection to the religious and social aims and goals of the synagogue. The Temple Administrator's support and supervision of the synagogue's infrastructure makes the religious goals possible. As Rabbi Howard Bogot describes the Temple Administrator, each becomes a "mishamesh bakodesh", a facilitator of holiness. This has an historical basis within the Jewish tradition.

First Chronicles (9:17-34) details the Levites' extensive supportive and supervisorial roles in the Second Temple. Following the pattern laid out when the first Temple was to be built (First Chronicles, 23:3-5), the Levites "were to oversee the work of the House of the Lord". They were the "officers and judges" (shom'rim v'shof'tim). They were the gatekeepers or porters (shoarim), who had charge of the watches and saw to the opening of the gates in the morning.
and their closing at night. "They were also over the chambers and the treasuries in the House of God". They were responsible for the vessels of service, furniture, flour, wine, oil and frankincense. Some were the singers (m'shor'rim), who "were free from other services, for they were employed in their work day and night." These Levites dedicated to Temple service were referred to as "letol'dotam rashim", "chiefs, according to their generations".

The activity of the Second Temple revolved around ritual and sacrifice. The synagogues existing at the the same time provided local places of study, assembly, and public prayer. Although many of the synagogue's needs as an institution remained constant through the centuries, the roles of the individuals fulfilling these needs changed greatly. They were called by different titles, had different combinations of duties, and enjoyed widely varying degrees of status and position within the community. As an example, the roles of sh'liaḥ tzebbur and ḥazzan date from the early Second Temple period and can be traced through the post-Talmudic period where they merge into a single role.¹

Prayers were not written down in the early second Temple period, and many Jews of that time did not know them. The presence of the sh'liaḥ tzebbur who recited the prayers aloud
permitted the entire congregation to follow the service. The sh'liaḥ tzibbur, "the messenger of the people", functioned until the sixth century as an unpaid leader of the service. As the numbers of prayers in the worship service and their complexity increased through the years, the sh'liaḥ tzibbur read the prayers of the service on behalf of the entire congregation.²

The term hazzan or hazzan ha-knesset, is first found in the Talmud. It is used to denote an overseer or superintendent both in the Temple and in the synagogue. While some studies suggest a connection to the Hebrew word "ḥazon", vision or seer, others point to a derivation from the Assyrian "ḥazzanu", overseer or governor. As used in the el Amarna tablets, it indicated the governors placed by Egypt in conquered cities in Palestine. Still other studies find the title of "ḥazzanum" for officials of small cities in the period of Ur III, 2400-2200 B.C.E., and in an Akkadian dialect, 2000-1500 B.C.E.³

Medieval Arabic uses a similar term, "khāzin", which literally means, "he who keeps safe, stores something away." In the Kor'an (XXXIX, 71,73), the plural "khazana" is used for "the angels who guard Paradise". Khāzin is used in records of administration at the caliphal courts to indicate
a number of functionaries who were overseers of such diverse areas as treasuries, archives, and even household stores and bedding.4

The ḥazzan, or ḥazzan ha-knesset, is viewed from many angles through the Talmud. In the Mishnah, (Shabbat 11a), the ḥazzan is depicted as supervising children's studies. In Yoma, 68b, and in Sotah, 41a, the Mishniot describe the ḥazzan as second to the rosh ha-knesset. (The rosh ha-knesset is "identified with the officer who administered the external affairs of the synagogue" (Yoma), and as the synagogue president (Sotah).) Discussion in the Gemara of the tractate Shabbat (35b), indicates that it was the ḥazzan who blew the shofar, either from the roof of his home or from the roof of the synagogue: "The School of R. Ishmael taught: Six blasts were blown on the eve of the Sabbath..." to allow time for those in the fields to return home and for the necessary Sabbath preparations to be completed. The ḥazzan administers the physical punishment ordered by the court in Makkot, 22b.

By the the sixth century, the role of sh'liḥaḥ tzibbur had been incorporated with that of the ḥazzan. The ḥazzan continued to act on behalf of the congregation in the worship service and as teacher in the synagogue. The development of
piyyutim, poetic prayers, which were introduced into the service, required that the ḥazzan be both studious and musically talented to handle their intricacies. From this time forward, the role of the ḥazzan continued to develop into the professional position which is identified today as that of the cantor.

At the same time that the roles of ḥazzan and sh'liaḥ tzibbur merged, a new title came to be associated with the role of the synagogue superintendent or overseer—that of the shammash. With a title which literally means "servant", the shammash of the Middle Ages is described in the Jewish Year Book for 5658 (1897-98) as "...an officer of considerable power and responsibility." "He assessed the members according to their means...and ...was a sort of permanent under-secretary-of-state, who governed while the parnas was supposed to rule." The shammash was still the executor of the sentences of the Jewish tribunal ("bet din"), in which capacity he also inflicted corporal punishment." He acted as town crier, and, in some areas, announced the results of law-suits in the synagogue on Saturday. The shammash continued the ḥazzan's earlier function of announcing the approach of the Sabbath by blowing a trumpet from a high roof on Friday afternoons.
In the sixteenth century, in the larger European Jewish communities, it was not possible for one person to carry out all the duties that had become the province of the shammash. The title of "unter-shammash" was given to the assistant who handled the routine chores of cleaning and polishing. The person who acted as the crier became known as the "schulklopfer", because he used a wooden mallet to knock on the doors of the members of the congregation to call them to the early morning service. The "better" (inviter), went "from house to house inviting the occupants to a marriage or berit milah." (While for some time it had been the custom for the shammash to issue these invitations, the Jewish Council of Lithuania in 1637 enacted a law that "no one is permitted to come to a banquet unless he had been invited by the beadle." Concerned by excessive expenditures for life-cycle celebrations, the law required the rabbi and officers to decide the number of guests appropriate to the occasion and the income of the party-giver.)

With the development of Jewish communal life in America, the role of shammash (or beadle) is viewed differently than it was in the larger European communities. A picture of the difference in status is shown in Early American Jewry, Jews of Pennsylvania and the South 1655-1790, by Jacob Rader Marcus. "South Carolina ...had a synagogal organization in
Charlestown ever since the middle-eighteenth century...By the 1780's there was a well-rounded communal organization in the city. Charlestown was destined to dominate the spiritual life in the South until the War of 1861. Since the earliest days there had been an officiating ḥazzan, paid or voluntary, and soon they had a professional beadle. (Abraham Jones, who was a shammash in the 1790's, had taken on the job in his eightieth year; the position was usually the financial refuge of a decent but unsuccessful businessman.)" 11

From the same source, there is an additional description of the low economic status of those employed by the synagogue: "Above those few impoverished Jews dependent on the philanthropy of their fellow-Jews came the employees of the Jewish community. They were in the lowest income group of the gainfully employed. The cantor, the ḥazzan, received a modest salary, supplemented on occasion by teaching youngsters Hebrew. In general, cantors were not encouraged to augment their income by dabbling in trade. The ritual slaughterer and the beadle also received very small salaries, but on occasion they plied some trade or did a little business on the side." 12

The duties of the American shammash or beadle were similar to the European counterpart. "The shammash served as
the general factotum. He saw to it that the synagogue was kept clean, that the perpetual light had an ample supply of oil, that the brasses were kept polished, the candles made, and the congregants served in their hours of sorrow and joy. In some towns he also collected the dues."13 When housing was provided by a congregation in New York for the ritual slaughterer or the beadle, they "were expected to take in the sick and itinerant poor. Their homes thus served as the communal hospice. Naturally, they were paid extra for this work. When quarters were not available for those officers, they were given rent subsidies and other grants of money, fuel, or meat." It is noted also that "the teacher...was not a communal officer, nor was the mohel or circumciser."14

With the wave of German-Jewish immigration in the mid-nineteenth century, the European model for the shammash no longer applied. Since the cohesive Jewish communities of Europe, autonomous and self governing, were not replicated in America, synagogue life changed dramatically. Instead of having one major religious organization for the entire community, each synagogue had to deal with the new problems of attracting, and retaining, members. Additionally, the "growth of Reform and Conservative Judaism in the United States...had major effects upon the nature of the synagogue."
"The synagogue ceased to be the center of the Jewish community, its core institution. Secular agencies, unconnected in any way with the synagogue, on occasion even antagonistic to it, took over full responsibility for all aspects of social welfare, health, community relations, and even, in some communities, the cemetery. As a consequence, the synagogue's Board of Trustees became administrators of a vastly simpler institutional setup."

"At first, more and more power became centralized in the Board of Trustees, usually composed of the more affluent members of the congregation." But with the synagogue becoming increasingly more democratic, committees drew members from a wide cross section of the congregation. The committees brought members into closer contact with the programming and operation of the synagogue. As a natural consequence, the professional administrator became a necessity once again, to coordinate, manage and facilitate the operation of the complex institution that the American synagogue had become.

The professional administrator re-emerged in the first decades of the twentieth century. In 1910, Samuel Berliner was associated with Temple Beth-El (which later consolidated with Congregation Emanu-El in New York City), and in 1914, S. D. Schwartz became Executive Secretary of Chicago Sinai
Congregation. By 1941, through the initiative of Irving I. Katz, the National Association of Temple Secretaries became an agency of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. In 1955, NATS became a UAHC affiliate, and in 1959, adopted the name National Association of Temple Administrators.17

Since then, the synagogue administrator's role has again become as supportive and supervisory as the Levite's of the Second Temple. Dues, budgeting, and financial management take the place of overseeing the receipt of sacred gifts and the Temple treasuries. Purchasing and inventory control, frequently automated today, still are as demanding tasks as they were centuries ago. The complexity of modern security systems and procedures replace the watches and gatekeeping of the shoarim. Supervision of maintenance staff and dealing with contractors are certainly in line with the Levites' responsibilities of Temple repair and building. Fortunately, cantors and their choirs carry out the responsibilities of the m'shor'rim, sparing the modern administrators the necessity of having a good voice (but not, of course, having a good knowledge of the liturgy). Even so, the administrator needs to communicate in totally modern ways with the larger community—through mailings of announcements and bulletins, through advertising and public relations activities, through telephone and direct contacts. In addition to the original
categories of administrative operations, the twentieth century administrator picks up the medieval functions of assisting in the planning of life-cycle celebrations and funerals, and being supportive of congregants in times of distress. As in the days of the Temple in Jerusalem, the burdens are shared with other professional staff members—rabbis, cantors, educators, and occasionally, even social workers. Although they may not always be "employed in their work day and night", the Temple Administrator of the twentieth century is every bit as dedicated to being a facilitator of holiness as were the Levites of the Second Temple.
1. L. Landman, *The Cantor*, pp. 3-5
   H. Sky, "The Development of the Office of Hazzan Through the Talmudic Period", pp. 5-6

2. L. Landman, op. cit., p. 5
   H. Sky, op. cit., p. 6

   "Hazzan", *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1905, p. 284b

   "Dīwān", pp. 304c-305
   "Khāzin", pp. 1181d-1182a

5. "Hazzan", *JE*, op. cit., p. 285a
   L. Landman, op. cit., p. 5


7. I. Abrahams, *Jewish Life In The Middle Ages*, p. 8

8. "Shammash", *JE*, p. 231

9. Ibid.
   I. Abrahams, op. cit., p. 56

10. J. R. Marcus, op. cit., p. 195

11. Ibid., pp. 274-275

12. Ibid., p. 424

NOTES (cont.)

14. Ibid.

15. I. Katz and M. Schoen, *Successful Synagogue Administration*, pp. 9-11

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.