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## Jlife Buzz- A Musical Calling: Cantor Zahava Fried's Journey to Congregation Beth Ohr

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It's not every day that someone's career dreams begin in preschool. But for Cantor Zahava Fried the appeal of music was undeniable for as long as she can remember. At just four

years old, she begged her parents for violin lessons and the allure of music grew stronger the more she played.

Now, some thirty years later, the gifted musician and soprano is preparing to join Congregation Beth Ohr in Old Bridge as Cantor for the upcoming high holiday season. The synagogue's president Philip Rabinowitz shared his excitement.

"After holding services online for more than two years, we wanted something special to welcome back our congregation to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Her voice is captivating, and she exudes warmth and positive energy. We believe the combination will create a wonderful spirit of community and a beautiful holiday experience."

Music has always been a primary form of connection for Zahava. After her early violin lessons, she delved into the study of viola, piano, and guitar. Her musical journey continued as she trained as a classical singer, bringing her to *bimah* as a teenager to lead Kol Nidre services at the Pittsburgh synagogue where she grew up.

"When I have the privilege to be in front of a congregation and to act as a conduit between the congregation and me and the divine, everything aligns. And in that moment, one can experience profound connection to what's beyond, to themselves and to the community around them. That's my hope for this holiday experience at Beth Ohr."

As part of the preparation for the high holidays, Zahava is helping the congregation learn new melodies through Zoom sessions. Teaching comes naturally to her, given her educational background. After pursuing Judaic Studies at Yeshiva University, she earned a B.A. in Education with a concentration in Early Childhood Studies. Working at a Jewish preschool after graduation she discovered the power of music to impart fundamental knowledge to children.

Then the COVID pandemic hit, bringing unexpected challenges including the loss of her job. "I realized that this was the precipice of something new. And my husband said 'Go to Cantorial school. It's what you've always wanted, and you know it. Just do it.'"

Zahava is now on her way to earning Cantorial Ordination at The Academy for Jewish Religion based in Yonkers, through an online program. Additionally, she is working toward her M.A. in Jewish Studies at Gratz College where she is a Legacy Heritage Midcareer Fellow.

Residing in Buffalo, NY with her husband and two daughters, Zahava fuels her love for music and teaching Torah with copious amounts of coffee. Rabbi Joel Mishkin, excited about her leadership during the High Holiday services recalls the moment he knew she was the right choice, "It took listening to Zahava chant just three notes of Kol Nidre and I knew that she was the one! I am so excited about the prospect of blending our spiritual styles together. This will really be a very special High Holiday for our synagogue."

For inquiries about High Holiday services at Congregation Beth Ohr, call the synagogue office at 732-257-1523.