How Rabbi Eliyahu Hirschon was appointed *Hazzen* (Cantor) of the Great Synagogue in Plonsk

One day during 1906, a young 20-year-old man appeared at the Great Synagogue and asked to speak to the head *gabbai* (warden). His outward appearance was very strange; he had long hair, and wore a long wide coat with shining buttons (like the students at the state conservatory) and he spoke Russian and Yiddish. He asked the *gabbai* if he could lead the service the following Sabbath. Glancing at him with a critical eye, the *gabbai* immediately refused, but when the young man pleaded with him, he took him to the chairman of the community; he too, turned him down.

As he turned to leave, the man saw a violin hanging on one of the walls of the chairman's apartment. Asking permission, he took the violin down and poured his bitter heart into playing a tune so full of emotion that it left a lasting impression on everyone present. When he finished playing, the chairman stood up and took him to the house of the rabbi – Rabbi Zvi Michelson. He introduced the young man to the rabbi and asked his permission for him lead the service the following Sabbath. The rabbi gave him permission, as long as he changed his clothes and trimmed his hair.

And so, the following Friday night, Elinka led the service in the packed synagogue, and the congregation’s heart was captured immediately. As soon as he finished the *mekadesh hashabbat* blessing, Rabbi Avigdor Grün shouted: Mazal Tov! And the congregation answered: Amen!

The congregation surrounded the young cantor and congratulated him heartily. News of his prayers swept the town, and the following morning people arose especially early – at four or five in the morning – to secure a place in the synagogue. During the service, the synagogue was dangerously overcrowded.

After Shabbat, the community committee met immediately, and unanimously decided to appoint him as the city's head cantor … within a few years he trained and led a renowned choir, built a good name for himself and made many friends and admirers.


A. M. Mezger, in the books of Yehuda Arni and Peretz Alufi, Kehillat Plonsk, pp. 60-61, and in Sefer Plonsk Vehasviva, pp. 247-248