Guide to the Shabbat Morning Service at Beth Israel Congregation

by

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"Prayer is not a stratagem for occasional use, a refuge to resort to now and then. It is rather like an established residence for the innermost self. All things have a home: the bird has a nest, the fox has a hole, the bee has a hive. A soul without prayer is a soul without a home."

"There is no specialized art of prayer. All of life must be a training to pray.
We pray the way we live."

"Our world today lacks sensitivity to words. We use words as tools. We forget that words are a repository of the spirit. The tragedy of our times is that the vessels of the spirit are broken. We cannot approach the spirit unless we repair the vessels. Reverence for words - an awareness of the wonder of words, of the mystery of words - is an essential prerequisite for prayer. By the word of God the world was created."

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

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How to "Be" in a Service

Try not to think of yourself as an outsider while others are praying together. You are not an outsider to God. The prayers, many rooted in the Biblical Psalms, attest to God hearing *all the sounds of the earth* simultaneously as one symphony, as one prayer music. The sound of your breath, the sound of your heartbeat, the sound of the blood rushing through your body, the sound of your whispering to the person next to you, all are part of that music, whether you intend them to be or not. They affect the people around you, whether conscious or subliminal. You are already part of the music, while the prayers beckon you to take an active role in aligning your sounds to the music. Is your contribution one of harmony, gratitude, and kindness, or one of discord and self-centeredness? Are you using your best "instrument" to join in or are you "othering" the service? You are a prayer among a flock of other individual prayers, distinct yet together.

As you put aside the duality of "I" and "them" in favor of God hearing the "we," put aside the dualism of "those who know how" and "those who don't." Hebrew is our sacred language, but most Jews throughout history did not know the Hebrew language. It is our practice to read-memorize parts of the service while our thoughts explore the translations and commentaries. You are not "lesser" if you're exploring those during the prayers, you're fitting right in!

Think of the prayers as poetry. Your goal is to see a prayer as written by yourself. What would it mean that you wrote that prayer or that line in the prayer? Sometimes we can look at a poem all our lives as just an invention of a distant poet until the day comes when we say, "That's exactly how I feel after my mother's funeral." The commentaries in the margins are meant to guide you there. The process of internalizing a prayer can take a lifetime.

The structure of the service is that there is a prayer leader (*shaliach/shelichat tsibbur*). The prayer leader recites every word of the Hebrew liturgy outloud or in a hushed tone. By being in their presence during a service, you are "covered" for the prayers when you say "Amen," so that you can freely improvise your own personal prayers, thoughts, and interpretations. We believe both spontaneous prayer and liturgy can and should coexist.

Etiquette

All male guests are asked to wear a head covering (*kippah)* which can be found just before one enters the sanctuary. Smoking is forbidden inside or outside. Photography, video-recording, writing, and using a cell phone are prohibited in observance of Shabbat restrictions. People are asked not to enter the sanctuary when the congregation is standing. Guests who are not Jewish are expected to stand with the congregation, and are welcome to join in reading a prayer aloud, praying the prayers, or doing the prayer-practices at the end of this Guide, if these would not violate their religious beliefs. At the *kiddush* reception after the service, all are asked to wait for a blessing to be said before eating or drinking.

The Service as an Opera or Musical Drama

The Saturday morning service is like an opera or musical that the congregation collectively reenacts each Shabbat. The congregation has roles to sing throughout, and it is normal to learn to sing these collective parts through a combination of memorization and using the prayerbook. The production reenacts the profound story of humanity coming to understand and enact its purpose in the world through a relationship with the cosmos, with God, and with the tradition of our ancestors. By participating in the play each week, we distract our ego –so involved in anxiety and the mistaken perception that we are the center of the universe – and encourage a different consciousness.

Bracketed by a Prelude and a Closing, the three acts of the service are Creation, Redemption, and Revelation. The service mirrors the Torah itself: Genesis tells the story of Creation and of our tribal ancestors, Exodus tells the story of our enslavement and Redemption, the subsequent books tell the story of the Revelation beginning at

Mount Sinai and continuing through a generation of wandering, Deuteronomy gives a Closing summary of what has already occurred, and then we roll the scroll back to the beginning and start over again. The Jewish calendar follows the same consecutive acts: we begin with Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot, which together celebrate the Creation, the cycle of new beginnings, and closeness to nature, followed by Passover which celebrates Redemption and then Shavuot, which celebrates the Revelation of Torah.

The writer Joseph Campbell used to say that every culture internalizes its own archetypal journey. For some it is the *individual* hero who goes on the journey of overcoming enemies and challenges, only to return to a home he (and it was usually a he) no longer recognizes. The Jewish archetypal narrative is very different. It is not an individual as its protagonist, but rather *the relationship between God and the human species*, and the journey is that story of Creation, Redemption, Revelation while wandering, and then repeat.

Prelude: Gathering

The Jewish service weaves together complementary individual and communal experiences, and so it's appropriate that the first section sees a gathering as individuals arrive and start their prayers individually. Our connection to God as an individual is personal and unmediated –in Judaism, no one gets between you and your sense of God, not through demanding a certain theology or set of beliefs, not through a test of faith, not through intrusive questioning -- and so our prayers are often silent, direct, and unshared. Stretches of the service leave us to our own thoughts. But God's connection to the world is not the sum of personal experiences: God connects to the community through communal acts of prayer, celebration, and Torah study, so our path as a community is revealed to us as a community. Praying at home or in nature does not enlighten the community, so we come together in a way that reveals a collective message while allowing us the time to pray alone. Think of the service as a group of folks who have come together at the same time to take a nature walk or museum tour. While they walk along, the guide (the rabbi) directs their attention to the sites along the way, sometimes just giving a name (or page number) and sometimes giving some background

or observation. *Each individual gazes and ponders for him/herself.* If one feels like lingering in their thoughts, or wants to take a different direction, one can drop out of the group for a time (reading the English, exploring a prayer on a different page, reflecting on one's life or a recent experience, doing a prayer practice at the end of this Guide) and rejoin the group later (at a prayer) when it feels right.

Act 1. Creation: Connecting to God as Nature Connects to God

The first part of the Saturday morning service is a sequence of *Morning Blessings (Birkhot ha-Shachar)* and *Verses of Song (Pesukei de-Zimra)*, mostly derived from the Book of Psalms. These lines, some out loud and many silent, are a warm up time for each individual to get their heart, mind, and soul in a state ready to direct attention, and open up our hearts, to God. Individuals arrive, greet others, and adult Jews don a prayer shawl (*tallit*) whose fringes represent our many intertwined responsibilities to others, to the world, and to God.

The community's attention focuses with the second part of the morning service (*Shacharit*) that begins on page 145 with a call that we raise our consciousness to three concentric circles of Creation's ongoing song: life, energy, and transdimensional. Page 145 calls us to an awareness that everything alive is already participating in a collective song or symphony. Bioacousticians describe this world: birds, insects, mammals, fish, reptiles: every living thing together makes communal music when measured with sensitive microphones and computer analysis. Think of what a deep sea microphone records: whale song, dolphin communication, fish clicking, etc. Page 145 pleads, "If only music filled our mouths as it fills the sea!" Music fills our body of organisms in a collective: we might think of King David's words (146) that "My breath/soul praises God, and all my innards God's holiness."

The *Kaddish* prayer on 148 demands that *we* call ourselves to deepen our acknowledgment of God's presence in the world. (This is one of those times that those who have lingered elsewhere rejoin the group for a prayer.) It is followed by the Public Call to Prayer (the *Barkhu*) on 149, for which we stand. This is a marker that anyone coming in after this is officially late.

Sitting down from the *Barkhu*, we again drift into personal meditation, now asked to hear the cosmic song not just in everything alive, but in *anything made of energy.* All matter is, after all, made of energy, and all energy consists of frequencies: a form of sound. There is a hidden song that God is hearing coming from all energy. On 152, we pause to say to ourselves, *It is on the day of rest that I take the time to listen, to truly acknowledge the holy reality in which we all dwell.*

On 153, we add a demand for awareness of a third level of concurrent symphony, that of the "angels," which is a word for the invisible realities that intersect with our own. Whether personified forces or theoretical physics, there are realities and dimensions invisible to human instruments that are nonetheless real. These forces attest to a *ra'ash gadol,* Big Bang, that all these songs are extensions of. That Big Bang of "creation" is both a past event and a present, ongoing reality of the universe existing in time. In the Hebrew Bible, God creates the cosmos using speaking – "let there be…"-- that is, sound. In theoretical physics today, some speculate that all reality is actually made up of multidimensional sound strings. It could be that what the prayer service is calling for us to acknowledge is actually not metaphorical but real: all reality is a sound cosmos that extends from God.

After entering a collective state of awe, love, and responsibility (the Jewish triad of religious experience) on page 154, we open our mouths in a crescendo of our human solo in this cosmic symphony: we, unlike the termites and the whales and the electron, are given the cosmic role of being aware of the interconnected oneness of all reality, and we attest to that by adding our human voice to the cosmic choir with the *Shema*, our single line of religious creed: *Listen…. all is interconnected and all in our singular God.*

As we come down from the crescendo of the *Shema*, we sing together a section of the Torah that states our natural reaction to this realization is to *love God in return* which we show through loving behavior and positive reminders of our role in this universe. We acknowledge that there will be consequences of climate for failing in our collective responsibilities and interconnected consciousness, and we recommit ourselves to a life of *mitzvot,* of responsibilities that grow out of a higher consciousness, as symbolized in the interconnected *tsitsit* fringes, in order to bring holiness to humanity. (156)

Act II. Redemption: Preparing for Torah

The service then shifts to the second act. We turn from our connection to God through the universe to our connection to God through Torah, which means "instruction" for learning and fulfilling our individual and collective purposes. I am a human being loved and now loving, but how? How do I become a better parent, spouse, son or daughter, citizen, neighbor, professional, individual, friend, human being?

We acknowledge that Torah is a trustworthy vehicle for our learning wisdom from God (157), and that without this wisdom, *we are unredeemed, that is, unconsciously not truly in control of our lives, not truly free. (158)* We are only freely acting when we make our actions accord with our deepest purposes and with the right means: otherwise we may feel free but we are actually acting from instinct, appetite, ignorance, distraction, feckless effort, and the subtle manipulations of society and others. All people need actual freedom, so we recall being saved (redeemed) at the Red Sea by singing the *Mi Khamokha* prayer on 158, and then we acknowledge that people need the means to act freely: Torah is our means. We now stand (*Amidah)* in unmediated, private prayer with God, acknowledging that religion is rooted in actual people's experience of God in their challenging lives (159), that we only create real longlasting change by continuing the projects of our ancestors and handing these projects on ("covenant"), that God helps bring the actual out of potential and life out of the void (160), and that we are capable of making God's purposes our own like the angels (161). The rousing Kedushah on 161 is a dramatic scene in which God is a leader inspecting the troops, determining their capability and intention to serve. The troops consist of two lines, angels on one side and humans on the other. The prayer leader plays one part and the congregation the other part, singing back and forth to each other in a duet. Angels have no free will, and so automatically follow God's orders. Humans have free will, and so while we serve imperfectly, we nevertheless have the honor of doing so lovingly and voluntarily. Personal reflection continues with reminders of the power of Torah, Shabbat, and Shalom (peace, contentment, interconnected harmony). (162-166)

Act III. Revelation: Connecting to God through Torah

With this preparation, we continue with the Torah service. Just as with Creation/Nature, we take revelation to be equally a past event and a present event. We relive Sinai by taking out the Torah (168) up on the *bimah* (now also Mt. Sinai), carry and revere the Torah as we march it around the synagogue (now also the 40 years we marched and communed with the Torah and God's presence in the wilderness), and hear it read to us as if for the first time, as we use the process of *midrash* (bringing our best selves to seeking wisdom in it) to reveal its plurality of divinely intended meanings to change our lives. Each person honored with a Torah blessing *aliyah* recites "Praised be You, Adonai, our God whose rule extends throughout the universe, you gave us Instruction we can trust, and planted inside of us something alive that transcends time. Praised be God, who is giving the Torah." (172)

We listen to the *haftarah* recitation of a prophetic selection from the Hebrew Bible –often adding in the communal perspective of a cry for social justice amid a worrisome present, along with a thoughtful, justified hope in the future of our people, our planet, and our species, then we lovingly return the Torah (183-184) and delve into the Torah's wisdom through a deep spiritual, emotional, and intellectual discussion of the text. Underlying this act is the understanding of Revelation not as historical event but as ongoing Englightenment. Central to Rabbinic understanding is that the grammatic root for Torah is a homonym for the Hebrew root for light, and so we are meant to think of revelation as ongoing enlightenment. The D'var Torah (sermon) is the application of Torah to the issues of our day in order to continue its enlightenment.

Closing

Finally, we conclude with additional (*Musaf)* prayers *(*185-192) that give us time to individually reflect so as to put everything that we've gotten out of the service so far into a form that we can take home and apply immediately to our lives. This additional section substitutes for the historical sacrificial offerings, and functions to give us additional silent prayer time, and an additional, thrilling Kedushah that is meant to encourage us that we are capable of serving in the ways the service has led us to think. We conclude with the *Aleinu* which reminds us to make God's purposes and our best values the true target and orientation of our actions, again as an individual, a people,

and a species (205-6). We end with congregational announcements and the profound closing song *Adon Olam*.

For a more detailed guide, see page 19.

A Guide to Some of Our Halakhic Customs

Minhag Hamakom: Our Customs

Every synagogue has its own *minhag hamakom*, "custom(s) of the place." In Jewish law, there is often a plurality of acceptable ritual practices, and so for each synagogue the rabbi serves as the *mara d'atra*, the "master of the locality," the legal decisor for which acceptable options are adopted. Jewish tradition encourages attendees of a service to follow the customs of the place. The following are some of the noticeable customs of Beth Israel Congregation as determined by Rabbi Caine.

We stand for two of the seven Shabbat morning kaddish recitations

We stand for the *kaddish* before the *barkhu*, and the *kaddish* before the *musaf amidah,* but not for the others. For mourner's kaddish, only the mourners stand.

There is widespread variation in the custom. Most Sephardim sit for every *kaddish* except the one before the *musaf amidah*, and only mourners stand for the mourner's *kaddish*. Ashkenazic custom varies widely. We follow the Sephardic custom, with the addition of the Ashkenazic custom that we rise in advance for *barkhu* when the congregation has recited *Pesukei Dezimra* (the introductory service).

Historically, sitting for all forms of *kaddish* (except a mourner for the mourner's *kaddish*) was the prevalent *halakhic* custom (as codified by Maimonides, among others). Nevertheless, individuals would sometimes stand which inspired *halakhic* rulings *opposing standing* by, among others, Rabbi Yehizkiya of Magdeburg (Germany, 13th century), who ruled that "standing for kaddish –when others are seated– constitutes *yohara* [haughtiness to appear more observant than others]" and so is inappropriate. A widespread variation on this custom was stated by Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg (13th c.): "One who asks whether to stand for *kaddish*, he is instructed not to stand, but if he

stands, one does not protest." Another custom was that if you are already standing when the leader begins chanting the *kaddish*, then you remain standing. This final custom was the one recorded about the Ari, Rav Yitzhak Luria (Safed, 1534-1572). While he didn't stand for the *kaddish* normally, he would remain standing if he was already standing. Some believe the custom of *always* standing for *kaddish* originated with the Ari's disciples in the late 16th century who would copy their master: the Ari stood for the *kaddish shalem* after the *amidah* because he was still fervently praying, and the disciples would rise because their master was standing.

We therefore consider it the proper custom to sit for *kaddish* –except for the two mentioned. We encourage those at our service to follow our custom, though they may choose instead to follow the custom of their childhood. When one chooses to practice their own custom over the local custom, we presume they do so out of reverence for how they were raised.

We leave the Torah scroll open between the chanting of each section

The *halakhic* debate over when to open and close the scroll during the Torah service has persisted since early Talmudic times. The Talmud states that the two requirements to *prevent delays in the service* (*tircha latsibbur)* and to *prevent embarrassment to those on the bimah losing their place (hilbin et panahv)* overwhelmingly trump two concerns that *one ought not to mislead the uneducated into thinking the blessings are written in the Torah scroll* and *one ought not to leave a Torah scroll open when one is not engaged in Torah reading.* Nevertheless, over the centuries some communities embraced the rejected position, despite rabbinic protests that even when the reciter forgets to look at the blessings sheet while reciting them, no sensible person would think the Torah scroll is mostly filled with the Torah blessings over and over again.

The confusion that animates the debate likely derives from a historical misunderstanding between the time periods of the *Mishnah* and the subsequent *Talmud.* The *Mishnah* states that one leaves the scroll open during "the blessing before the reading" but closes it *before* "the blessing after the reading." It was likely that in Mishnaic times, each blessing only occurred once, so the "blessing after the Torah reading" only occurred *after the seventh aliyah*. In Talmudic times, when the

after-blessing was recited seven times, and so the scroll kept getting closed in order to conform with the Mishnaic dictum, it was natural for people to start closing it during the before-blessing as well, so that in our day people feel closing the scroll is the right thing to do regardless of the *halakhah*. We follow the original ruling that the Torah should remain open until the end of the seventh reading so that we meet the halakhic requirements that the reader's place is not lost and the reading continues swiftly.

We are inclusive of non-binary names and honors

Following Conservative Movement guidelines, we call Jews using their preferred options among the terms *ben* (son of), *bat* (daughter of), and *mi-beit* (from the house of). The numbered Torah honors are called out by the rabbi using the ordinal paired with the term "aliyah" (e.g. "*l'aliyah hashlishit*" which means "for the third aliyah") rather than paired with the gender of the person. We also use the non-binary term "brit mitzvah" (covenant of obligation) as well as the gendered "bar mitzvah" or "bat mitzvah."

Some ritual honors are covered by Non-Jews

The exclusion of non-Jews from service participation has historically reflected the cultural mores of communities. During the Crusades, such exclusion reflected concerns over the dangers to Jews and to non-Jews allowing it. In 20th century America, such exclusion reflected profound discouragement of intermarriage. Given Beth Israel's mores of inclusion and of respect for *chovevei Yisrael* (those who demonstrate love of Judaism) within families who may not all be Jewish, we allow many honors to non-Jews who have personal commitments to Jewish tradition (for example, they are supporting Jewish education). For the honor of reciting the Torah blessings –which requires that one be Jewish– we encourage a non-Jewish spouse to stand with the Jewish spouse as the latter recites the blessings, thus keeping families together.

Head Covering: Understanding the Three Distinct Practices

All men, Jewish or not, wear a head covering (*kippah*) in the sanctuary as a sign of respect. There are, however, three entirely distinct bases for women wearing head coverings. One is the modern custom of **prayer egalitarianism**: to promote the full equality of women, they are encouraged to don the ritual objects previously limited to men, including *tallit* and *kippah*. A completely unrelated, older custom is that due to **modesty**, women ought to cover their hair at all times in public so that they do not attract the male gaze. Hair covering is not

the same thing as head covering, since a wig is a hair covering but not a head covering. A third, important and oft neglected law is the requirement for head covering for everyone, men and women, **when reading Torah or praying the Amidah**, for the sake of *yirat shamayim*, the awe of acknowledging *the One before whom you stand*. While that applies even in personal practice at home –and it is the basis for the custom of Jewish men beginning in the 12th century to wear a *kippah* everywhere, to demonstrate that they are in awe of God's presence at all times, and not just while praying or on the *bimah*-- that law is intensified by the additional principle of *kvod hatsibur,* honoring the congregation, which states that one must especially show this *yirat shamayim* when reading Torah or praying the Amidah *on the bimah* because one is representing not only oneself but the entire community to God. This requirement applies to anyone fulfilling those roles. The *Shulchan Arukh* states, "All are called to be among the seven [Torah readers], even a woman or child...However, they are forbidden to read with an uncovered head." While head covering became associated with Jewish identity over time, rather than with spiritual identification with *yirat shamayim,* the latter has been sadly lost. Even Ultra-Orthodox decisor Ovadiah Yosef ruled that all women and girls are required to don a head covering when reciting the Amidah or reading Scripture to themselves, in order to acknowledge the One before Whom they stand (unrelated to modesty and identity)– though he did not enforce it.

Today, some Jewish women embrace the public "modesty" hair covering by wearing a scarf as a recovery of Jewish gender agency, while others avoid it for the same reason. (To be clear, it is the Conservative position that standards of modesty are society-dependent, so that in a society where the visibility of hair is the norm, there is no risk of immodesty. Similarly there may be immodest behaviors today that would not have been considered immodest centuries ago.) <u>At Beth Israel, we leave to individual decision the first two areas of egalitarianism and modesty.</u> Nevertheless, we encourage a recovery of the independent sources of *kvod hatsibbur* (respect for representing the congregation before God) and *yirat shamayim* (respect for the sanctity of Torah and prayer leading before God). We therefore ask that all respect the tradition of donning a head covering (whether a cloth *kippah*, ornamental metal *kippah*, headband, etc.) when chanting Torah, reciting Torah blessings, and leading the service, unless this causes emotional distress. We do not publicaly correct those who refrain.

Tallit and Egalitarianism

Only Jews wear the *tallit* prayer shawl since it symbolizes the obligations of Jewish law. Beth Israel is an egalitarian congregation in which women and non-binary individuals may take on any role a man does, both in governance and in ritual. Historically, Jewish women did not wear a *tallit* prayer shawl because the *tsitsit* fringes symbolize the full set of commandments, and women were assigned only a subset, in order that they focus on caring for children and for others. As this distinction is troublesome, and since women are considered equal to men at Beth Israel, Jewish women are strongly encouraged to wear a *tallit*, and **since Jewish law requires this of a prayer leader**, women and non-binary individuals are expected to wear a *tallit* and head covering when they lead Hebrew prayers unless it causes emotional distress.

Mishebeirakh Prayer for those in Need of Healing

During the Torah service, we include a prayer for emotional and physical healing. It is the one exception to the rule that during Shabbat one does not engage in petitionary prayers. Our custom is that during the recitation of the prayer, an extensive list of names submitted by members is recited quietly at the Torah: these are names of people that congregants have asked the rabbi to pray for on a daily basis, and for whom congregants may attend in person to share the name outloud. At the same time, the rabbi solicits names of those in need of healing from the congregation: you are invited to add names, whether in Hebrew, Yiddish, or English, whether a Jew or a non-Jew, whether another or yourself. *Even if you've already submitted a name to the formal ongoing list, please also say the name outloud as an act of active prayer.* The rabbi will also read the names of Beth Israel members who have asked the congregation to pray for them directly, and who either cannot come themselves or would prefer not to say their own name outloud.

Electricity, Streaming and Zoom Minyan

Beth Israel allows certain uses of electricity on Shabbat, including streaming the service. The use of electricity on Shabbat and holidays is a very complex *halakhic* topic. Some consider the prohibition of lighting fire on Shabbat to apply to electricity, though electricity does not satisfy the *halakhic* definition that fire consumes the fuel it is attached to. (Light bulbs do not burn up their elements, nor do batteries consume their

chemicals.) The most commonly agreed upon *halakhic* issue with electricity is that it may be considered to violate the prohibition that forbids "chasing away the spirit of Shabbat through weekday intrusion." Similar to reading an anxiety producing newspaper, or thinking about homework or business matters, what is not a technical violation could be considered a spiritual violation. Having a day away from cell phones and electronics could well be essential to Shabbat in our day, even if potentially they are not technical violations. (To be clear, it is a technical violation to use an electrical appliance to do forbidden activities like gardening, cooking, or photography.) It is Rabbi Caine's ruling that electricity is not in itself always a technical violation but it should only be permitted when it does not violate the spirit of Shabbat. Turning on and off lights or a kitchen warming-plate does not violate the spirit of Shabbat, and it is preferable to leaving them on for 25 hours which violates the prohibition on wasting fuel and minimizing environmental impact. Driving a fully-electric car to synagogue is preferable to driving a car that lights fuel on fire when you turn a key or press a petal. However, using a cell phone for non-safety purposes is not permitted. *Please do not use a cell phone (except to monitor emergencies) while on synagogue property on Shabbat and holidays; photography is forbidden.*

The service is simulcast on a livestream and on Zoom. The main principles against streaming are that 1) streaming reduces the creation of vital, in person community, and 2) on Shabbat and holidays, technology dispels the spirit of the holiness of the day. The main principle in its favor is that technology allows the inclusion of those who are not able to physically attend (who number more than one might expect) and the inclusion of those who otherwise would not choose to connect to a service. The Conservative Movement allows local rabbis to choose to stream the service as long as non-Jews attend the technology or it is automated. Rabbi Caine endorses the option for inclusion. In addition, Rabbi Caine endorses the position that people may fulfill their obligation to say the Mourner's Kaddish through Zoom as long as they are sharing their video, under the *halakhah* established in the *Shulchan Arukh* that the service leader may count in the minyan those who are attending "through a window" when the prayer leader can discern that they are actively participating.

Accessibility

In the hallway next to the sanctuary, you will find shelves of books to make the service more accessible, including large print prayerbooks and some in braille, Russian, and Spanish. In addition, there are several different versions of the *siddur* plus assorted commentaries on the Torah.

Frequently Asked Questions

How Do I Accept an Honor and What is "*Yishar Koach*?"

You may be approached and asked to do an honor. This is a way of honoring you, hence the name. Honors include: Opening/closing the ark curtain; lifting (*hagbah)* the Torah scroll; dressing (*gelilah*) the Torah scroll; doing an English reading; reciting the Torah blessings in Hebrew (an *aliyah*); and carrying the Torah scroll around the sanctuary. If it makes you uncomfortable to do the requested honor, simply say so: we will not take offense and we want you to be comfortable. Reciting the Torah blessings and lifting the Torah require knowledge of how to do so. (There are videos on our website to help you learn!) If your honor is approaching, please seat yourself in a front row so you are ready to ascend the bimah without delay. If you are approaching for an *aliyah* of reciting the Torah blessings, the rabbi will ask you for your Hebrew (or Yiddish) name: just do your best. Non-Jews are welcome to accept the honors of English readings and, in most cases, ark openings/closings. After an honor, others say, "*Yishar Koach,"* which means "[May your] strength be supported" similar to "More power to you." It is now almost universally mispronounced and mistranslated as "Yasher Koach," "May your strength be straight." The proper response is "*Barukh tihiyeh,"* which means "May it be a blessing."

What is Conservative Judaism?

Conservative Judaism conserves the Jewish tradition so that it is passed on intact, while at the same time adding contemporary interpretations and practical applications in our own day, as has always been the case. For this reason the service is complete and in Hebrew so that we don't break a link in the chain: we pass on the original so that new interpretations are possible. We believe that "tradition" is best understood as "passing on the questions" rather than just "passing on the answers." In order to pass on the questions, we must pass on the conversations of the past including past questions and answers, and we innovate by adding new answers into that inheritance. It's similar to

passing on the topics for a speech and debate class from generation to generation. For example, for thousands of years, Jews have approached the Torah with questions like the following. *If Noah was the "best man of his generation" and his generation was lousy, what does it mean to be a decent human being in a place where no one is behaving decently (Mishnah Avot)? If God hardens Pharaoh's heart, then does he not have free will, and when are we like that? How can coveting be a transgression when we don't punish people for their thoughts? Why is there a tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden if God didn't want humanity to eat from it? What does it mean that "God is One?"* We could teach one answer to each question, but the practice of tradition is to pass on the questions, the debates, the process of argument for a high purpose, and traditional perspectives and disagreements, so that each person can construct an answer that applies in that very moment, and one may well take a different or even opposite view a year from now. That's what tradition is: one receives the inheritance of the full range of human-Torah questions and wisdom, and in each moment connects to a variegated and deep human truth. Similarly, we apply Jewish law as it has always been applied: we work within the boundaries and processes of the *halakhah* as we make rulings for *the range of acceptable practices*. In so doing, Conservative Judaism is a religion of The Middle Way: we encourage hearing all sides, take in all human perspectives, and eschew extremism.

A difference between Conservative and Orthodox Judaism in our approach to Jewish law is that Orthodox Judaism by and large considers a recent cultural custom as having the status of equivalence to Jewish law if it has persisted for a period of time that can vary from two generations to 200 years. Movements dedicated to "returning things to the old fashioned way" are often in debt to modernity, since the "old fashioned way" may be a reconstruction of the time of one's grandparents, or an imagined past, rather than factually of earlier times. So if people have been standing for a prayer for one century, then "It's Tradition!" to stand for the prayer-- even if there was no standing for the prayer, including in the legal codes, for two thousand years prior. Conservative Judaism, by contrast, employs a historical consciousness (the denomination's original name was "Postive Historical Judaism") and more freely sanctions decisions based on precedents from the earlier, classic legal codes, and on the Talmud, even when they contrast with customs. For example, historically, the classical legal codes opposed the

practice of spelling translations of God as "G-d" or the equivalent. Even Maimonides, the author of the legal code the *Mishneh Torah*, wrote out the word "God" in Arabic without alteration. The practice of writing "G-d" began in the 20th century, and then became common custom. Thus, Conservative Judaism considers "G-d" as both misleading and breaking with Jewish law, while many Orthodox consider it a "long standing custom" and appropriate stringency. Another example is the separation of the sanctuary into "men's" and "women's" sections. This practice seems to have begun in the 11th century, and exists neither in the Bible nor in Rabbinic descriptions of the Temple nor in the Talmud. It is a longstanding practice and considered Jewish law in Orthodox Judaism, but it is not considered divinely mandated in Conservative Judaism. People often think a modern movement like Conservative Judaism introduces innovations unknown to history when in fact we are often returning to earlier precedents without the added stringencies of recent customs.

What does it mean to be a "member" of the synagogue?

Being a "member" of a synagogue is similar to being a "member" of PBS or a "member" of the "Friends of [*fill in your favorite museum, charity, or non-profit organization*]." The term has seen some evolution over the years. The term "member" meant a great deal to first and second generation America Jews who were often shut out of membership in clubs and organizations, and it resonated as a translation of its Hebrew counterpart, *chaver*, which denotes both "friend" and "member." Membership may come with perks in non-profit organizations – streaming past episodes of Masterpiece Theater, discounted entry to a museum or symphony, a synagogue's High Holiday tickets– but "member" does not describe an exchange of services for a membership fee, as it may connote today. The essence of a *sustaining* membership is to provide ongoing financial support to the synagogue so that it is able to fulfill its mission. For this reason, many non-profit organizations have switched from the terminology of "membership" to that of "*sustaining* membership" or even "supporter." A Beth Israel member is one who gives charitably in order to sustain the synagogue as the continuation of the Temple in our days: an institution that daily convenes Jewish community, provides Jewish education at all levels, infuses Jewish life cycle events with meaning and Jewish lives with purpose, and which connects all who pass through its doors to Torah (in its broadest sense of cosmic meaning and traditional modalities of purpose) and to each other.

The Hate Speech Outside Our Doors FAQ

Who are these people with the offensive signs outside the synagogue?

This group calls themselves Jewish Witnesses for Peace and friends. They believe the state of Israel has been an illegitimate state *since it was born in 1948*. This is not a group that opposes the post-1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza – this group opposes the very idea of a Jewish homeland in the Middle East. Its leader calls himself "post-Jewish," has proclaimed his admiration for Nazi leaders, denies the Holocaust, and claims that there is a global Jewish conspiracy.

Why are they there and how long will it continue?

The protest is taking place here because of Beth Israel's long history and the vitality of our gathering on Shabbat morning. The leadership of this group has requested to address the congregation and claims they will stay there until they are permitted to do so – we certainly will not grant access to a group that shows such blatant disregard for our congregation and its members. They say they will stay until the congregation passes a resolution opposing the existence of the state of Israel, or dissociates itself from Israel – this is not going to happen! These signs are legal – it is free speech, protected by the First Amendment. We cannot force them to leave. The action will continue until they decide to stop.

What is Beth Israel doing about them?

From the beginning of this protest, we have followed a policy of intentional non-engagement with this group. Since what they are doing is legal, we cannot force them to leave, and we do not want to hand them the publicity a legal fight would entail. Our instincts in this area have been affirmed by the current and former Ann Arbor police chiefs, and by numerous other attorneys and communal leaders we have consulted. We continue to investigate legal options, albeit without much optimism.

We have also cultivated and received support from *The Ann Arbor News* (an editorial calling for them to end the protest), numerous clergy from other faiths (who have written letters to the newspaper opposing the protests) and many community leaders. The Ann Arbor City Council has unanimously condemned the protests as Anti-Semitic hate speech. Our non-engagement policy has won the respect of the community and prevented these protests from escalating into something much worse.

Over the years the number of protestors has dwindled to almost nothing. Please do not confront them: they wear cameras and attempt to goad people into a confrontation for the purposes of charging them with assault.

What do I tell the children?

It's a hard truth but this can be a teachable moment. Anti-Semitism is a reality and we can orient our children to it in age appropriate ways.

Prayer Guide with *Kavanot* (Prayer Practices)

What can I be thinking while that prayer/page is happening in the service?

Judaism considers that each formal prayer can be accompanied by a multitude of *kavanot*, spiritual intentions or thoughts. A major part of prayer is focusing on what spiritual consciousness and thoughts one is bringing to the prayer: put simply, "How am I praying this today? What is my personal goal for this page?" Here is a quick guide to the prayers, and a few *kavanot* for each prayer.

Act One: Creation (Nature)

Page **145,** Nishmat: "*The soul of everything alive continually blesses Your Name, Adonai our God*." Everything with life in it, from fish to grass, from the very large whales to the organisms of my gut macrobiome, is making sound that combines to form a music. ***Kavanah: Can I hear Nature as God hears it? Let me contract my ego, and open my perceptual funnel to truly listen, to hear the interconnected music of this always new song in this very moment. I can hear my breath, so I am already singing in the song. I am a choir just as Nature is a choir.***

Pages **147-148,** Shochein 'Ad, Uvmak'halot, Yishtabakh: *"Your Presence extends to the transcendent realms."* Those who follow the immanent, continuous song to the transcendent realms, are touching the realm of pure Justice with a love song. I sense the congregations across the world joining together with ours in doing so, choruses within choruses. *"God, You delight in the chorus of song, giving life to all worlds."*

Pages **149-151**, Barkhu, Yotser Or, El Adon: "You shape everything from energy, and create pure darkness, making everything out of that balance." The sound of everything

is not only the sound that comes from what is alive, but the sound which comes from literally everything, from a mixture of energy and void that makes up all the universe.

Kavanah: How can I balance the mixture of dark and light in my life? How can I see what is going on in my life right now as neither good or bad, but as a mixture?
Page **154**, Ahavah Rabah ("Great Love"): *"You love us through granting us the sentience to understand the laws of life."* The Universe loves us by allowing us to understand It. By understanding the laws of psychology, I can heal my psyche and that of others. By understanding the laws of economics, I can make a better life for those close to me and for those distant who also need my loving care. By understanding the research on parenting, I can become a better parent. All realms from the sciences to the humanities are torah's that are part of the universal, cosmic Torah. And for Israel You loved us by giving us a means of flourishing through time through the laws of the written and oral Torah's.

Kavanah: In what areas of my life am I coming to understand how life works, how the world works, so that I can live better? How can I experience those areas as God loving me?

Page **155**, Sh'ma and V'ahavta: Now our great solo in the cosmic choir(s): Listen, Israel! Adonai is our God, Adonai of absolute singularity. How do I return the Ahavah Rabah (great love) to You with all my heart, all my soul, and all my extra (beyond what I need to live)? I return the love through loving behavior, through the use of my words and actions, in my own solitariness and in when with others, during the times of waking up and putting to bed, during the times of going somewhere, and during the return from somewhere. In all moments of transition, may I be a teacher of life-affirming wisdom.

Kavanah: How am I presenting to the world in my first hour of the morning, and the final hour before sleep? Is it positive or negative? What words are being voiced in the car going to and from places? Are they words of wisdom and love, or distraction and superficiality? How can I increase the former?

Page **156,** V'haya im-shamo'a: While the V'ahavta was directed at me as an individual to behave in a way that returns the cosmic love, this prayer is directed at us as a collective to behave in a way that returns the cosmis love. We will know we are operating in concert

with the divine wisdom when the climate is as we expect. When the rains are off, when the land is not yielding its abundance, we know we are not in concert with Torah. We started the prayers connecting to God through Nature in and around ourselves: we now shift from hearing to hearkening, from awareness to responsibility.

Kavanah: How can I bring my Judaism and my wisdom to serve God's purposes and the Land in order to bring ecological balance specifically, and greater harmoniousness in general, through my relationship with Jewish tradition and with God? How can I understand this not as a voluntary spirituality, but as absolute responsibility (commandedness/mitzvah)?

Redemption and Service

Page **157,** Emet: From love to trust. Now that we've proceeded from love and awe to its unequivocal result in responsibility –for when you truly love, you recognize your inescapable duties– we realize that our greatest freedom is expressed in serving. *Emet/Emunah* (expressions of the same grammatical root), are relationship words which mean being faithful to another. In Judaism, faith is not a belief in the existence of God, but is faithfulness, or reciprocal trust, in our relationship with God/Torah/Tradition. We are serving as our ancestors served the *"God whose judgment and righteousness extends to the ends of the earth. Blessed are the ones who attend to Your mitzvot and place Your teaching and words in their hearts."*

Page **158,** Mi Khamokhah: If true freedom consists in meeting the responsibilities that grow out of love, then one cannot truly express love, service, and gratitude without being free from oppression. When one is hungry, oppressed, voiceless, or marginalized, one cannot serve. All have a human right to freedom. "You redeemed us from Egypt and freed us from the house of bondage. The cherished people offered songs of thanksgiving... to the ever-living GOd who is transcendent, powerful, and awe-inspiring, humbling the haughty, raising up the lowly, freeing those in chains, redeeming the poor, and helping the weak."

Kavanah: As we have been freed, we must free others. How can I free others who are suffering limitations on their freedom, through basic human needs, political or social oppression, or in other ways? What is one step I can take this week to redeem others?

Page **159,** Amidah- The God of Those Who Came Before: The relationship of our ancestors to God is not fundamentally different from my own. They too connected to God through love, awe, transcendence, responsibility, and acts of kindness. They found a connection and a wisdom I too can find when I start from a genuine place inside me of seeking wisdom, feeling gratitude and love, and striving to better manage my life with holiness and goodness.

Kavanah: What is one genuine place inside of me that I am just trying to be a better human being: a better parent or grandparent, a better friend or sibling, a better son or daughter, a better person at my job, a better person to myself? Feel a kinship with all who have asked this question, and moved forward in steps.

Page **160,** Amidah- The God who brings Life to the Lifeless: God's compassion (*rachamim)* and selfless love (*chesed)* express themselves in the tender kindness of vitality infusing what is dormant. What brings vitality to what was trapped: freeing another, inspiring another, feeding another, nourishing another, being kind to another, healing another. All forms of bringing life to what is otherwise lifeless is the nexus in which God operates and we participate in God.

Kavanah: What is dormant potential in me that wants to become actualized? What is at low-energy in me that could become energized? Where can I bring energy and vitality to what is dormant in me or another? Where can I bring to life a value bequeathed to me by a loved one, so that the dead are brought to life?

Page **161**, Amidah- Holiness, Kedushah [only recited outloud]: The Jewish mystics added this special prayer to dramatize our participation in Holiness, the invisible realm of divinity intersecting with our reality. While we may just see the physical collection of people in the sanctuary, we are actually standing in two intersecting dimensional realities. In one, the automatic extensions of the Divine into forces (such as Rafael, healing, Gavriel, courage, and so on), the angels, are lining up as soldiers in a line to be inspected by their Commander. We in the sanctuary, too, are standing in a line across from them, at military attention: feet together, no slouching, faces up. God walks between the two lines, inspecting us for our fitness to serve. Are we willing? Are we courageous? Are we kind? Are we determined? Do we accept the responsibilities that

come with love and awe? The prayer is a duet of call and response with the prayer leader voicing one line and we the other line.

Kavanah: I may not be perfect like the angels, but I have everything I need to serve God's purposes in this world. I have the free will to make that choice. I, too, can be holy like the angels, for I have an extension of God's divinity in me at all times, too: my soul, a fragment of divine energy always connected to its source in God. What is God's special mission for me this week to carry out?

Pages **162-166,** Amidah- Shabbat, Gratitude, Peace: I cannot serve without embracing Shabbat. If our mission includes redeeming, then I cannot be a messenger of God if I enslave myself. If God can take a day to stop creating, stop fashioning the world, and simply experience it all as wonderful, then who am I to deprive myself of the same?

Kavanah: How am I enslaving myself, and by doing so shutting out the experience of life's blessings?

Each morning, afternoon and evening God provides me signs.

Kavanah: How can open myself up to the signs? How can I let go of missed signs from the past so I can be open to the ones coming up ahead?
We close this act on redemption and service with a foreshadowing of the next act, enlightenment: *"Bless us, our creator, united as one with the light of Your presence; by that light, Adonai our God, You have given us a guide to life, the love of kindness, righteousness, blessing, compassion, life, and peace."*

Revelation (Enlightenment)

Pages **168-184**, The Torah Service: The name of God, which we do not pronounce and instead substitute outloud with "Adonai" (my Master), is a grammatical form that means, simultaneously: It Was, It Is, It Will Be. In other words, the past, present, and future are simultaneous dimensions for God. The giving of the Torah was not just an historical event in the past, it is also taking place in the present, and it is also taking place in the future (in new meanings and applications of Torah we cannot imagine).

Kavanah: Let me experience the bimah transform into Mount Sinai, let meanings of Torah enlighten me in this present moment to give light to a path ahead for this week. Let me find in a word of the Torah or Haftarah, or a footnote in the Etz Chaim, or the rabbi's teaching, or a reflection that comes to my mind, the opening to a way forward.

As the blessing over the Torah states, "*Blessings-bestower are You, Adonai, our God and Rule-Maker of the universe, who gave us a Torah in trust, and thus planted an experience of eternal life in our midst. Praised are You, who is Giving the Torah (in this moment and continually).*

Closing

Pages **185-19**2, Musaf (Additional) Amidah: We reiterate the process of the Amidah, with modifications to some of the prayers. Whereas it previously served as a transition from Redemption to Revelation in seeking a way to serve, it now has the benefit of enlightenment, and so we use the time to incorporate some sparks of enlightenment into our thoughts of how to serve. Put another way, the first Amidah was the journey from the Red Sea to Sinai, and this Amidah is the journey from Sinai to the Promised Land, now with Torah in hand.

Kavanah: What is one insight, perspective, new spark of wisdom or question I can take away from the service that I can apply to my life for the week ahead?

Page **205**, Aleinu: Originally a prayer special for Rosh Hashanah, Ashkenazic Jews incorporated into the closing of every service. It is future facing, concluding the service with a Messianic vision, that all the families of the earth will come to align in common purpose. The poet William Stafford wrote in part of "A Ritual to Read to Each Other:"

If you don't know the kind of person I am,
and I don't know the kind of person you are,
a pattern that others made may prevail in the world,
and following the wrong god home we may miss our star....

And so I appeal to a voice, to something shadowy, a remote important region in all who talk:
though we could fool each other, we should consider--
lest the parade of our mutual life get lost in the dark.
For it is important that awake people be awake, or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;
the signals we give--yes or no, or maybe– should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.

Kavanah: When I leave today, what value(s) will serve as a star for me to orient the navigation of my life going forward in our mutual life?

Page **207**, Mourner's Kaddish:

Kavanah: How do I give life to the dead through my renewed spiritual energy and commitments, which is (whether I call it this or not) my relationship to God?

The *kaddish* expressed in the common tongue of Aramaic each individual's connection to God. Versions were and are recited after studying a Jewish teaching from Tanakh or Talmud. A human being is also a *torah* that may deepen our connection to God. Connecting to the Amidah's blessing that giving life to the dead is providing vitality to that which lay in dormant potential or suppressed energy, the penultimate line asks for reinvigoration of life. As the *kaddish* depends on a highly idiomatic form involving God's name, literal translations obscure the common-tongue message. The following translation by Rabbi Caine incorporates the idiom:

> *May we come to feel God's presence increasing, and holiness a reality, in this world. May we come to see God's laws as good, and make God's intentions for our world a reality, in our lifetime and in each of our days. Amen.*
>
> > *May God's bounty be felt for ever and ever.*
>
> *May we find blessing, beauty, wonder, transcendence, exaltation, honor, endurance, and the realness of God's goodness in this world, which goes beyond any words of gratitude, praise, poetry, or consoling ever uttered in this world. Amen.*
>
> *May a great contentment find its way here from the heavens, and re-invigorate life for us below. Amen.*
>
> *May the force which makes for peace in the transcendent realms bring peace to us, to Israel, and to all who dwell in this world. Amen*

Quotations from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

"We do not step out of the world when we pray; we merely see the world in a different setting. The self is not the hub but the spoke of the revolving wheel. It is precisely the

function of prayer to shift the center of living from self-consciousness to self-surrender." "We do not refuse to pray. We merely feel that our tongue is tied, our mind inert, our inner vision dim, when we are about to enter the door that leads to prayer. We do not refuse to pray; we abstain from it. We ring the hollow bell of selfishness, rather than absorb the stillness that surrounds the world, that hovers over all the restlessness and fear of life—the secret stillness that precedes our birth and follows our death. Futile self-indulgence brings us out of tune with the gentle song of nature's waiting, of mankind's striving for salvation. Is not listening to the pulse of wonder worth silence and abstinence from self-assertion? Why do we not set apart an hour of living for devotion to God by surrendering to stillness? We dwell on the edge of mystery and ignore it... setting up the thick screen of self between God and us, adding more shadows to the darkness that already hovers between God and our wayward reason. Accepting surmises as dogmas, and prejudices as solutions, we ridicule the evidence of life for what is more than life. Our mind has ceased to be sensitive to the wonder. Deprived of the power of devotion to what is more important than our individual fate, steeped in passionate anxiety to survive, we lose sight of what fate is, of what living is.

To pray is to take notice of the wonder, to regain the sense of the mystery that animates all beings, the divine margin in all attainments. Prayer is our humble answer to the inconceivable surprise of living. It is all we can offer in return for the mystery by which we live."

"It takes two things to make prayer come to pass: a person and a word. What do most of us know about the substance of Words? Estranged from the soil of the soul, our words do not grow as fruits of insights, but are found as sapless cliches, refuse in the backyard of intelligence.... We all live in them, feel in them, think in them, but failing to uphold their independent dignity, to respect their power and weight, they turn waif, elusive, a mouthful of dust. Words have ceased to be commitments.... [But] Words of prayer are commitments. We stand for what we utter. ... The word of prayer is like a pledge in the making."

"The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of space; on the Sabbath we become attuned to *holiness in time*. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world."

A Quick Guide to Our Norms and Expectations at Beth Israel

Please follow our *minhag hamakom*, our preferred custom, whenever possible.

Head coverings - All who identify as male, whether Jewish or not, wear a head covering (typically a *kippah*) as a sign of respect while in the sanctuary. All who identify as nonbinary or as female are encouraged to wear a head covering while in the sanctuary, and are expected to do so when chanting Torah, reciting the Torah blessings, and leading the service. (A variety are in the basket on the *bimah*.) We do not correct those who refrain. *See page 11 for details.*

Tallit - All Jews 13 and older who identify as male wear a *tallit* while in the sanctuary during morning services (not afternoon or evening). The dissenting custom, that Jewish men may wait to wear a *tallit* until they are married, only applies to those who wear a small *tallit* on a daily basis. Jewish nonbinary individuals and women 13 and older are *strongly encouraged* to wear a *tallit* while in the sanctuary, and are expected to do so when leading Hebrew prayers unless it is emotionally distressing. Non-Jews do not wear a *tallit* since it symbolizes being bound to the obligations of the Jewish covenant. *See page 12 for details.*

Torah Open - Our custom is to leave the scroll open during the Torah blessings. *See page 10.*

Kaddish - The congregation stands for the *kaddish* before the *barkhu* and the *kaddish* before *musaf amidah*. We sit for the others. Only mourners stand for mourners *kaddish*. *See p. 9.*

Cell Phone - We do not use cell phones while on synagogue grounds. *See page 13.*

Siddur - We show respect for the congregation by following along in the prayerbook or this Guide at all times. We do not place holy books on the floor.

Kiddush Lunch - We do not begin eating until after we recite the blessings.

Children - Please monitor your children. Unless your child is attending Shabbat children's programming, your child must be with you at all times. For safety reasons, children may not play unattended on the playground or in Beth Israel rooms. When they are in the sanctuary, we welcome the voices of children at normal speaking volumes, but running on the bimah or making loud noises is an invitation that they might need a break. We aim for a balance.

Security - Please maintain awareness of your surroundings, including the locations of egresses. Please refer to the cards in the pews for detailed security information.