

General Guidelines
(Practice, Practice, Practice, Practice, Practice, Practice...)

Welcome to leading services! We hope that the experience of leading, as well as the experience of preparing and learning more about the services will help to increase your comfort with the services and deepen your experience of prayer.

Here are a few questions and answers that we hope will help you get you on your way.

What's the best way to prepare?

Practice, Practice, Practice. Practice some more. Make sure you feel comfortable with all aspects of the service you'll be leading so that you don't get flustered. There's lots of help available...see the reverse for more details.

How should I behave while I'm up there? Generally stand in a respectful way that conveys the dignity of the task you are undertaking.

- Try to keep your hair out of your face; you don't want to have that to worry about or be playing with it during the service. Similarly, try to deal with any scrunchies, hair clips, navel rings and other items before leading.
- Please avoid drinking water while leading (or reading Torah or Haftarah). Unfortunately, there are halakhic problems with drinking while leading (DWL- Drinking While Leading) so please avoid it. Feel free to load up on beverages before you begin leading or after you've finished.
- If you ever need a place to put your hands, just pick up your siddur and hold it. Feel free to play with the corners of the pages. It can be oddly soothing.

What if I forget...

...a word, a sentence or a whole paragraph? A Gabbai should be standing near you, keeping tabs on everything that's going on. If you do forget something, they will gently tell you that you forgot something and tell you to go back and do it again.

...a tune? That's OK. Tunes are the icing on the cake. It happens to everyone, and the best thing to do is to just plunge forward without the tune.

I'm afraid of the Congregation...they're going to yell at me when I make a mistake and throw me in Minyan jail.

Don't worry. First of all, there's no such thing as Minyan jail. And there's no such thing as an irreparable mistake. In a worst-case scenario, you may have to go back and repeat something, but you won't go to jail for that. And as long as you've done your practicing, you won't make any mistakes. ☺

Second, the only person you need to pay any attention to is the Gabbai. The Gabbai will tell you if you've made a mistake, missed a word or run over a small child. If the screaming Mee-meets think you've done something wrong, they will have to go through the Gabbai to get to you, so pay no attention to them.

But people yell other things out at weird times and I don't know what they're saying.

Synagogues have often been lovingly referred to as "zoos," "stock exchanges" and "Grand Central Station" due to the random shouts and murmurs that are given off by the congregants throughout the service. Just ignore the shouts; generally they're shouting because they were inspired by a particular line or because they learned to do things that way. But they're not trying to tell you what to do (and if they are, see the above). That said, it's important to keep in mind that the Congregation will respond and be loud about things, especially during Kedushah and the Torah service, so don't be taken by surprise by that stuff.

Useful Resources

The Tape

Contents of the Tape

Side A: Prayers for Shabbat Morning: Psukei D'Zimrah, Shaharit, Mussaf

Side B: Prayers for Shabbat Evening: Kabbalat Shabbat, Ma'ariv

Side B also contains appendix: Extra tunes for El Adon (Shaharit), Mimkomcha (Shaharit Kedushah), Ein Kelohenu (Mussaf), Anim Z'mirot full lyrics (Mussaf), Birkat Hahodesh (Mussaf).

I will try to get this tape digitized... anyone want to help with that? We will all be forever in your debt.

The Web

There is a website that has links to many, many prayers, sung out loud by a professional Chazzan: <http://www.virtualcantor.com/>. We're not kidding.

The CD

Josh Milner put together a CD a couple of years ago. It has some of P'sukei D'zimrah, all of Shabbat Shaharit and Mussaf and some of the Holiday prayers.

The Minyan

Email DCMinyan@hotmail.com when you have questions or are ready to lead. Let us know what you need help with specifically and we'll get you set up with someone who can go over the prayers with you.