

A Visitor's Guide to Shabbat (Sabbath) Morning Services at Anshe Sholom B'nai Israel Congregation

Welcome

This brief guide is designed to help orient a newcomer to our congregation. We are delighted you are with us this morning. Please do not feel any hesitation asking a stranger sitting near you for help finding your place in a prayer book or for an explanation of an unfamiliar custom. We are a diverse congregation and are honored to open our doors to Jews and non-Jews of every background who attend prayers at our congregation out of curiosity, as part of a religious journey, or to attend a celebration hosted by a member of the community. Many of those surrounding you who appear to be veteran worshippers were themselves newcomers only a few months or years ago, so rest assured—nobody is judging you!

Which Books Do I Need?

There are two books that you will need to follow the services. You can find these books in the wooden cabinets along the back wall of the synagogue. The first book is the “Prayer Book”, called a *Siddur* in Hebrew, which contains all the prayers recited in our congregation in original Hebrew and in English translation. We currently use two different editions of the prayer book. The first is published by Koren Publishers and features the translation and commentary of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. This book is bound in gray covers and may be referred to as the “gray prayer book” when pages are announced. The other is published by Artscroll Publishing and is bound in a black cover and may be referred to as the “black prayer book” when pages are announced.

The other book you will need is a *Chumash*, Pentateuch, or book containing the Five Books of Moses. We have three or four editions of the *Chumash* in our congregation and we use them to follow along with the reading from the Torah scroll. Pages are announced for each edition before the reading begins. Then, as each of seven sub-sections begins, the chapter and verse are announced to help readers keep pace.

Head Coverings

In Jewish tradition, covering one's head is a sign of respect, humility, and modesty. We ask that all men cover their heads during prayer services as well as during the *kiddush* reception that follows. Kippot or yarmulkes for head covering are provided in a bin located in the synagogue lobby next to the entrance to the sanctuary. Many married women cover their heads with a hat or scarf. We have a collection of hats on a hat rack in the lobby for women who would like to borrow a hat while attending services.

How Should I Dress?

One of the ways that we express the special nature of the Sabbath and festivals is by dressing in festive and formal clothing. Many men will wear a suit and tie. Some will wear a jacket and no tie, and others will wear a collared shirt, slacks, and belt. Most women wear skirts or dresses to Shabbat and holiday services. Men and women express our respect for an ethos of modesty by wearing shirts with sleeves and by wearing clothing that covers our thighs and knees.

The above notwithstanding, everyone is welcome to attend services no matter how one happens to be dressed. We would much prefer that you join us rather than stay away and wait until you have found the “right clothing”. We strive to create an environment of spirituality when we gather as a congregation that precludes paying attention to the clothing that other people are wearing.

A Note About the Sabbath and Holidays

Observant Orthodox Jews refrain from using all electronic devices, including phones, cameras, and computers, for the duration of the Sabbath and other festivals. Please turn off your cell phone and refrain from using any electronic devices during services on Shabbat or holidays or during the *kiddush* reception that follows.

Overview of Jewish Worship

Although the rabbi is present, services are led by a *chazzan*, or *shaliach tzibbur*, a volunteer from the community who is the “community representative” in prayer. The *chazzan* stands at the table in the middle of the sanctuary. He will say aloud the final sentences of many paragraphs of the prayers in order to set the pace for the congregation. There are also prayers recited exclusively by the *chazzan*. He faces the same direction as the congregation because our communal prayer is an entire community standing together before God rather than a performance with an audience.

Almost all of our prayers are recited in Hebrew because Hebrew is the original language of the Jewish people and the language of our scriptures. The prayers were themselves composed in Hebrew centuries and millennia ago. Using the original Hebrew preserves subtle nuances that may be lost in translation and allows Jews to pray together no matter where they are from or which languages they speak. Our prayer books contain full English translations for those who are not fully fluent in Hebrew. God understands English too, and you should feel comfortable reading and praying in whichever language is most comfortable for you!

Men and women sit separately in Orthodox synagogues, divided by a partition known as a *mehitzzah*. Before the breakdown of traditional Jewish life in modern times, Jewish men and women prayed in distinct and separate spaces in every known Jewish community throughout the world. Our Sages considered the light-hearted atmosphere associated with men and women intermingling to be incompatible with prayer. Furthermore, sitting separately from our husbands and wives allows married couples the chance to stand in communication with God as an individual. Children may sit in either section as childcare is the equal responsibility of fathers and mothers.

Shabbat Morning Schedule

9:00 - 9:25 Preliminary blessings and Psalms.

9:25 - 9:50 *Shacharit*, the morning service, is comprised of the recitation of the *Shema* and the blessings that proceed and follow that recitation. The climax of the *Shacharit* service is the *amidah*, a silent devotional prayer recited while standing. The *amidah* is then repeated out loud on behalf of the congregation by the *chazzan*.

9:50 - 10:55 The Torah scroll is removed from the ark and brought to the center of the synagogue to be read. The Torah is divided into sections. Each Shabbat morning, a section is read in an annual cycle through which the entire Five Books of Moses are recited over the course of the year. This cycle of readings goes back to the time of the Biblical scribe Ezra more than 2500 years ago. The Torah scroll is written without any punctuation, vowels, or vocalization, or any indicators of the musical pattern. The reader must study and memorize those components in order to read the Torah for the congregation. Most weeks, the Torah reading is divided into seven smaller sections and a different member of the congregation is called to say a blessing over each section of the Torah reading. After the Torah is read, it is briefly lifted up and displayed before being bound and covered. A selection from the prophetic writings, called the *Haftarah*, is then read.

After prayers for the sick, blessings on behalf of the United States, the State of Israel, and Members of the Israel Defense Forces, and a prayer for peace, the Torah is returned to its storage place in the front of the sanctuary.

10:55 - 11:10 Once the Torah has been returned to the ark, the rabbi, or some other speaker, delivers a sermon, known as a *drasha* or *devar Torah* in Hebrew. A young person celebrating a bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah may give the sermon in place of the rabbi.

11:10 - 11:30 *Mussaf*, an additional prayer, is recited only on Shabbat and festivals to commemorate the extra worship that took place on those days in the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. The *Mussaf amidah* is recited silently by individuals and then repeated out loud on behalf of the congregation.

11:30 - 11:40 Our services end with concluding prayers, congregational announcements, and the singing of *Adon Olam*, a culminating hymn that is led by the young children of our community.