

Shabbat Navigator: A Guide to the What's, Why's, and How-To's

Did you ever wonder why but were too afraid to ask. Here is a resource to help answer some of your questions — but the best way to learn is to ask more! Please feel free to call, email, or visit our Clergy to discuss questions you have about observing Shabbat or any other Jewish traditions and rituals.

Shabbat Service and Rituals

Candle Lighting

We light candles to usher in Shabbat and holidays. It is traditional to use two candles on Shabbat, symbolic of the two commandments to “remember” and to “observe” Shabbat. When we light the candles we gather in the light and beauty of Shabbat by symbolically waving our hands over the flames and then covering our eyes during the blessing.

Sabbath Bride

Shabbat is often referred to as a bride, and we, the Jewish people, are the groom. Thus, on Shabbat we welcome our Sabbath bride with song and praise and we recommit ourselves to the love that we share with God.

Lecha Dodi

This poem is a 16th-century mystical poem by Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz of Safed and is sung to welcome the Sabbath Bride. When we reach the last verse, beginning *Boi v'shalom*, “Enter in Peace,” we rise and turn toward the entrance of the sanctuary, as if to greet the Presence of Shabbat. When we arrive at the very last line, “*Boi Kallah Boi Kallah*, Enter, O Bride! Enter, O Bride!” it is customary to bow to the left and to the right as if to bow to the entrance of Shabbat, showing respect for this beautiful day that has arrived.

Bar'chu

The Bar'chu is the “call to worship” and is formally the first part of the evening service, our first “interaction” with God. We bow as if we are seeing a King or a Queen for the first time and we want to show our respect. The first line is said by the service leader; therefore, he or she is the only one bowing during this line. The second line is the congregational response; this is when the congregation bows. Bar'chu is a way of saying “God, we are ready to enter Your sacred space and begin our time to pray.”

Sh'ma

The premier declaration of faith in Judaism, Sh'ma proclaims God's unity and eternity. Sh'ma literally means to “hear” or “listen.” In this prayer we are listening to God's calling and responding from our own selves. There is a tradition to cover one's eyes to help concentrate. Some cover their eyes with their hands in the form of a Shin (the Hebrew letter of which the word Sh'ma begins), some close their eyes with deep focus, while others have their eyes open and gaze at the world which God created. Whichever tradition you wish to follow, the important aspect of Sh'ma is knowing that we are calling upon all of the People Israel to proclaim that God is One.

V'ahavta

We declare our loyalty and love for God with this Torah text, a concrete example of God's love for us. We love God with everything — heart, soul, body, good and bad inclinations, and with more strength than we think we possess. We pray that there not be a moment in our lives that we do not show God this love.

Mi Chamocha

After freedom from slavery, our people sang these words at the Sea of Reeds (Red Sea) to celebrate their freedom. They proclaimed, "Who is Like You, God?" as they marveled at the miracle of the parting sea. We sing these words in our services to remind us of the miracle that God performed for us and the miracles that surround us on a daily basis. We also sing these words as a reminder of the freedoms we have today, as we hearken to our historical experience as slaves in Egypt. We remember that just as God provided our ancestors with the gift of freedom long ago, we too can both find freedom in our lives and work for the liberation of the enslaved.

Amidah

This group of prayers literally means "to stand" and begins with three paragraphs of praise. *Avot v'Imahot*, the first, proclaims God's greatness and reminds God of the merit of our ancestors (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel). We bow at the first and last "Baruch Ata Adonai" in the first paragraph. The second paragraph, *G'vurot*, talks of God's acts of kindness and compassion. Although there is a "Baruch Ata Adonai" in this paragraph, we do not bow. The third paragraph is the smallest of the three and speaks of God's holiness and our desire to be holy. We continue this prayer either silently or as a community with a prayer for Thanksgiving and a prayer for Peace. We pray both for thanksgiving and for all of the wonders God has bestowed upon us while at the same time acknowledging a world which is still stricken with hatred and fighting; thus our prayers for Peace are deeply needed.

Kedusha (Morning Services)

Speaks of God's holiness both in heavens and here on earth. We acknowledge God's sacred nature as it is set apart from our daily lives. But the powerful act of acknowledging the holy separation shows our respect and awe. During the Kedusha we stand with our feet together when saying "*kadosh, kadosh, kadosh, holy, holy, holy.*" We rise up on our toes to symbolize that we seek to break loose from the bonds of earth and unite our service with that of the heavenly angels.

Aleinu

We acknowledge the Jewish people's distinct position in the world and our goal to create a world which is free of war and famine. During Aleinu we bow at the beginning of the second paragraph, *Va-Anachnu kor'im umish'tachavim umodim*, which literally means, "*we bow and bend to acknowledge Your (God) rule.*" We stand up from bowing when we say, *lif'nei Melech*, which literally means "*before You God.*" We also hope for a time when this world will be perfected in the eyes of God. We understand that it is up to us to engage in Tikkun Olam (repair of the world) to help bring about that sacred time.

Mourner's Kaddish

Although the Kaddish does not mention death, we recite this in honor of those who have passed away. Before the Kaddish the clergy recites the names of those who have died recently. We also recite the names of those who have died around this time in years past. We remember them as we say this powerful prayer. At the end of the Kaddish when we say “Oseh Shalom,” bow at the waist and take three steps back, starting with left foot.

- Bow left and say “oseh”
- Bow right and say “ya’aseh”
- Bow forward and say “v’al kol...amen.”

Like many things in Judaism there are different explanations for this practice. One is that we try to mimic the scene in which we are in the presence of royalty, for we call God Sovereign. When we depart from royalty, we step backwards and bow to each side as to show respect for all that is around us. Another explanation is that we step back and bow towards different directions to show our respect for the Shalom, the peace that is being created. The most important part of this prayer is our remembrance of the loved one who has died. And through our memories of them, we hope that our lives will serve to make their memory a blessing.

Oneg Shabbat

Shabbat should be a joyful time and Oneg Shabbat literally means “delight of Shabbat.” After services we gather as a community to enjoy some of the delights of Shabbat; Challah, tea, and coffee, an assortment of sweets and fruit. Oneg Shabbat is a time for us to share some of the delights of Shabbat while interacting with new and old friends.

Shabbat and Synagogue Terms

Shabbat: Sabbath, it is also pronounced, Shabbes, which is the Yiddish and Ashkenazic Hebrew pronunciation for the Sabbath.

Kodesh: Hebrew word for “Holy.”

Amen: A response we say communally at the end of certain prayers. Amen means, “I agree.”

Bracha: Hebrew word for “Blessing.”

Motzi: The blessing over the Challah (braided bread for Shabbat).

Kavanah: Intention, the meaning behind the prayer.

Mitzvah: Commandment/Jewish act of responsibility.

Minyan: Quorum of ten necessary for public worship.

Challah: Braided egg bread, for Shabbat and festivals.

Kiddush: Blessing recited or chanted over wine, emphasizing the holiness of Shabbat and festivals.

Tzedakah Box: Container for collecting money for charitable purposes. It is customary to give *tzedakah* prior to candle lighting in the home.

Havdalah: Literally means “separation.” This is a ceremony on Saturday evening that divides the Sabbath from the beginning of the week. We use three symbols to help us transition from the holy nature of Shabbat into the realm of the regular week: a braided candle, a kiddush cup containing wine, and box containing sweet-smelling spices. The light of the candle symbolizes the light of Shabbat and the strands of the braided candle symbolize our interconnected nature. The wine is, as always, a symbol of joy. The sweet-smelling spices symbolize the sweetness of

Shabbat, in which we breathe in one last time so that we enter our week with a hope for a sweet week.

Torah: In a narrow sense it is the Five Books of Moses, hand-written on a parchment scroll. We have a number of Torah scrolls in our Ark. In a broad sense, Torah is everything which flows from Judaism. Torah is the foundation of our faith.

Ark (*Aron Ha-Kodesh*): This is where we house our Torah scrolls. The Torah is such a special and holy symbol in Jewish tradition that it is kept in a holy space. We first learn about the Holy Ark from the book of Exodus in which God commands the Jewish people to build an Ark to house the tablets that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai. In our congregation the Ark is located on the eastern walls of the sanctuary and the chapel.

Bemah: The raised platform in the synagogue where the clergy lead services and where we read from the Torah.

What to Wear

The act of being with our community for worship is far more important than what you wear. Having said that, we do show a level of respect for the Synagogue and the service that we try and demonstrate through our dress and behavior. When attending services, try and dress in a way that will show the proper respect to God and to the individuals who are praying with you.

Kippah/Yarmulke (skull cap): Both men and women are welcome to wear a kippah during services as it shows our deference to God. A kippah can come in many different styles, colors, or fabrics. The kippah is a way for us to show that we understand that God is above and it is a way for us to enter into a holy space and a holy time by physically preparing for this spiritual moment.

Tallit/Tallis (prayer shawl): The clergy wear Tallit while leading services. Most Jews wear their Tallit during Shabbat morning services when we read Torah. We encourage you to bring your Tallit and pray with us. If you do not own one, we have them available at the beginning of every service.