



Conduct, Context, and Content for Our Services

Bruchim Habaim – Welcome!

Shalom and welcome to Peninsula Sinai Congregation, a traditional, egalitarian Conservative congregation. We are glad that you have joined us for services today, and we would like to help you get the most out of your experience here. Not everyone is familiar with traditional Jewish prayer, and there is no limit to what is available to learn. To enrich your experience, we have prepared the following overview. Though it focuses on Saturday morning services, it contains information relevant to other services as well. Please feel free to take this document into the sanctuary and read it during our service. If you have a question that is not addressed here, or you would like more information about what you read, please ask!

Conduct – Some Guidance

No two people are alike, and what brings one person close to God may distract another. We appreciate these differences, and seek to find standards that are fitting for our community. In doing so, we recognize that some decorum is necessary, while too much decorum leaves many feeling cold and detached. We invite you to include practices, which are helpful and comfortable for you, so long as they do not distract others. Here are a few points to keep in mind while in our sanctuary and at our synagogue:

- Please avoid bringing active cameras, mobile phones, and pagers into the sanctuary during any service. If your communication device is necessary, please ensure that it is silenced. Please also refrain from *texting*.¹
- Please refrain from smoking.¹
- Please feel free to express yourself through song and prayer. Please refrain from unnecessary conversations.
- Please make sure that all males keep their heads covered with a Kippah. Females are welcome to do so, if they would like. Extra Kippot can be found in the basket on the wall opposite the entrance to the sanctuary.¹
- If you would like to follow along with the service, please feel free to ask your neighbor for help finding the page. But please also feel free to explore the Siddur or Chumash at your own pace.
- Please stand when the congregations stands. Please feel free to stand when others are sitting, if you are at a different part of the service.
- Please avoid applauding in the sanctuary.
- Please know that your children are welcome and appreciated. Please guide them by sitting together. Please feel free to make use of our baby-sitting

¹ This request applies to all parts of the synagogue grounds on Friday nights, Saturdays, and Jewish holidays.



service for your young children (Saturdays, 10 am – Noon, Room 1 of our school building).

- Please feel free to bring and quietly read an appropriate Jewish book for yourself or your child. Some Jewish books can be found in our library, opposite the entrance to the sanctuary.

Context – Ritual Objects and Architecture

Jewish prayer employs various ritual objects. The most common among these is the **Siddur** (prayer book). Our congregation uses Siddur Sim Shalom, an authorized Siddur of the Conservative Movement. You can find this blue and gray covered book in a pocket under or in front of your seat. It contains the traditional prayer service with translation and supplementary readings, for weekdays, Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath), and most Jewish holidays. Because Hebrew reads from right to left, the pagination of the Siddur is opposite that of a common English book.

When inside the synagogue we ask all males to cover their head with a **Kippah** (also known as a yarmulke). Some can be found in the basket, opposite the entrance of the sanctuary, or occasionally on the table at the entrance. Jewish men cover their heads as a sign of humility and respect before God. This is done in holy places, and while praying and studying Torah. Some cover their heads even more frequently, including those who do so all day long. Many Jewish women may also cover their heads for similar reasons. They may use a Kippah, or some other head covering. Women are welcome to wear a Kippah in our synagogue, and are asked to do so when called to the Torah.

Another garment worn during many religious services is the **Tallit** (prayer shawl). This garment is traditionally worn by males who have become Bar Mitzvah (thirteen years old, the age of Jewish adulthood). In our synagogue, females may also wear it. The focus of this garment is the Tzitzit (fringes) on the corners. The practice and purpose of this is explicit in the Torah: “make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout the ages...look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them, so that you do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge...Thus you shall be reminded to observe all My commandments and to be holy to your God.” (Numbers 15:38-40). We ask that men and women wear a Tallit when called to the Torah.

Several services throughout the week include the public reading of the **Torah**, also known as the Pentateuch or the Five Books of Moses. The Torah is part of the Jewish Bible, and it is comprised of the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It contains the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and many others. It also contains many ritual and civil laws. Jewish tradition maintains that this divine book was given to the Israelites by God, through Moses, at Mount Sinai. It is important to note that Jews do not read the Torah literally. Rather, we believe that an additional, *Oral Torah* was revealed at Mount Sinai, which interprets and expands upon the *Written Torah*, in many



unexpected and non-intuitive ways. Understanding Judaism requires knowledge of both of these sources.

When the Torah is read during a service, we follow along in a special book called the **Chumash**. Our congregation uses the red Etz Hayim edition, produced by the Conservative Movement. Copies of this book are kept on two carts at the entrance to the sanctuary. It contains the entire Torah, with translation into the modern English, along with various commentaries. It also contains a collection of essays and maps to enrich our understanding of the Torah. The blue Hertz edition of the Chumash can also be found in our sanctuary. It is similar in form and content, but fairly dated.

Though the Torah may be studied from printed books or even a computer, when read publicly as part of a religious service, a handwritten scroll is used. A professional scribe, with a quill, writes this scroll on parchment. The scroll is then attached to two rollers. When not being read, the Torah scroll is dressed with fine garments and silver, and stored in the **Ark**, at the center of the front wall of the sanctuary. Our ark contains three Torah scrolls. Each scroll is identical in content. Multiple scrolls allow for faster transitions on special days, when different parts of the Torah are read.

In the front of the Ark is the **Bimah**, a raised platform. Historically speaking, the Bimah was found in the center of the synagogue. Upon it the Torah was read, and the service was often led. In recent centuries, the Bimah was relocated to the front of the synagogue, and the service was led from there. Like many modern synagogues, we have returned to leading from the center of the sanctuary, where you will find the **Amud** (reader's table). Despite this, we have kept the Bimah at the front. As such, it serves as a platform for the Ark, and not for the Torah reader or service leader. Meanwhile, the location of the Amud demonstrates that the leader is part of the congregation. S/he does not "perform" the service on anyone's behalf, but leads from amongst the people.

Hanging above the Bimah and Ark is the **Ner Tamid** (eternal light). This light is perpetually lit, representing the altar fire, which perpetually burnt at the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. It also symbolizes God's eternal presence. This light also reminds us of the **Menorah**, the nine branched candelabra, which stood in the Jerusalem Temple. The candelabra is an ancient Jewish symbol, which is also represented in our synagogue at both ends of the Bimah, and on the northern and southern walls of the sanctuary.

The Bimah, Ark, and Ner Tamid are found along the Eastern wall of the sanctuary. Jews are instructed to direct their prayers toward the Land of Israel. When seated, we may face different directions. But when praying the Amidah (see below), we stand facing East. The leader generally faces East as well, "leading" the prayers, and not "performing" them for an audience. A notable exception is during the Torah reading. Our congregation adopts the practice of many others, in facing the



congregation when reading the Torah. This demonstrated that the Torah reading is, unlike the prayers, directed toward the congregation.

Content – The Service

While Jewish prayer often includes spontaneous individual expression, much of the synagogue service is composed of fixed liturgy. It is preferable to recite this liturgy in the context of a **Minyan**, a quorum of ten (10) Jews who have reached the age of Jewish legal adulthood. Though some synagogues only include males in this quorum, ours also includes females. Without a Minyan, some of the most holy prayers and rites are omitted.

Even in a Minyan, prayer remains an obligation for each individual. Some parts of the service involve communal responses, but during other parts, it is not extraordinary for participants to be on different pages! In our congregation, we call pages periodically to help participants pace themselves and assist those who are less familiar with the service.

Jews recite three daily services, with a fourth service on Shabbat and Jewish festivals. These services are called **Shacharit** (the morning service), **Minchah** (the afternoon service), and **Aravit** or **Maariv** (the evening service). The additional service for Shabbat and festivals is **Mussaf**, and is generally recited immediately after Shacharit.

The morning service is the lengthiest, because it begins a new day. We begin with basic blessings, thanking God for restoring our physical and intellectual faculties, and reminding ourselves of the purpose of prayer (pages 2-18).

To spiritually prepare ourselves for the formal service, we continue with **Pesukai Dezimra** (54-94), a series of biblical passages that remind us of the majesty of God's creation and God's role in history.

After this daily morning routine, we continue with the central elements of the morning and evening services. This transition is marked by the **Barkhu**, a formal call to prayer. What follows is the recitation of the particular biblical passages, framed by thematic blessings (For Saturday morning: 340-353). These passages and blessings remind us of our relationship with God and the attendant responsibilities. The focus here are the famous words of **Shema**: "*Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One*" (Deut. 6:4).

The essence of each daily service is the **Amidah**, a silent prayer recited while standing. (For Saturday morning: 354-365). Like most Jewish prayer, the Amidah may be recited in translation. Nonetheless, it is often repeated for the benefit of those unable to recite it themselves. The Amidah is composed of three opening blessings and three closing blessings. These blessings focus on praising and thanking God. On non-festival weekdays, thirteen intermediate blessings petition God for our various needs and desires. On Shabbat and festivals, we do not petition



God in this way, and those 13 blessings are substituted with one intermediate blessing, recognizing the purpose and sanctity of the particular day.

There are a variety of customary **gestures** employed when reciting the Amidah, including bowing at particular points, and rocking one's body to retain focus on the prayer and the Divine presence. Even when they have completed their recitation, some individuals may remain standing out of respect for their neighbors who are still engaged in prayer. Some individuals may close their eyes or wrap their Tallit over their heads, to gain special focus and a sense of the Divine.

On days when the **ritual Torah reading** is performed, we escort the Torah in and out of the Ark and around the sanctuary with special prayers (394-427). This provides an opportunity to include special prayers on behalf of our country, the State of Israel, those in need of healing, and more. Each week on Saturday morning, a portion of the Torah is read. Traditionally, the entire Torah is read in order, over the course of one year of Saturday mornings. In our synagogue, the entire Torah is read over the course of three years. Still, each Saturday morning, the Torah reading is broken into seven sections, called **Aliyot**. For each Aliyah, someone is honored by being called to the Torah and reciting the blessings before and after that reading.

On special occasions, Aliyot may be distributed to those experiencing a lifecycle event. When this occurs, a special blessing is usually recited in recognition of the occasion. This can include **Bar and Bat Mitzvah**, the birth of a child, the Sabbath preceding a wedding, a special birthday, Yahrzeit (the anniversary of a death) and more. Depending on the nature of the occasion, the individual marking the day may also speak or lead part of the service.

On Saturday mornings following the Torah, is the reading of the **Haftarah**, a selection from the Prophetic books (*e.g.* Joshua, Judges, Kings, Isaiah, Micah). As the Torah can be described as the first "third" of the Jewish bible, the prophetic books can be described as the second "third." Every Haftarah is linked thematically and linguistically to either the weekly Torah reading, or (in the case of a special Shabbat or holiday) to the special nature of that particular day. The Haftarah is generally read from a printed book. Just like the Torah reading, it can be found in the Chumash, with translation and some commentary.

On Saturdays and Jewish festivals, **Mussaf** follows the Torah and Haftarah reading. Each of the daily prayer services corresponds to a section of the service that used to be performed at the Temple in Jerusalem; Mussaf is the additional offering for each Sabbath and holiday. The Mussaf service includes the recitation of the Amidah and some closing prayers (430-441, 506-515).