

Introduction to How To Pray in Synagogue

The synagogue (shul) prayer service may confuse the unfamiliar. Here is a brief guide to following the congregational prayers.

NOTE This Guide may be printed and given to people who are unfamiliar with the prayer services (or to people who are not yet completely comfortable in following the prayer services). It may be particularly useful for people who do not normally attend weekday minyan, especially people who are saying kaddish!

A printed copy may also be useful as a guide to a specific siddur. Before the prayer service takes place, the actual page numbers may be copied from the siddur onto the pages of the Guide for quick reference during the service. (This could be done by the user or by someone who is more familiar with the prayer services, as an aid to help the user follow what is going on.)

General Rules in Following/Answering the Leader

Ends/Beginnings of Paragraphs

Each individual says most of the prayers, but the leader sets the pace. He says out loud the last line or two of many paragraphs (and sometimes the next paragraph's first few words), to help others find where he is in the prayers.

Hint If you get lost, listen to the leader and try to find those words at the beginning or end of one of the paragraphs near where you think you should be!

Saying Amen

When the prayer leader/chazan says a blessing (Baruch ata adonai...) and finishes the final word, everyone usually replies amen.

Baruch Hu U'Varuch Shemo

It is common (but not required) to say baruch hu u'varuch shemo after hearing God's name (Adonai) when it is said in a blessing.

EXCEPTION No one should say baruch hu u'varuch shemo between bar'chu and the beginning of the amida.

NOTE Some people say the phrase very loudly and slowly (pretentiously), but this wrong practice may prevent themselves and others from hearing the blessing's end and knowing when to say amen.

Praying Shacharit

This list mainly includes the parts of the prayer service that are said together or when in synagogue, not those said individually or at home.

NOTE If you need to use the toilet between baruch she'amar and yishtabach, say asher yatzar after saying yishtabach and before saying yotzeir or.

NOTE If you need to speak during the early part of shacharit, it is best to speak after yishtabach but before bar'chu. You should not speak during psukei d'zimra unless it is urgent or about the shacharit service.

Initial Blessings/Asher Natan

The initial blessings beginning with asher natan... through the end of ven brit may be said at home.

Ma Tovu

Upon arriving in synagogue in the morning, say Ma tovu....

Talit

Married men (and also those with a tradition to wear a talit from bar mitzva age) normally put on their talit gadol on all days (except Tish'a b'Av morning).

For more details, see Talit (Gadol).

Tefilin

On weekdays, all men put on tefilin. They do not interrupt putting on tefilin to respond to other's prayers, not even to say amen.

For more details, see Tefilin.

Birchot HaShachar/Initial Blessings

If you have not yet said the initial blessings beginning with asher natan... through the end of ven brit, say them once you are in synagogue and after you have put on talit/tefilin (if relevant).

Everyone stands while the prayer leader reads the initial blessings aloud. They say amen after each one.

NOTE Individuals should not intend to fulfill their personal requirement to say those blessings by answering amen, since everyone should say the blessings for him/herself.

L'Olam Yehei Adam/Shema

L'olam yehei adam is said quietly, with everyone saying the shema line together.

Order of the Sacrifices

Some read (quietly) the order of the sacrifices.

13 Principles of Talmud Explanation/Kaddish

- The 13 principles of how the Talmud is explained are read quietly.
- Kaddish is said by any mourners.
- Everyone says, amen, yihei shmei raba...

NOTE Everyone, not just mourners, stands for kaddish; this is the custom for all kaddishes and for all services.

Mizmor Shir/Kaddish

- Mizmor shir is read quietly.
- Another kaddish is said by the mourners.

Baruch SheAmar

Baruch she'amar is said by everyone, standing. The leader says the final blessing out loud.

Verses (Psukim)

The following several pages are verses (psukim) from various sources, said by everyone quietly.

NOTE The leader says several intermediary lines aloud due to their importance and so that everyone else knows where he is.

Mizmor L'Toda/Yehi Chevod

- Everyone stands to say mizmor l'toda quietly (just for this paragraph).

- The next paragraph (yehi chevod) is read quietly.

NOTE Don't say mizmor l'toda the day before or during *Passover* (the Thanksgiving offering Toda was chametz), or before Yom Kippur.

Ashrei and 5 Psalms

Ashrei and the following five psalms (#146 to 150) are said quietly by everyone; the leader says the final line or two out loud.

Baruch Adonai L'Olam Amen v'Amen

Baruch adonai... is said by the leader.

VaYevarech David

The next section (from va'yevarech David until after bar'chu) is said quietly by everyone while standing.

Shirat HaYam

Shirat ha'yam is read quietly by everyone.

Yishtabach/Kaddish

Yishtabach is said quietly by everyone together. The leader says the final line of yishtabach out loud and then kaddish.

Bar'chu

- The leader says Bar'chu et Adonai ha'mevorach.
- Everyone bows from the waist and replies (aloud), Baruch Adonai ha'mevorach l'olam va'ed (which is then repeated by the leader).
- Everyone says the blessing's ending ...u'varei et ha'kol.

Shema and Its Blessings

The next paragraphs lead up to the shema:

- Leader says, "Et shem ha'el..."
- Everyone says aloud, together: Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh... and Baruch kevod Adonai mi'mkomo.
- Leader says the final line or two of La'el baruch ne'imot... and everyone responds amen.
- Everyone says ahavat olam quietly.
- Leader reads the final lines aloud.

NOTE It is the custom to not say amen to the blessing before shema.

- Everyone says the first line of the shema together and aloud, but Baruch shem... silently.
- Everyone reads the shema individually, and the leader repeats out loud Adonai eloheichem emet.
- Everyone reads the next paragraphs, through ezrat avoteinu, together, quietly.

Mi Chamocha

Stand for Mi chamocha until after the amida.

Adonai Yimloch

Everyone reads together and aloud: Adonai yimloch... until the final blessing before the amida.

NOTE At some time before completing that blessing, step back far enough (one large step is fine) so that you can take three small steps forward to begin the amida. If there is no room to step back, you may pray the amida without stepping forward.

The Amida

Amida: Details and Direction

For more details on saying the amida, see [What To Pray: Set Prayers: Amida](#)

For where to face during the amida, see [Amida: Location: Where To Face](#)

Stepping To Begin the Amida

After saying ga'al Yisrael, symbolically approach God by taking three steps forward (any size of steps is fine):

- Step forward with your right foot,
- Step forward with your left foot, and
- Step forward with your right foot.
- Bring your left foot to meet the right one, so that both feet are touching at the heels and at the balls (so that you are standing as if you had one leg, like the angels!)

Bowing in the Amida

Next, with your feet still together, do knee-bowing at the start and end of the first paragraph. You will also be bowing at:

- Beginning of modim (waist-bowing).
- End of modim (knee-bowing at Baruch ata Adonai of the blessing ending u'lecha na'eh l'hodot).

NOTE For how to do knee-bowing and waist-bowing, see [Amida: Actions: Bowing](#).

Slach Lanu

In slach lanu, when saying ki chatanu and ki fashanu, hit your chest over your heart with your fist. Reason We are saying that we sinned, so we strike our heart for leading us astray.

Ending the Amida

Symbolically take leave of God by taking three steps back after Adonai tzuri v'go'ali:

- Step back on your left foot,
- Step back on your right foot,
- Step back on your left foot (and then place your right foot next to your left foot).
- Bow to the left while saying Oseh shalom bi'mromav...,
- Bow to the right while saying Hu ya'aseh shalom alenu, and
- Bow to the middle (straight in front of you) while saying Ve'al kol yisrael v'imru amen.

Then pause for at least three seconds before walking forward or sitting down.

Reader's Repetition of Amida

At kedusha, everyone stands (even if they were sitting so far for the amida's repetition) with their feet together, again imitating the angels who only have one leg.

- The leader says nekadeish (in some places, everyone says nekadeish).
- Everyone says the next line together (kadosh, kadosh, kadosh...).

NOTE When saying kadosh each of the three times, rise up on the balls of your feet and return to “feet flat” so you will be able to rise up three times total. Some people also rise on their feet when they say the next line (baruch kevod), but it is neither required nor a universal practice.

- After the leader says *Halleluya*, everyone else may move their feet (or sit down, if that is their custom).
- On fast days, the leader says an extra paragraph in shacharit (other paragraphs in mincha are said by everyone).

NOTE These extra paragraphs usually appear in small--or tiny!--print in siddurs near where they get said. Look for asterisks to show where to insert them. It might be helpful before beginning shacharit to ask someone to point out exactly what to say and when.

Tachanun

When To Say Tachanun

Tachanun is usually said on weekdays.

How To Say Tachanun

Tachanun is said differently, depending on if there is a Torah scroll in the room, as follows:

Tachanun If Torah Scroll Present

Tachanun with Torah Scroll: Sun., Tues., Wed., Fri.

To say tachanun on Sundays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, when a Torah scroll is present:

- Say Va'yomer David sitting down, while resting your head on your left arm (unless you are wearing tefillin on your left arm, in which case lean onto your right arm).

NOTE Rest your head on your left arm even if you are left-handed. Some type of cloth should separate your face and your arm when doing this, but if your arm is bare and you don't have a talit or other garment with which to cover your arm, you do not need to put your head down at all. There is no problem with not being permitted to put your face on your bare arm, just that there is no point in doing so.

- When you reach shomer Yisrael, lift your head up and sit normally while saying the paragraphs until v'anachnu lo neida ma na'aseh.
- Before saying “na'aseh,” stand up for the remainder of tachanun.

Tachanun with Torah Scroll: Mon., Thur.

To say tachanun on Mondays and Thursdays, when a Torah scroll is present:

- Say tachanun standing until Va'yomer David... at which time, everyone sits down.
- Follow the directions above for the remainder of tachanun.

Tachanun If No Torah Scroll

Put your head down only if there is a Torah scroll in the room. When you say tachanun in a room in which there is no Torah scroll, sit for the first part (without resting your head on your arm), remaining sitting for shomer yisrael..., then stand for va'anachnu lo neida.

For more about putting your head down for Tachanun, see Tachanun.

Hallel

- When hallel is said, most of the psalms are said quietly by everyone. (In some *synagogues*, several of the psalms are sung in unison.)

- The lines beginning Hodu l'adonai... are read aloud by the leader.
- Everyone else responds aloud, Hodu l'adonai... and reads quietly the next line (which the leader then reads aloud when they finish).
- Similarly, Ana adonai is read responsively by the leader, followed by everyone else.

Kaddish

The leader says kaddish out loud.

Torah Reading (Mondays and Thursdays)

- Everyone reads quietly the phrases va'yehi be'nso'a... and brich shmei.
- The Torah is taken out and carried to the bima.
- As each man (called an oleh) is called up to the Torah:
 - The oleh says Bar'chu...
 - Everyone responds Baruch Adonai....,
 - The oleh repeats that line and says a blessing.
 - Everyone answers amen.
- After each reading, the oleh says one more blessing and everyone replies amen.
- After the third aliya, the Torah is lifted up.
- Everyone says, V'zot haTorah...
- The Torah is rolled and wrapped.
- Meanwhile, the leader reads four paragraphs beginning, Yehi ratzon mi'lifnei avinu...
- The final paragraph, Acheinu kol bet yisrael... is read by everyone aloud.
- The Torah is put back while everyone reads two psalms quietly.

Ashrei/U'va L'Tzion

- Everyone reads ashrei quietly, followed by la'menatzeiach and u'va l'tziyon.
- Everyone together says, Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh and Baruch kevod.

Kaddish

The leader says kaddish.

Alenu

Everyone says alenu together.

Kaddish

Mourners say kaddish.

Psalm for the Day

Psalm for that day is read by everyone.

Kaddish

One more kaddish is said by the mourners.

L'David

- During Elul and into Tishrei, L'David is read by everyone.

- One more kaddish is said by the mourners.

Praying Ma'ariv

V'hu Rachum

Everyone reads the two introductory lines of v'hu rachum.

Bar'chu

- Leader says bar'chu.
- Everyone else responds, baruch Adonai....
- The leader repeats that line.
- Everyone reads the next paragraph/blessing.
- The leader says that final line out loud.
- Everyone responds amen.

NOTE Don't say baruch hu u'varuch shemo at all during ma'ariv.

Shema and Its Blessings

- The leader repeats the final two words of the shema and the word *emet*.
- Everyone continues quietly saying the phrases until Mi chamocho.
- Mi chamocho is said by everyone together including by the leader, who then also reads the next line.
- Everyone says Adonai yimloch... together, continuing through the end of the next blessing, which is repeated by the leader.
- Everyone says *hashkiveinu* quietly.
- The leader says the blessing shomer amo Yisrael la'ad out loud.
- Baruch Adonai l'olam... is said through to the end by everyone quietly.
- The leader says the final line and the final blessing out loud.

NOTE Baruch Adonai l'olam is not said in Eretz Yisrael.

Kaddish

The leader says kaddish.

Amida

Everyone says the amida silently and individually.

Kaddish

The leader says kaddish.

Alenu

Everyone says alenu together.

Kaddish

Kaddish is said by any mourners.