HOW TO PRAY

HOW TO PRAY: READING

Use Siddur or Not

You may use a prayer book (*siddur)* or not—whichever way helps you concentrate on the prayers.

HOW TO PRAY: SPEAKING

HOW TO PRAY: VOLUME

Saying Prayers Out Loud

Say prayers (and blessings) out loud, but not overly loud, in order to help you to concentrate on what you are saying.

EXCEPTION The main exception is the *amida* prayer, which is said quietly enough that you can hear yourself but that people near you cannot hear what you are saying.

HOW TO PRAY: LANGUAGE/PRONUNCIATION/NUSACH

Praying in Own Language

Praying in *Hebrew* is preferable, even if you don't understand *Hebrew*.

NOTE You MAY pray in your own language, but only if that is the language of the country in which you are praying.

NOTE If your native language is not commonly spoken in the country in which you are now present, you may not pray in that language, even if you are with a *minyan*. If several languages are commonly spoken in your country (such as *Hebrew* and English in Israel, or English and Spanish in Florida and California), you may pray in any of those languages.

Ashkenazi Jew, Sefardi Pronunciation

An *Ashkenazi* Jew should ideally not pray using *Sefardi* pronunciation, but since it is OK to pray in any language, this is not a problem.

HOW TO PRAY: ACTIONS

HOW TO PRAY: ACTIONS: STEPPING

How To Pray: Actions: Stepping

See *Amida* Actions: Stepping Before *Kedusha*.

HOW TO PRAY: ACTIONS: BOWING

HOW TO PRAY: ACTIONS: BOWING: WHEN REQUIRED

Bowing: Halacha or Custom?

The places in the prayer services where we bow are required by *halacha* and are not just customs.

HOW TO PRAY: ACTIONS: BOWING: DIRECTION

When To Bow toward Jerusalem

Normally, when saying the *amida*, or bowing at any other prayers such as *kaddish*, *alenu*, and *bar'chu:*

- If you are in a room with an ark (*aron kodesh*), face the ark—even if the ark is NOT in the same direction as Jerusalem.
- If you are not in a room with an ark, face Jerusalem during the *amida*. You do not need to face Jerusalem when bowing at any other times except during the *amida*.

HOW TO PRAY: ACTIONS: BOWING: TWO MAIN TYPES

Waist-Bowing and Knee-Bowing

There are two main types of bowing during the prayer services:

- Bowing just from the waist (with and without taking steps), and
- Bowing with the knees, plus two variations on *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur* (hands and knees on floor).

I. Waist-Bowing (Two Forms)

A. Waist-Bowing/No Steps, for:

- *Modim;*
- *Modim* in reader's repetition of *amida;*
- *Bar'chu;*
- *Lecha Dodi;* and
- *Alenu.*

To bow this way, keep your legs straight and bend forward from your waist.

B. Waist-Bowing/Take Steps, for:

Oseh shalom at the end of:

- *Amida,* and
- *Kaddish.*

To bow this way:

- Bow down from waist with your legs straight.
- Take three steps backward (left foot, right foot, left foot),
- Then:
    - Bow from your waist to the left and say, *oseh shalom bi'mromav,*
    - Bow from your waist to the right and say, *hu ya'aseh shalom alenu,* and
    - Bow from your waist to the front and say, *ve'al kol yisrael v'imru amen.*

II. Knee-Bowing (Three Times during *Amida*)

- Beginning of *amida's* first blessing,
- End of *amida's* first blessing, and
- Next-to-last *amida* blessing: *ha'tov shimcha.*

To bow this way:

- Bend knees (at *baruch*),
- Bow forward (at *ata*), and
- Straighten up (before God's name).

III. Knee-Bowing to Floor (Two Forms)

A. Knee-Bowing to Floor--Hands and Knees Only
(*Rosh Hashana musaf: alenu* in reader's repetition of *amida*)
To bow this way:

- Kneel (with your back straight up) (at "*hayu kor'im*"), and
- Bow down with hands and knees on floor (at *"u'mishtachavim u'modim*"), but
- You are not required to touch your forehead to ground.

NOTE You should still bow from your waist (but not to the floor) on *Rosh Hashana*--even if you are praying alone and even if there is no *Torah* present.

B. Knee-Bowing to Floor--Hands, Knees, Forehead
(*Yom Kippur musaf: alenu* reader's repetition of *amida* describing how the people bowed down on *Yom Kippur.)*
To bow this way:

- Kneel (with your back straight up) (at "*hayu kor'im"),*
- Bow down with hands and knees on floor (at *"u'mishtachavim u'modim"),*
- Touch forehead to floor (at *v'noflim al pneihem*).

NOTE You may not bow down (*modim* for *Yom Kippur*) on a bare stone floor (this also includes concrete, terrazzo and other stone-like materials). You must put a cloth, paper, or some other separation on the floor where you will place your forehead and your knees. A *talit* may be used for this purpose. If you have only one paper towel, put it under your forehead.

NOTE It is customary today to cover any floor, not only if it is bare stone.

SITUATION You are bowing down (*modim* for *Yom Kippur*; also for *Rosh Hashana* if you bow down this far) on a bare stone floor (concrete, terrazzo, and other stone-like materials).

WHAT TO DO You may not touch your forehead or knees (if covered by pants legs or skirt) to the floor. You may cover the floor with some separation such as cloth, paper, or even a *talit* at the place where your forehead (or knees) will touch.

REASON You might wipe off any dirt from the floor on your pant knees or skirt, which is prohibited on *Yom Kippur*. There is no need to use a paper towel or other separation for knees if they are bare (for example, due to wearing shorts or a short skirt).

NOTE There is no problem with brushing dirt off your hands, so you can touch the bare stone floor with your bare hands during the bowing.

HOW TO PRAY: ACTIONS: BOWING: WOMEN

Bowing: Women

Women are not required to bow to the floor on *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*, but some women have that custom.

HOW TO PRAY: ACTIONS: BOWING: IN FRONT OF ANIMALS AND MIRRORS

Bowing If Animal in Front of You

You may not bow down, as during the *amida*, if an animal is in front of you.

Mirror or Picture of People in Front of You

Don't face a mirror or picture of people when saying *amida* or any other prayer at which you will bow.

REASON You should not bow down to an image.

HOW TO PRAY: ACTIONS: BOWING-LIKE ACTIVITIES

Bending Down during Amida To Pull Up Socks,...

You may bend down during the *amida* to slide up your socks, scratch your legs through your pants, and other permitted actions.

EXCEPTION You may not do so when you are saying the final sentence (the actual blessing) in each paragraph.

When You May Crawl on Stone Floor

You may crawl on a bare stone floor if you are trying to find something on the floor, are chasing a child, or for any purpose other than prayer.

When Kneeling Is Forbidden

Kneeling is only forbidden if it is for praying (except for prescribed prayers such as at "*hayu kor'im*" in *Yom Kippur*) or if it looks like praying, but there is nothing inherently wrong with kneeling for fun, gardening, or other purposes.

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