

ברוכים הבאים! Welcome and thank you for entering our gates of holiness for our high holidays! The following is a guide to our service that might be helpful. At all times during the year, we invite the whole community, whether they are formal members of our holy community or those who are searching for a touch of the divine, to be a part of our prayer service. Thank you for your presence and your support.

### **What should I bring to the service?**

Here is a list of items you may want to bring to services this year to help you connect with the service and to pass the time for those moments when you need a break or your mind wanders.

**Your own machzor** (High Holiday Siddur) – While we provide plenty of *machzorim* (plural) for everyone, having a *machzor* of your own, with which you are familiar or in which you have written notes, can help you to engage in the service. In addition to our own Mahzor, we highly recommend Mahzor Lev Shalem from the Rabbinical Assembly. I will be announcing pages from both Mahzors.

**A book for spiritual growth** – Books like “Chicken Soup for the Soul” or “Life’s Little Instruction Book” contain short words of wisdom and stories that can inspire you to focus on themes of the day, and lead you to focusing your behavior for the year to come. There are also great and accessible Jewish books related to the High Holidays and liturgy including *Who By Fire, Who By Water* (edited by Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman), *Entering the High Holy Days* by Rabbi Reuven Hammer. Also, I highly recommend Rabbi Alan Lew’s “This is Real and You Are Completely Unprepared”

**A journal** – If you regularly keep a journal services may be a good time to look back at some of the things you have written during the year to reflect on how you have changed or grown during the year.

**Snacks** – Sucking candy and water may help you make it through the. Those who may need an extra boost may want to bring a granola bar or something more substantial. Stepping outside to snack may be the best approach.

### **Hints on how to get the most from this service.**

**Read the English** – Prayer is prayer is prayer. There certainly is value to reciting prayers in the original Hebrew and many will get a great deal from that. But, saying them in English will have a different impact and may suit others more.

**Stop and smell the roses** – Okay, there may not be roses but making stops along the way is a good idea. Instead of trying to get through all of the prayers, stop after a few and read them again (and again and again if necessary). Ask yourself if you agree or not. See what you can learn from the prayer. Does it tell you anything that you can incorporate into your life?

Remember, prayer is poetry! Find something that moves you

**Close your eyes and meditate** – Instead of singing, hum the melodies and think of your own prayers. The words of the liturgies are great but they are only one path. Take some time to come up with your own.

### **Notes about T’shuvah – Repentance**

Maimonides, a twelfth century philosopher and Jewish scholar, laid out a description of how we should do *t’shuvah*. He said we have to start with acknowledging our mistakes, even if it is only to ourselves. We then have to follow up by determining never to do it again. The next thing he suggests is for us to pray, perform acts of charity and to work on changing ourselves and our actions. According to Maimonides, the final part of our *t’shuvah* is not making the same mistake when put in the same situation.

### **What can I expect from the service?**

(page numbers will be read from the bimah, but you can find all page numbers in the table of contents of your Mahzor)

The service is divided into several main parts.

**Birkot Ha’shachar** – Morning Blessings – A collection of blessings related to getting going in the morning. (Pages 58-70)

**P’sukey D’zimrah** – A collection of Psalms and reflections we use to “warm up” and get in the proper frame of mind for prayer. (Pages 90-105)

**Shacharit** – The morning service. Its highlights are the *Shema*, our testament of faith, (Page 106-123) and the *Amidah*, private meditation to God (RH-Page 124, YK-Page 430).

**Torah Service** – On Rosh Hashana (RH), Day 1 (168 – 173) we read about God fulfilling the promise made to Avraham and Sarah that they would have a son and a repetition of the promise that Avraham will be the head of a nation. RH Day 2 (174-176) contains the story of God telling Avraham to sacrifice Isaac. In Avraham’s quest to carry out the command we find the source of our Shofar – the Ram. On Yom Kippur (YK) (488-494) we read about the service the High Priest was to perform to ask for forgiveness for the community.

**Sounding the Shofar** – At this point, when it is not Shabbat, we sound the first 30 blasts of the shofar. Later in the service we will add another 70 blasts for a grand total of 100. The sound of the shofar is a “wake up” call. It reminds us to look inward and reflect on our actions (202-211)

**Musaf** – Means “additional” – This section was instituted to mirror the “additional” sacrifice that was offered on Shabbat and holidays. The Rosh Hashanah *musaf* contains three sections; *malchuyot* – “sovereignty” where we praise God as the One Ruler above all other rulers, *zichronot* – “remembrances” where we ask God to remember us as individuals for our own merit and as a community in the merit of those before us, and *shofarot*, where we recount times in our Biblical texts when the shofar was used. (214-298) The liturgy from Yom Kippur includes the Vidui (confessional prayers).

### **What is my role in this experience?**

The **leader’s** role is to guide the community through the service. The leader provides a pace for the prayers, as well as melodies, which will aid others to connect to the prayers.

The **congregant’s** role is twofold. First and foremost it is to spend time focusing on the words or themes of the prayers. The words of the prayer book are a tool. How we use these tools are up to us. Just saying them is not enough. It is our job to use these words in a reflective manner to do the personal, spiritual work needed to start the year renewed. We also should use the words to reflect on who we are as individuals and in what areas we would like to change.

The **congregant’s** second role is to participate in the service. The leader is not there to perform but to guide the congregation. There will hopefully be many melodies that are familiar to you or that you can easily pick up on. Join in with them either by singing the words or humming the melodies. In addition, there are many blessings that are said during the services. The leader may be making these statements but you have to seal them by saying “Amen,” – I agree. By participating in these ways the leader has the backing of the community and is not left up in front all by him or her self.

## Going Up! Honors and Aliyot

At synagogues around the world, Jews will soon ascend the bimah (pulpit) and receive honors on some of our holiest days. From year to year, the Shaarei Kodesh Honors Committee works hard to that members of our holy community are asked to participate every year. This sends that message that each member is honored, not just technically, with a task to do on High Holidays, but deeply and lastingly, with acknowledgment and appreciation.

Even if you do not open the ark, recite the blessings as the Torah is read, lift the Torah, or otherwise assist during services this year, **everyone present in the congregation participates in the honors process.** The people in the seats are the actual purveyors of honor. It is your attention, your well wishes, your energy that honors people when they ascend the *bimah*. Among your prayers this season, I encourage you to pray for those who take part in the service. This is, of course, easy and natural to do when you know them personally. If a community member whom you don't yet know takes part, you can certainly pray, "May they be blessed! May they have a good and sweet year!" And, of course, wish them a hearty "*yashar koach*" (continued strength) when they come off the *bimah*.

The honors of opening and closing the ark have many layers of meaning. During the Torah service, we open the ark to the words from Numbers 10:35: "And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses would say." (*Vayehi binso'ah ha'aron vayomer Moshe.*) The liturgy quotes the formula that Moses spoke when the ark moved. "Rise up, Adonai, and let Your enemies be scattered; let those who hate You flee before You." (*Kumah Adonai veyafutzu oyvecha veyanusu misanecha mipanecha.*) And when the Torah was returned to its resting place, Moses would say, "Return, Adonai, to the many thousands among the people of Israel." (*Shuvah Adonai rivevot alfei Yisrael.*) To this day, those are among the words that we recite as we replace the Torah in the ark.

**The person who opens the ark** stands, as it were, in Moses' place. He or she sets the Torah and the children of Israel in motion – literally and figuratively – by the simple removal of a curtain. And the words associated with that task are spiritually powerful indeed. They imply: don't identify with the Torah lightly. Torah has its lovers and its enemies. We must support the former and beware of the latter. The words from Numbers can also be understood as a reflection of individual spirituality. In that sense, the ark opener is the catalyst for a daring prayer:

May everything in me and in us that fights holiness be exiled and scattered to the four winds. And may I, together with the entire Jewish people, be a worthy host to God's holiness. May we be a safe and deserving place for Torah to rest. When you open the ark, it is as if you are standing by the Torah and launching its entry into our community, just as Moses launched its entry among the ancient Israelites.

**The role of the person closing the ark** is no less important. So often, in Western culture today, we begin with gusto, with respect, with energy ... and then just peter out. It's not enough to release Torah into the congregation by opening the ark. It's vital, too, to protect Torah, to treat it with respect, to return it to its resting place (the ark) and, symbolically, its Source (God). When we return the Torah to the ark during a Torah service, we recite words directly related to the themes of High Holidays. The Rabbis assembled words from throughout the Bible, and

recast them, out of context, as a dialogue between God and the Jewish people about how we can return to one another.

The people to God: "Return, Adonai, to the many thousands among the people of Israel." God to the people: "It is a good inheritance I have given you. Do not forsake My Torah." The people's compromise: "Return us to you, Adonai, and we shall return. Renew our days as of old." When you close the ark, it is as if you are testifying to that covenant of renewal and return.

**The role of those carrying, lifting, or dressing the Torah** is to bring Torah into community and then, respectfully, back to its resting place. Our scroll has two wooden spindles, on which it cannot stand. Torah can stand only when carried and carried out, lifted and uplifted, by community. It depends on us. Torah is held on the right shoulder, leaving the heart space (left side) open to receive it.

### Congregational Honors: Logistics & Intentions

If you have any questions about how to carry out your honor, please consult with our clergy or a board member in advance or, if needed, on the day of the honor.

When on the bimah, you are invited and encouraged to wear a tallit, as well as a head covering. At the same time, we understand that not all women are comfortable wearing a tallit and/or kippah (yarmulke).

It is customary to face the ark while – and even after – you open it. You may feel a pull, out of politeness, to face the "audience." Of course, we all know that services are a participatory experience of prayer, not a show. When the ark is opened, it is a time in the service when you, as well as the congregation, are relating keenly and visually to the Torah. Facing Torah, rather than turning your back on it, will help others, too, to focus on the holiness of the moment.

In the midst of the logistics, take a moment to pray. Standing before the ark, you have a unique opportunity for prayer. Just as prayer requests placed into the crevices of the Western Wall are said to ascend quickly to the Heavenly throne, a prayer said before an open ark has a clear path and power. With close physical proximity to the Torah, you may also feel a special closeness and intimacy with the Divine.

*Thank you to Rabbi Michael Werbow of Temple Beth Sholom, Sarasota, FL, and Rabbi Debra Orenstein, Congregation B'nai Israel in Emerson, NJ, for inspiring me and providing me information for this information sheet*



– Rabbi David Baum,

**JOURNEYING TOGETHER ON A PATH TO HOLINESS**

שנה טובה ומתוקה

May you have a good and sweet year!