

Welcome to Temple Beth Miriam

May this synagogue be, for all who enter, the doorway to a richer and more meaningful life.

B'ruchim HaBaim - Welcome

We are an open and inviting congregation for anyone seeking to connect to Jewish community, tradition, study and worship. Our members come from all parts of Monmouth County. We are affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism and combine contemporary values with classical teachings of Torah.

Sanctuary Etiquette

We ask that all cell phone and personal electronic devices be turned off during services.

Please do not enter or leave the sanctuary while the congregation is standing, the Torah is being read, the Aron Kodesh (Holy Ark) is open, or during the Rabbi's sermon except, of course, in an emergency.

Please refrain from talking during services. It is not proper to chew gum, eat or drink in the sanctuary.

Worshippers should remember that cameras or other recording devices cannot be used in the sanctuary during services.

Feel free to sing! If you don't know the words, a well-placed 'La la la' can also lift the spirit high!

Understanding Our Prayer Book, Mishkan T'fillah

When you arrived, the usher will have handed you a prayerbook or you may take one yourself from the cart which is outside the sanctuary doors. In addition to our prayer book, you will find a red or blue Chumash, (a word which means 'five') which contains the first five books of the Bible with commentary, and is used to follow the Torah and Haftarah (prophetic) readings.

Every two-page spread in Mishkan T'fillah contains a traditional prayer with translation and transliteration on the right side and alternative English readings on that prayer's theme on the left. Every double page has enough variety to allow each individual worshiper to find a "home" there. The left and right side pages always conclude with the same traditional Hebrew line, which is called the chatimah (literally 'a seal' or 'signature' that wraps up the meaning of the prayer with the theme of the prayer). When you get to this line, no matter which passage you're reading, you know to turn the page and keep up with the service.

Getting The Most Out Of Your Experience

Allow yourself to get lost in the music of the service. Music can be an extremely powerful force that can touch your soul and help you to focus on the task at hand. Close your eyes, listen, and sing, even if you don't know the words.

Listen to the prayers. Make a connection to what is being said. Prayer is different for everyone and may be different for you each time you recite the same prayer.

On Shabbat (Sabbath), it is common to greet people by saying, "Shabbat Shalom" meaning that you wish that person a peaceful and joyous Sabbath.

After the service, if you have further questions, please ask the Rabbi, Cantor or the member sitting next to you. We want to share our congregation with you and are more than happy to spend time with you and answer questions and get to know you. You will find Beth Miriam a very friendly place.



About Our Sanctuary

The large area in front of the sanctuary, where services are conducted, is called a bimah. On the bimah is the most sacred place in the sanctuary, the Aron Kodesh or holy ark, which houses the Torah scrolls (Sifrei Torah). The Torah scrolls, written in Hebrew, contain the five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). The two tapestries on either side of the Ark say, "Here I am" (Genesis 22:1) - on the Rabbi's side, and "Be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2) - on the Cantor's side. One saying denotes our responsiveness to our covenant with God and the other describes what our response should be.

Directly above the Aron Kodesh is the Ner Tamid (eternal light). It is symbolic of God's presence in the sanctuary and is always illuminated.

The stained-glass windows of the sanctuary represent major themes of Judaism: light, truth, God, and the tribes of the Jewish people. In the Social Hall, the windows represent major Jewish literary works of law and scholarship, the Prophets, the Ten Commandments, the 23rd Psalm and the High Priest uttering the Priestly Blessing (The LORD bless you and protect you! The LORD deal kindly and graciously with you! The LORD bestow His favor upon you and grant you peace! (Num. 6:24-26)). The High Priest served during the years in the desert and at the Temple in Jerusalem, neither of which exists today.

You may see some congregants wearing a kippah (skull cap) and/or tallit (prayer shawl). Wearing either of these is optional in our temple. The kippah represents showing respect to God while a tallit, worn by Jewish adults, serves as a reminder to observe all God's laws. Its fringes and knots represent the 613 mitzvot (commandments) that all adults should observe.

Movement in Prayer

It is always your choice as to whether to follow these minhagim (customs) of our synagogue.

During the Bar'chu – the call to worship, our congregation may bend at the knees and then bow from the waist as the leader says, "Bar'chu" (Everyone bless God) and as you respond, "Baruch" (Blessed is God) This is symbolic and bowing before God who is seen as the Ultimate Sovereign.

During the Sh'ma (Listen, Israel), some may close and/or cover our eyes with our hand. This is so nothing distracts us during this holiest of prayers.

During the Avot v'Imahot (the central prayers of the service) some may bend our knees at Baruch, bend over from the waist at 'Atta' (You) and straighten up at Adonai (the way we say God's name since we don't pronounce the name directly) to symbolically approach the Ruler, God, as one enters God's presence.

During the K'dushah (prayer extolling God's holiness), when, "Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh" (Holy, holy, holy) is said, many people rise on tiptoes three times. In Isaiah 6:3, the Rabbis teach that there is a heavenly choir of angels in heaven who spend their days and nights singing God's praises with these words. We lift up on toes to symbolically be closer to God and imitate the angels.

The Torah service is, of course, a big part of the service. During the Torah procession around the sanctuary, congregants often reach out and touch the Torah with either their prayer book or Tallit (prayer shawl) and then kiss what touched the Torah. This is to show reverence for the Torah.

During the Aleinu, (a prayer for world unity) many people bend their knees and bow at kor'im (bless) and straighten at umodim (and thank) to symbolize bowing before the Ruler of the World.

While reciting "Oseh Shalom" (May the Maker of peace) at the end of the Mourner's Kaddish many congregants face to the left, then to the right, then forward to acknowledge God's presence is everywhere.

If you would like to take this informative sheet home with you, there are copies in the foyer. Feel free to take one.