



# KEHILA KEDOSHA JANINA SYNAGOGUE AND MUSEUM

## Guide to Understanding Shabbat Services

Welcome to Kehila Kedosha Janina! We are happy you are joining us to celebrate Shabbat with our community, continuously active in New York for nearly 100 years. We are proud to maintain the centuries-old Romaniote Greek-Jewish liturgy and traditions.

Whether it's your first time in a Romaniote synagogue, or at any Shabbat service, we hope this guide can help illuminate and enliven your experience with us.

Feel free to ask us any questions and let us know how we can help make your experience meaningful and comfortable. Please also join us after services for a delicious Greek Kiddush lunch.

*Shabbat Shalom uMevorab!*

May you have a peaceful and blessed Shabbat!

## 1. The Origins and History of Jewish Prayer

Jewish prayer has evolved over centuries, from early Temple sacrifices to the structured services we have today. Each part of the Shabbat morning service has a purpose and history, offering us a connection to Jewish tradition and heritage.

Jewish worship originally centered around offerings (*korbanoth*) offered in the Temple in Jerusalem. This included offerings of animals, grain, and incense, which symbolized devotion, repentance, and thanksgiving. The text we read today contains both passages directly from the Torah describing these offerings as well as passages from the Talmud further expounding on their protocols and practice.

After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the Rabbis sought ways to replace sacrifices with prayer, believing that heartfelt words could serve the spiritual equivalent of offerings. The Temple in Jerusalem (*Beth HaMikdash*) was replaced by the synagogue — originally called a *Mikdash Me'at* “little sanctuary,” then later *Bet Knesset* “house of gathering,” translated into Greek as Synagogue (*sunagōgē* ‘meeting’, from *syn-* ‘together’ + *agōgē* ‘bring’).

Over time, the Rabbis formally established the three daily prayer services: *Shaharith* (morning), *Mincha* (afternoon), and *Arvith* (evening). Jewish prayer became structured, with fixed texts in the *Siddur* (prayer book). Different Jewish communities (e.g., Ashkenazi, Sephardic, Romaniote, etc.) developed unique *nusha'oth* (liturgies), *minhagim* (customs) and melodies in the Diaspora.

## 2. The Structure of Shabbat Morning Services

Shabbat is the Jewish day of rest and celebration that begins on Friday before sunset and ends on Saturday evening after nightfall. Shabbat commemorates that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. On Shabbat we refrain from certain types of work and take a step back to celebrate, thank God, and enjoy our family and community. The Shabbat morning service is longer than weekday prayer services and includes unique sections to reflect the sanctity of the day. Below is an outline of each section, including its purpose and historical context.

## **I. *Korbanoth* (Offerings)**

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This section includes passages about the Temple sacrifices, meant to honor the ancient practice of offerings. The *Korbanoth* were originally practiced in the Temple and became part of prayer after the Temple's destruction as a way to remember and honor those rituals.

## **II. *Zemiroth* (Verses of Praise)**

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This section of psalms and hymns “warms up” the spirit for prayer. It encourages reflection on the beauty of God’s creation and the wonders of life. Developed around the 2nd-5th centuries CE, these verses were added to help worshippers approach prayer with joy and reverence. Some key prayers of this section include:

### **Barukh She’amar ברוך שאמר**

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This prayer opens the section with praises to God, who “spoke and the world came into being.” It sets the tone for the praise to follow.

### **Ashre אשרי (Psalm 145)**

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*Ashre* is central to this section of the service. An acrostic poem based on the Hebrew alphabet, it celebrates God’s kindness and justice, emphasizing that all creatures depend on God for sustenance and life.

### **Halleluyah (Psalms 146-150)**

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These psalms are filled with the refrain “Halleluyah” (Praise God), expressing pure joy and awe.

### **Az Yashir Moshe אז ישיר משה**

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This text is the song that the Israelites sang after crossing the Sea of Reeds during the Exodus from Egypt. It expresses gratitude to God for redeeming us from Egypt.

### **Nishmath Kol Hai נשמת כל חי**

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Recited on Shabbat and holidays, *Nishmath* praises God as the source of all life and acknowledges that words alone cannot fully express our gratitude and reverence.

### III. *Shema* and Its Blessings

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The *Shema* is the central Jewish declaration of faith in One God. Surrounding it are blessings that focus on God's love, creation, and redemption. The *Shema* text itself is from the Torah. By the 1st century CE, it was central to daily Jewish worship, with blessings added to frame the *Shema* in themes of faith and divine love.

### IV. *Amida* (Standing Prayer)

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The *Amida* is the central part of Jewish prayer. It is recited while standing, and one should concentrate on the idea that you are standing in front of God. Established by the Rabbis of the Talmudic period, the *Amida* was structured to create a moment of personal connection with God, with a silent personal reading followed by a repetition out loud with the congregation.

The Shabbat *Amida* is shorter than on weekdays, reflecting the restful nature of the day. On Shabbat, the text of the *Amida* emphasizes peace and rest rather than requests or petitions to God.

During the *Kedusha* (Sanctity) section of the *Amida*, the *Hazzan* leads a responsive chant that describes how the angels praise God. We stand focused with our feet together to imitate the angels in heaven. The words of the prayers evoke the praises of the angels and the words of the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel.

### V. Torah Service

Reading the Torah publicly dates back to the time of Ezra, the prophet who led the Jews out of Babylonian exile and back into the Land of Israel (5th century BCE). Weekly Torah portions were eventually organized into an annual cycle, uniting Jewish communities worldwide.

Each week, Jews around the world read a *Perasha* (portion) of the Torah. Before the Torah reading, one of our community members gives a *derasha* (sermon), explaining the content of the Torah portion and connecting it to themes such as history, faith, ethics, and beyond.

Before the Torah is taken out of the *Hekhal* (ark), we recite the prayer *Berikh Shemeh*. This is a mystical prayer which asks for God's compassion and redemption. Written in Aramaic, it is sometimes recited in Greek or Ladino.

Procession: The Torah is removed from the *Hekhal* and paraded around the congregation, allowing individuals to touch or kiss it, creating a physical and spiritual connection with the Torah. It is then lifted and rotated for the whole congregation to see.

Torah Reading: The weekly Torah portion is chanted in 7 sections known as *aliyoth*, when individuals are called up to the Torah. Following a person's *aliya*, we sometimes recite *Ashkavoth* (memorial prayers) for their relatives who passed away recently or whose *Adara* (anniversary of passing) is in the coming week.

Following the Torah reading, we read a corresponding *Haftara*, which is a selection from the prophets with themes that correspond to the weekly Torah portion. In Romaniote communities, the *Haftara* was sometimes read in Greek. This made the message more accessible to those who primarily spoke Greek. Other Jewish communities read and translated the *Haftara* in Ladino, Aramaic, or other local languages.

## **VI. *Musaf* (Additional Service)**

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In addition to the three daily prayer services - *Shaharith* (morning), *Minha* (afternoon), and *Arvith* (evening) - on Shabbat and on holidays we have an additional fourth service (*Musaf*) in between the morning and afternoon. *Musaf* includes the *Amida* prayer and commemorates the additional Temple sacrifices that were offered on Shabbat and festivals. When the Temple was destroyed, the Rabbis preserved the memory of these offerings with the *Musaf* prayer, reflecting on Shabbat's sanctity and ancient customs.

## ***Kiddush* (Sanctification for Shabbat Lunch)**

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We are commanded to verbally declare Shabbat, the seventh day of the week, as separate and sacred. We do this on Friday night as well as Saturday morning by holding a cup of wine and reciting Shabbat rest-related verses and a blessing over wine before we begin our meal. People often sponsor our kiddush lunch in honor of happy occasions, in memory of loved ones, or simply to make a donation to our community.

### 3. Different Liturgical Traditions

Although we are a Romaniote community, the text of our prayer books reflects the Sephardic rite. Historically, Romaniote communities in Greece would sometimes use books like these, due both to financial constraints preventing the community's mass printing of their own books as well as the overlap between the Romaniote liturgy and the Sephardic or Italian-Jewish prayers. At KKJ we insert special prayers and *piyyutim* (liturgical poems) at certain points in the service according to our Romaniote customs.

**Romaniote:** A uniquely Greek-Jewish tradition, the Romaniote rite dates back to the Byzantine Empire, used by the Greek-speaking Jews who have lived in Greece since the 4th Century BCE. It features some differences in the text of prayers as well as distinct melodies for prayers and chanting of the Torah, similar to those of Byzantine chanting.

**Sephardic:** Developed in the Ottoman Empire among Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. Rich in Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) songs and *piyyutim* written by poets and Rabbis in Spain, this rite evolved to incorporate Ottoman musical styles and can include more emotional, varied expressions.

**Middle Eastern Sephardic:** The traditions of the Jews of Islamic lands, including North Africa, Syria, Persia, Iraq, and Yemen. Features many Kabbalistic (mystical) prayers and meditations, and melodies in the Arabic maqam scale.

**Western Sephardic (Spanish and Portuguese):** Originated from Jews expelled from Spain and Portugal in the 15th century who later migrated to Western European hubs of Amsterdam and London, as well as the New World of New Amsterdam, Philadelphia, and the Caribbean. Known for a formal, dignified prayer style, it features Western-influenced musical styles and uplifting melodies, with texts that avoid certain mystical prayers.

**“Sephardic”** as a term can refer to three categories (with potential overlap):

**Geographic:** Jews who trace their origins to the communities of the Iberian Peninsula (present day Spain and Portugal) who were expelled in 1492. For example, the Sephardic communities of Salonika, Izmir, Rhodes, and Amsterdam had ancestry from Spain or Portugal.

**Religious Philosophy:** Jews who follow the teachings of Maimonides and the Ge'onim and their stream of Torah which emphasizes rationalism, the study of philosophy and sciences, and engagement with the broader world. For example, Romaniote, Italian, and most Jewish communities who lived in Muslim lands (Ottoman Empire, Persia, Iraq, North Africa) tended to follow this religious framework.

**Social:** Jews who share the experience of “otherness” (non-Ashkenazi) upon immigration to Israel or the New World. Even if certain Jewish communities don't originate from Spain and maintain distinct customs of their own, they are often more closely aligned to the Sephardic experience than that of Ashkenazim. Examples include Jews from Iran, Central Asia, India, and elsewhere.

We celebrate both the diversity of customs and practices around the world as well as our unity as the Jewish people. Whatever your Jewish background, we welcome you into our synagogue and community.



# Kehila Kedosha Janina

Synagogue and Museum

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