

A Brief Overview of the Jewish Saturday Morning Service

by
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Two weeks ago I spoke about our singing and dancing in our services - the fact that we have come from an Evangelical mother who taught us to rejoice in our worship. And after all, what could be more worthy of our celebration than the fact that our King has not forsaken us, but has redeemed us through His Son Yeshua, and awakened us to His presence, spiritually, and to the day of His reigning in Zion which is coming soon.

So our worship style is a reflection of who we are and where we have come from. But if our mother is Evangelical Christianity (who birthed us, and to whom we are grateful) then we also have a father – our Jewish people.

In nearly every synagogue, throughout the world, we find that education is highly valued, and Jewish people are educating themselves in what it means to be Jewish. So there are programs and classes on understanding the reasons for and the practices associated with our feasts, the meaning of the different parts of the prayer book, the Siddur, the values of our life cycle rituals, and the importance of how we conduct ourselves as Jews in the world.

Today, I will give a very brief overview of the Sabbath morning service, as it is in nearly all Jewish services as well as our own.

The service has three main parts: the *Sh'ma*, the *Amidah*, and the *Torah*. And this is the shape of our own service. We don't go through the entire *Siddur* here, which is both a time issue and a matter of our not having a high level of Hebrew literacy. It's just not practical, and it would not be edifying to attempt to do this, though we occasionally have services in which we do more of this liturgy.

Now here's some background from the *Siddur*. The *Sh'ma* is a section of the *Siddur* that begins with the call to worship - the *Barchu* - in which we speak a blessing for the God who is to be blessed. This is followed by various prayers and Scriptures, leading up to the section from Deuteronomy 6, which begins: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the unique *Adonai*," and continues from there with the *V'Ahavta* – "You shall love ..."

The *Sh'ma* continues with other Scriptures from Deuteronomy 11 and Numbers 15. Then follow several prayers exalting God, but culminating in a prayer, *Tzur Yisrael* (Rock of Israel), of which the final blessing says: "Blessed are You, Lord, who redeemed Israel." By this time, everyone is standing, and people don't even say "*Amen*" to this prayer, because no breath is wasted before coming into the most solemn time of the service, the *Amidah*.

Now the *Amidah* is a series of prayers, which are abbreviated on Sabbath and on Holy Days, because it is not considered appropriate to ask God for anything on Sabbaths and Holy Days. Why would this be? It's because we are trusting in His provision as we did in the wilderness, when we didn't gather manna on *Shabbat*. We believe that He will provide for us, so that we don't have to work, and we don't have to ask Him for anything, because He provides. At Ohev, we follow the practice of abbreviating our prayers, not because we don't want to ask, because we aren't especially convinced that asking is wrong. After all, didn't Yeshua heal on *Shabbat*?

At Ohev, we normally participate in the first two prayers, along with one at the very end, which is that God is the one who grants peace, and we usually sing that as the song "*Sim Shalom*" - Grant Peace. And this is as much as some Reform congregations also do.

Lately, we've also been working on adding one additional prayer from the *Amidah*, and it's called the *Kedusha*, normally prayed after the first two blessings. It contains quotes from Isaiah, where he had a

vision of the Lord in which the angels cried, “Holy, holy, holy is *Adonai Tzva’ot* - the Lord of Hosts - the whole earth is filled with His glory.”

If the *Amidah* is the most solemn part of the service, then the *Kedusha* is the most solemn part of the *Amidah*. The *Kedusha* is normally prayed as a responsive prayer in which, interestingly, the congregation leads, and the reader follows. At Ohev, as we begin to learn this interesting and precious part of the liturgy, we are taking baby steps. We’ve had a couple of different trials, and we are still experimenting a little, but we are learning, and that’s good.