

A Basic Guide to Personal Prayer and Shabbat Morning Solo Prayer

Personal prayer is an integral and often overlooked aspect of Jewish life. So often, we think of prayer as primarily a communal activity, but the truth is that both the personal and the public are critical to our prayer experience. Because it is complicated for us to get together right now (Zoom is helpful, but not the same as sitting alongside a neighbor), we have a unique opportunity to concentrate on our personal prayer lives (even if we are together on zoom, and definitely when we are not).

The most important thing to remember when praying on one's own, is to remember that it is one's Kavanah (one's intention) that carries the day. Forgive yourself if you can't say all of the words on a page, or if you don't have access to the words themselves. English (or any language you speak) can work alongside the Hebrew of our traditional prayers. Feel free to pause and reflect on some of the English translations. Some can be particularly powerful in these days. Consider adding poetry, melody, silence, meditation to your prayers. Just speak from your heart, and the prayers will be received.

But if you'd like an overview of a formal service (what to do if you are praying a service you might regularly hear in synagogue), here is a list of basic information and some frequently asked questions about prayer in a private setting—especially on Shabbat.

What do I leave out without a minyan?

There are a number of prayers that are only said in a minyan: Barchu, Hatzit Kaddish, Kaddish Shalem, Mourner's Kaddish, the Kedusha in the Amidah, taking out of the Torah, among them. Even so, you can still recite a private Amidah out loud or quietly, read the Torah and Haftarah portions of the week in English or in Hebrew (without blessings), recite Hallel on holidays, recite Shema and her blessings, say the Amidah, and chant/sing Psalms to your heart's content.

What are the basics of the Shabbat morning service?

Shabbat morning begins with Birkot Hashachar and Pseukei D'zimra (Morning blessings and Psalms of Praise). This is the way we "warm

up” for prayer, focusing our attention and giving thanks for the gifts that are ours.

Following that, we reach Shacharit, the morning service which leads us towards its first high-point, the Shema (with blessings speaking of the beauty and order of Creation and the great gift of love, the gift of Torah leading towards the Shema and a blessing recalling our redemption following it). Immediately following the blessing of redemption, we move to the second high-point of Shacharit, the “Silent Amidah”, which can be recited quietly or out loud. When praying on your own, it is entirely up to you.

Torah Service is the next major part of a Shabbat morning service in synagogue. It includes the presentation of the Torah, reading from the Torah and Haftarah as well as special blessings for the welfare of the community, Jewish people, the world. Within this period is usually also a Dvar Torah (a bit of learning usually based along the Torah portion of the week). We can not take out the Torah when we are praying on our own, but we can read and learn (and even chant out loud) the words of the Torah reading/Haftarah—without the blessings, of course. And it is always a good time to learn some Torah.

The Shabbat morning service concludes with Musaf (the additional service consisting primarily of an additional Amidah and a number of closing prayers including Ein Keloheinu, Aleinu, and Adon Olam

Though we don’t recite Mourner’s Kaddish without a minyan, when we do not have a minyan at shul, we often recite Psalm 121 (p. 666-667 in Sim Shalom) in memory of those we love who have died.

What is the Basic Order of the Prayers for Shabbat morning?

Here is the basic order of our Shabbat morning service with pages referencing Siddur Sim Shalom (with our PSJC Transliteration book in parentheses)

Birkot Hashachar and P’sukei D’zimra
(Morning Blessings and Psalms of Praise)

This is the way we “warm up” for prayer, focusing our attention and giving thanks for the gifts that are ours.

There are a number of private prayers that can enhance your experience and help you focus, including prayers for the gift of our bodies, for our souls, for the gift of Torah.

I begin with one line: V’ahavta L’Reicha Kamocho (Love your neighbor as yourself)—It is found towards the top of p. 10

RISE

Page 10 (Translit p. 10) Birkot Hashachar (morning blessings that express our gratitude for waking and for being alive.)-RISE

We continue to the end of the first paragraph on p. 12 and then pick up at the bottom of that page and continue through the first full paragraph on p. 14 (Translit p. 5).

Page 50 (Translit p. 27) - Psalm 30

RISE

Page 54 (Translit p. 31) - Baruch SheAmar (two paragraphs)

Page 76 (Translit p. 18)- Psalm 92 (Song for Shabbat - on festivals, substitute the psalm for the appropriate day of the week).

Page 80 (Translit p. 37) - Ashrei

Pages 82-88 - Psalms

Page 88 (Translit p. 45) - Psalm 150, "Halleluyah"

Page 334-336 (Translit p. 115) - Nishmat Kol Chai

Shacharit—The formal morning service

This is essentially “Shema and her blessings” (Shema surrounded by blessings prior and after) and the Amidah

Page 336 at the bottom of the page (Translit p. 117) - Shochan Ad

Continue with the top two paragraphs on p. 338 (skipping Hatzi Kaddish at the bottom of p. 338)

Page 340 —Skip Barchu when you do not have a minyan

Page 340—Yotzer (the first blessing before the Shema). Followed by the rest of the page and continuing through the top two paragraphs on p. 342. (On a Festival that falls on a weekday, move from the Yotzer blessing to the bottom of page 342)

Page 344 (Translit 127) - Shabbat and Festivals continue with the first full paragraph, "Titbarach" and continue through the Sh'ma and her blessings to page 352. Remember to add the line above the Sh'ma if there is no minyan present.

RISE

Page 354-364 (Translit 139-153) - Shabbat Shacharit Amidah - (While you can/should recite the whole Amidah either outloud or to yourself, be sure to skip Kedusha (p. 356)—this is the elaborate version of the third blessing of the Amidah reserved for recitation with a minyan). We also skip the Kohen's blessing on p. 362 when we do not have a minyan

On a Festival, the Amidah is found p. 366-376 (Translit p. 169). Here, the Kedusha is found on p. 368 and the kohen's blessing is on p. 374.

The last blessing of the Amidah is a beautiful prayer for peace—Sim Shalom (p. 362 or p. 376). Both also conclude with additional prayers that close with Oseh Shalom (p. 364 and 376). While not technically a part of the Amidah, they are generally recited alongside this text as a reminder of the personal prayers we add to complete our own Amidah.

On Festivals (and Hol Hamoed), we recite Hallel, page 380 - 390 (Translit p. 173 - 183). On Rosh Hodesh and the last six days of Passover, we recite half Hallel (following the notes in the book). Feel free to sing out these Songs of Praise as loudly as you would like, including the blessing at the start of Hallel.

Torah Study

Although we don't do the Torah Service per se when we are praying without a minyan, this is a time to read Torah, Haftorah and reflect on a d'var Torah. You can also add the prayers for Country, Israel and Peace on pages 414 - 416 (Translit p. 201 - 204) or presented as pdf's on our website. This can also be a nice time to add your own prayer for healing. (Our Refuah Shleima list that is on our website includes the words to Debbie Freidman's Misheberach on behalf of those who are ill). It might also be nice to close this section for yourself by singing Etz Hayim Hee (p. 426) which includes the promise: "It is a tree of life to those who grasp it and all who uphold it are blessed. Its ways are pleasantness and all its paths are peace. Help us turn to You, and we shall return. Renew our lives as in days of old."

Musaf—The Additional Service for Shabbat and Festivals

RISE

Page 430-440 (Translit p. 215) - Musaf Amidah for Shabbat
(Again, skipping the elaborate Kedusha on p. 432)

Page 456-476 (Translit p. 231) - Musaf Amidah for Festivals
(Skipping Kedusha on p. 458-460)

Page 508 (Translit p. 281) - Ein Keloheinu

RISE

Page 510 (Translit p. 281) - Aleinu

Page 514 (Translit p. 293) - Adon Olam

I hope this overview helps you make your own prayer experience more fulfilling. Thanks to Elizabeth Schnur for the good work and conversation that led to this piece.

While I look forward to seeing you on Zoom at our weekday Minyanim or Kabbalat Shabbat, or even our Shabbat morning Zoom if you'd like to join, I really can't wait for the day we can sit together again and celebrate Shabbat alongside one another. In the mean time, may we use the quiet of these days to grow our own personal prayer practice. Knowing that while there is a structure to Jewish prayer that can guide us, we can trust our hearts to take us where we need to go.

-Rabbi Carie Carter