

## Choreography for Shabbat Morning Worship at Congregation Kneseth Israel

Every service has a rhythm and a mood and a choreography. These are some of the dance steps or the Jewish aerobics for worship on Shabbat morning. They may be done slightly differently in any given congregation, because each congregation has its own *minhag*, custom and none of this is *halacha*, Jewish law. There are even variants sometimes within a congregation. You will see that here at CKI. It is part of our embracing diversity. Choreography is designed to enhance our spirituality and make it more meaningful. There is nothing to keep you from swaying, shuckling or dancing in the aisles.

Prayer	Choreography	Page Number
Birkat Hashachar	Stand if able. These blessings mirror how we arise in the morning, the first of which is to get out of bed.	Page 65
Mourner's Kaddish	<p>In this congregation, typically only the mourners rise, or those marking a <i>yahrzeit</i>. I typically announce that those who are mourning or marking a <i>yahrzeit</i> or who have the tradition of always rising for mourner's kaddish to please rise and join me.</p> <p>During the last paragraph, <i>Oseh shalom</i>, there is the tradition of taking three steps backwards. We came up with three interpretations for why. 1. We are leaving the Divine Presence with a sign of respect like you would back out of a King's Chamber. 2. You are waving at the Holy One and saying, 'Look at me. I am here. Take notice of me. 3. The three steps represent all of Israel. The <i>Cohanim</i>, the Levites and the Israelites. No one answer is correct.</p>	Page 82
Baruch Sh'amar	Please rise in recognition of G-d's creation	Page 83
Yishtabach	We are about to enter the formal part of the service. We rise on <i>yishtabach</i> in order to be ready and remain standing through <i>Barchu</i> .	Page 106
Bar'chu	<p>Stand if able</p> <p>Bend on Baruch, Bow on Atah, up on Adonai. Baruch comes from word <i>berech</i> meaning knee.</p> <p>Sit for <i>Yotzer Or</i></p>	Page 107
Ahava Rabbah	Custom to gather <i>tzitzit</i> together in preparation for <i>Sh'ma</i> . People do this when the words are recited, "V'havi'ainu l'shalom" Bring us towards peace from the four corners. Tune that is used is <i>Hatikvah</i> , Israel's	Page 111

	national anthem, because we have been gathered from the four corners.	
Sh'ma	Cover your eyes. Covering our eyes allows us to focus more completely. Some people leave their eyes open because when saying the Sh'ma we are witnessing that G-d is One. Witnesses see something. Some congregations people rise for Sh'ma, not typically here	Page 112
V'ahavta	Open eyes  Third paragraph, some people kiss their tzitzit on every mention of tzitzit to remember the mitzvot and our "loving dedication to G-d". I just do on the last one when I let go.	Page 112
Geula	Rise on Tzur Yisrael, Kumah... Kumah means rise  Some rise prior to the Michamocha so they are ready.	Page 114
Amidah	Facing East toward Jerusalem, at CKI that is towards the Ark. Amidah means standing. Stand if you are able. Some make three little steps back and forward to enter the presence of the Divine. Some people cover their heads with Tallit for Amidah because it is a personal moment with the Divine.	Page 115b
Avot	Bend on Baruch, Bow on Atah, up on Adonai Repeat for last Baruch (called a hatimah, a stop)	Page 115b
G'vurot	Don't bow	Page 115b
Kedusha	Bow side to side on each zeh: ZEH l'ZEH v'amar" Rise up on toes on each "KaDOSH, kaDOSH, kaDOSH" Tradition is that the angels did this	Page 116
Balance of Amidah	Remain standing. Bow (but don't bend knee) on Modim Anachu Lach. Take three little steps forward and back when you are finished, then sit	Page 117-120
Torah Service	We rise to take out the Torah(s) when we open the ark Some people rise when the Torah service begins.	Page 139-

	When the Torah is paraded through the congregation it is customary to move toward the center aisle and kiss the Torah with your siddur (prayerbook) or tallit out of respect. Some do not. We remain standing until the Torah is undressed and placed on the reader's stand (amud)	Page 141
Torah Kaddish	Rise	Page 146
Lifting Torah	Rise, when Torah is lifted. Custom to open three columns. Some point their tzitzit towards the Torah Sit when Torah is dressed and put on stand.	Page 146
Putting Torah away	Rise when Ark is opened Repeat Torah parade, move toward center aisle.	Page 153
Musaf Amidah	Remain standing for Musaf, repeat choreography of Amidah above. Sit when finished to signal when the communal service may begin again.	Pages 155-161
Musaf Kaddish Shalem	Some rise, some sit	Page 181
Ein Keloheinu	Sit	Page 182
Aleinu	Rise, bend knee on Korim bow on umishtachvim, up on lifnei	Page 183
Mourner's Kaddish	In this congregation, mostly the mourners stand. Some join them out of respect. Some join out of respect for the Six Million who have no one to say Kaddish for them	Page 184

**Happy Dancing**

From the Coffee Shop Rabbi's blog, <http://coffeeshoprabbi.com> Rabbi Ruth Adler:

A lot of newcomers to synagogue are intimidated by the choreography of Jewish public worship. People sit, people stand, people turn around and bow to the door (what?). There's a sort of hokey-pokey thing periodically, too. What on earth?

One way to cope with this is to think of it as dance. Just as David danced before the Ark (2 Samuel 6:14-23), when Jews pray, we dance before the ark with the Torah in it. Unlike David, we wear all our clothes.

Recently I walked one of my Intro classes through the choreography of [the service](#) as it is practiced in most Reform congregations.

First, a few general principles bear repeating:

- 1. WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK:** If you are curious about a gesture or practice, ask the person doing it what they are doing and why. If everyone in the congregation is doing it, ask one of the service leaders (after the service!) *It is never "stupid" or rude to ask politely about a practice so that you can learn.* As Hillel teaches in the Mishnah, the shy will not learn!
- 2. MOST CHOREOGRAPHY IS OPTIONAL:** Bow, etc, if it is meaningful to you or if you think it might become meaningful to you. If it is distracting or just "isn't you," that is OK. However, give yourself permission to try things out and see how they feel. Some people find that choreography makes them feel more in tune with the minyan, or closer to God in prayer: how will you know if you don't at least try it out?
- 3. EXPECTED CHOREOGRAPHY:** Only a few things are "required," and those only if you are able.

If you are able, stand for the [Barechu](#) [call to worship before the [Shema](#)].

If you are able, stand for the [Amidah](#).

In most Reform congregations, stand for the [Shema](#).

Show respect to the Torah Scroll: Stand when it is moving or uncovered, and face towards it. Stand when the Ark is open.

- 4. RESPECT THE BODY:** It is a [mitzvah](#) [sacred duty] to care for your body. If choreography is going to damage your back or your knees or whatever, don't do it. If you see someone refraining from something, assume that they have a good reason and don't bug them about it.
- 5. ESCHEW OSTENTATION:** Both the ancient rabbis (Berakhot 34a) and [Reform tradition](#) frown on showy displays of piety. If something is meaningful to you, that's OK. But keep in mind that you are doing this for yourself and for prayer, not for a show for anyone else.

For more detail, you can check out this handout I gave the class: [Choreography of the Service](#). Happy dancing!