

**Choreography of the Shabbat Morning Service
For the Etz Chayim Bar/t Mitzvah Family Class
November 23, 2003**

Page 36: **Barchu**

We rise for the *barchu*.

Leader faces ark.

About facing the ark vs the congregation. In traditional settings, the prayer leader conducts almost the entire service facing the ark. S/he is the emissary of the congregation, praying to G0d on the congregation's behalf. As such, s/he faces G0d's representative—the Divine Book – the Torah.

In most congregations, the ark is built in the east so that in facing the ark, one is facing Jerusalem. (Within Jerusalem, it is facing the Temple Mount.) Given the choice between facing the ark and facing east, we face the ark.

The Reform movement followed the Christian tradition of having the service leader face the congregation. At Etz Chayim, we do a mix. We turn for those prayers that involve bowing – otherwise the leader would be bowing to the congregants! (One exception in Torah service—get to in a minute.)

At *bar'chu/baruch* bend the knees. The root for Baruch is "*berech*" which means bended knee, the movement of expressing gratitude and wonder for the gifts of life. So, there are many times in the service when we come to a blessing and we bend our knees and bow on the word *baruch* or *barchu*.

At *et/atah*, bow from the waist with the upper body and head (but not as far as the belt because that would connote the arrogance of a prideful piety).

At *Adonai* bend back up straight because *Adonai* uplifts us all – in fact, look at page 15 for the morning blessings where it is written, *zokeif k'fufim*, "...whose power lifts up the fallen/lifts those who are bent over." ("Who raises the downtrodden." Siddur Sim Shalom and others.) And on page 51 of the *Amidah, G'vurot*, it says *someich nof'lim*, Adonai "lifts the falling..." More literally, "*Adonai* raises up those who are bowed down/bent over." (Psalm 146:8)

All are seated.

Page 45: **Shma**

For the *Shma*, people may stand or sit according to their custom.

Tradition in Jerusalem to rise

Tradition in Babylonia was not to change positions because it is more disruptive to your concentration and that is the point. You are to focus, to envision Sinai, etc and therefore remain as you are. This became the accepted *halacha* until the Reform movement decided to stand to emphasize the importance of the *Shma* to Judaism. Then to simplify they had people remain standing after the *Barchu*.

Etz – follow your own custom, but sit after *Shma* for *V'Ahavta*

After the *Shma*, those who are standing should sit.

(misleading language since v'ahavta is part of shma.)

Page 53: We rise at “kuma” which means – “rise!”

We remain standing now for the *amidah*.

Page 54: **Amidah**

Amidah means “standing prayer” so it’s no surprise that we stand. It is the official substitute for the sacrifice for which our ancestors stood.

The choreography of the *amidah* is modeled on the notion of one coming before a sovereign. In our liturgy and tradition we relate to G0d as King of Kings, as Sovereign of the Universe! So, no less courtesy should be shown to G0d than to mortal kings. The convention that prevailed in royal courts when approaching a king thus became the basis for several customs during worship. So there is standing, stepping forward, bowing, stepping back, etc.

Leader faces the ark.

“*Adonai S’fatai tiftach...*” is traditionally said in an undertone while taking three short steps backward and then three steps forward beginning with the right foot, as if approaching a sovereign. (Why three back first? So you end up where you began given the reality of prayer space!) (Right foot, signifies “eagerly.”)

Avot: Bow, bend, upright at first “*Baruch atah Adonai...*” at the beginning and at the end. This way, we bow at the beginning and end of the introductory blessing.

At the names of the ancestors, you may bow slightly, beginning at your right and moving left. Ari explains that in doing this he is simultaneously honoring G0d and acknowledging what he owes to his ancestors’ unique and individual relationships with G0d. By bowing for the three papas and four mamas, he bows seven times, a holy & meaningful number in itself for him.

There is no more bowing until the blessing of Modim on page 65. The sages were wary of excessive humility and, in fact, cautioned us not to bow during the other blessings (Berakhot 34a).

Page 57: **Kedushah**

At each chant of kadosh, kadosh, kadosh, we rise up on our toes (three times), each time a bit higher than before. This verse is from Isaiah 6:3 in which he saw a vision of serafim (fiery angels), each with three pairs of wings flying and calling out to one another, “Holy, holy, holy...” in praise of G0d. And so, just like the angels – we flutter on our feet singing out G0d’s praises!

Page 64: Modim: At the words “*modim anachnu lach*” (we acknowledge you) and at the very end of the blessing when saying “*Baruch atah Adonai...*” you bow.

(This is the last blessing traditionally associated with the sacrifices so we end our bowing here rather than after the blessing of peace.)

Page 68: At the conclusion of the Amidah—birkat shalom—we take three steps backward this time starting with the left foot and moving “reluctantly.” It is customary to bow slightly three times from the waist: first towards the left, then towards the right, then forward. This was how a subject would take leave of his/her king. (If you recite the private meditations that begin on page 79, then do the stepping and bowing at “*oseh shalom...*” on page 81.)

Page 78-79: During *kaddish shaleim*, some also step backwards before reciting the sentence “*Oseh shalom bimroman.*” While saying it, bow as above.

Pages 91: **Torah Service**

At *Gadlu l'Adonai Iti* we bow and then rise up on our toes at *un'romima*

Page 112: **Aleynu**

Already standing from Torah service.

Leader faces the ark.

At "*va'anachnu*" we bend our knees

At "*kor'im*" we bow at the waist

"*umishtachavim umodim*" stay bowed

At "*lifney melach*" we rise