

60 YEARS OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AT THE JEWISH CENTER: A RETROSPECTIVE

Compiled by Debbie Brett and Gila Levin

Sabbath and Holiday Attire

"Regarding appropriate attire for sanctuary services, the Religious Affairs Committee decided not to change existing policy. "This policy, more custom than requirement, urges men to wear kipa and **optional** tallit when sitting in the congregation, requires men to wear kipa and tallit when ascending the bima, **mildly encourages** women to wear a head covering of preference when ascending the bima, and presently offers no specific recommendations to women (re: kipa and or tallit) when sitting in the congregation." (emphasis added)

Programs and Policies of the Religious Affairs Committee: 1986-1988

Some women wore hats or other head coverings; others did not. In the 1970s, women did not wear pants to services. Long skirts were the preferred attire.

Ruth Schulman reported that she thought "the heavens would open up" the first time she wore a tallit to Shabbat services.

Participation of Women

"Harold Staras reported that a member of the congregation wanted his wife to have an aliyah on the occasion of his son's Bar Mitzvah. This was considered informally between some members of the Religious Committee and the Rabbi. Other members of the Committee, particularly Saturday morning attendees, made their objections known to the Rabbi, who decided not to permit the aliyah."

Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting, May 6, 1969

Ruth Schulman was one of the first women to have an aliyah, alongside her husband Mel, z"l, in 1971. She remembers davening the preliminary service on Shabbat morning during the tenure of Rabbi Matt.

Two members quit The Jewish Center when women were first given aliyot. One later rejoined.

There was considerable controversy over the idea of calling a woman to the Torah as a Bat Kohen or Bat Levi. Some women insisted on extending this title to them. Today, we no longer call men or women to the Torah as Kohanim or Leviim.

In the mid-80s, the family of a couple having an aufruf requested that no women ascend the bimah that day, and the rabbi complied. The response from the congregation was strongly negative, and special exceptions to the official policy of egalitarianism were no longer permitted.

Donna Glazer taught women how to put on tefillin in the 1980s.

Gilda Aronovic was the first woman to serve as a gabbai.

Men and women always sat together at The Jewish Center -- except when a Brooklyn-based Yemenite-Israeli congregation visited TJC in June 1983. The Yemenite women did all of the cooking for the weekend's meals.

Bar Mitzvah Ceremonies

In the 1960s, B'nai Mitzvah led the entire service, but read only the Maftir portion from the Torah. They did the announcements. If the Bar Mitzvah was on a holiday, the celebrant had to learn Hallel. The Rabbi was an observer, except for the d'var Torah which he delivered every Shabbat.

By 1969, there was a sense that the B'nai Mitzvah were dominating the service. A policy was adopted limiting B'nai Mitzvah to reading only one Torah portion and the Haftarah. They could no longer lead the entire service.

By 1982, some congregants wanted the B'nai Mitzvah to do more -- to read more Torah and lead Musaf.

In 1983, the Religious Affairs committee determined that B'nai Mitzvah would not be allowed to lead the preliminary service and Shacharit, and that they would have only minimal participation in Friday night services. In 1984, they were no longer allowed to give speeches. Later, B'nai Mitzvah were allowed to do more if they were better prepared. They had to attend a minimum of 13 Shabbat morning services in the year prior to the Bar or Bat Mitzvah, and many students did more than the minimum. They could do the preliminary service and Shacharit or Musaf, but not both.

In the 1990s, B'nai Mitzvah gave a Friday night speech on a Jewish hero of their choosing. Years later, they reported on a mitzvah project in which they participated. Children also recite the kiddush on Friday night.

Becoming a Bat Mitzvah

"A Bat Mitzvah ceremony may take place on a Friday evening in which the Bat Mitzvah, under the general supervision of the Rabbi, may lead the congregation in prayer and song as appropriate to a Friday evening service.

A Bat Mitzvah ceremony may also take place on a Saturday morning where again the Bat Mitzvah, under the general supervision of the Rabbi, may lead the congregation in prayer and song appropriate to a Saturday morning service. The Bat Mitzvah may also be called upon to chant the Haftarah (prophetic portion) and its blessings. She may not, however, be called to recite the blessings over the Torah or to read from the Torah scrolls i.e., she may **not** have an Aliyah." (emphasis added)

Recommendations of the Religious Committee, as discussed (and deferred) at the Board of Directors meeting, February 3, 1969

The first young woman to become a Bat Mitzvah at TJC was Alice Rome, z"l, on a Friday evening in 1965. The second was Irene and Sam Goldfarb's older daughter. Shabbat morning B'not Mitzvah did not occur until 1968. The first Shabbat morning Bat Mitzvah was Mimi and Al Gershen's daughter, Reva (now Dr. Reva Gershen Lowy)

The first adult Bat Mitzvah class was formed in the early to mid 1980s. Classes have continued until today.

Language and Liturgy

"With the agreement of Religious Affairs co-chairs, Rabbi Glazer announced at Yom Kippur services (1987) the formation of a Language and Liturgy Commission to review and make proposals in the area of the language of prayer. This came in the wake of a step taken in May-June 1987 to make three additions

to the Amidah prayer, changes which were instituted following highly informal (and therefore procedurally irregular) discussions with one of the chairs and some concerned congregants...This commission met a number of times throughout 1988, and submitted a report...in which they recommended acceptance of these changes in the Amidah prayer. The Commission is expected to reconvene ... with a full schedule of meetings geared primarily to educating themselves and the congregation to the issues involved in language and liturgy, and it is hoped that...they will be able to bring several guest lecturers to the community on this subject."

Programs and Policies of the Religious Affairs Committee: 1986-1988

Adding "imahot" to the Shabbat morning Amidah occurred during the tenure of Rabbi Glazer and Cantor Freedman after the Language and Liturgy Commission made its report. Consistent use of "imahot" at the weekday minyanim did not occur until more than five years later.

Hiring a Cantor

"Should we have a Cantor? Some felt it would enrich the services, increasing attendance. The Rabbi felt it might discourage the Saturday morning participation of the children."

Minutes of the Board of Directors, July 7, 1969

Although temporary Cantors were hired for the High Holidays and student interns were also welcomed over the years, the Jewish Center did not have a permanent Cantor before Bob Freedman was hired part-time in 1982. He became full time in 1985.

Choirs and Instrumental Music

The former B'nai Zion congregation had an organ at one time. Later Rabbis did not permit instrumental music.

The Center used to have a choir on Friday nights, but with no instruments and not every week. Both men and women sang in the choir.

Rabbi Glatt was the first rabbi to permit music on Shabbat an hour after services -- but only a capella performances. Then dancing was permitted along with the vocals, and then instruments, but only with Jewish music. Rabbi Glazer allowed instrumental music in the afternoon.

The first use of instruments during a Shabbat or holiday service was for Simchat Torah in 1988, during Rabbi Glazer's tenure.

Cantor Simon began the Friday night Shabbat Alive services in the last decade.

Weddings

" If it will not conflict with a previously scheduled event, the Princeton Jewish Center is available for weddings of both members and non members of the Center. The only restrictions are that both partners to the marriage must be Jewish and that the ceremony must be performed by either the Rabbi of the Princeton Jewish Center or by a rabbi of whom he approves."

Recommendations of the Religious Committee, as approved at the Board of Directors meeting, February 3, 1969

Funerals

"Funeral services shall not normally be held at The Center. Only in special circumstances, upon the request of the family, may the services for a Center member be held in The Center, on a non-conflicting basis with previously scheduled events. The officiating rabbi must be the Rabbi of the Jewish Center or a rabbi of whom he approves."

Recommendation of the Religious Committee, as approved by the Board, December, 1968.

Friday Night Services

"An experimental Friday night service with more English was introduced on a trial basis in spring 1988. No final decision has been made as to its future."

Programs and Policies of the Religious Affairs Committee: 1986-1988

In 1987, Cantor Freedman put together a special Friday night prayer book that was used for many years -- until the spiral bound paperbacks fell apart due to their extensive use. *Siddur Sim Shalom* is now used on weekdays, and for Friday night services held in the Bet Midrash.

Start times for Friday night services were always an issue, with some congregants and clergy advocating the 6:30 start time and others advocating beginning at 7:30 or 8:00 PM so that more commuters from New York could arrive on time. Over the years, TJC experimented with the later start time but it didn't endure.

Shabbat Services

"A suggestion was made to find out via questionnaire how many Center members would prefer more Reform practices, more participation of women, some experimentation. Other members proposed more traditional Friday and Saturday services. Rabbi Brenner indicated that the only change he has instituted has been that of Bat Mitzvah."

Minutes of the Board of Directors, July 7, 1969.

"A suggestion to appoint a permanent gabbai was considered and rejected. An annual (January) letter to gabbaim was instituted, thanking them for their services and engaging their attention to the ongoing problem of broadening the pool of aliyah holders.

In ongoing attempts to broaden this pool, a Newsletter item was inserted periodically by the Cantor and/or the committee urging congregants to present themselves during the week as aliyah recipients. A handout entitled "Aliyot to the Torah" was prepared and is available in the Center office...Gabbaim were urged to draw new people into the pool when they make their Sabbath-morning rounds, and it was agreed that the Membership Committee Chairs should pass on to the Cantor the names of new members who can then be honored with a welcoming aliyah."

Programs and Policies of the Religious Affairs Committee: 1986-1988

On Shabbats when there was no Bar or Bat Mitzvah, services often involved a discussion among the Rabbi, congregants, and religious school students.

The Silverman prayer book was used for many years, but was later replaced by *Siddur Hadash*. Subsequent editions of this siddur were gender-neutral.

Some congregants do not recall any time since the 1950s when the Torah portion was read in full. Others recall that TJC switched to the three year cycle some time prior to 1982 under Rabbi Glatt's tenure. It became more difficult to find volunteers to learn long Torah readings every week. Full repetition of the Shacharit or Musaf Amidah occurred only rarely at the beginning of Cantor Freedman's tenure, and has not been the practice for more than two decades.

Congregants ascending the bimah now carry their prayerbooks, a change instituted by Rabbi Feldman.

Havurah (Library) Minyan

The Havurah minyan began in 1985. Initially it met once a month, then every other week. At one point it ran weekly, but now it is back to every other week. Some services are run as study sessions between prayer segments and as part of the Torah reading. Lively singing is part of the service. Attendees share thoughts or poems.

Weekday Minyanim

"Various ideas to stimulate attendance at the Sunday minyan included a move to require Board or Committee members to attend; this was rejected by the Committee."

Programs and Policies of the Religious Affairs Committee: 1986-1988

Congregants do not recall ever having **daily** morning and evening minyanim at TJC. Sundays and Wednesdays were selected for weekday minyanim "to avoid the necessity of reading Torah," which would lengthen the service and discourage attendance.

High Holiday Services

At one time, high holiday services were held in the theater at Westminster Choir College. Once the sanctuary was built, high holiday crowds were accommodated in a tent that extended from what is now the back lobby into the parking lot. Closed circuit TV screens allowed people in the tent to see the service in the sanctuary. When it rained, the tent was "a muddy mess."

"A new mahzor (*Mahzor Hadash*) was chosen by the Committee for adoption by the congregation...funds were not made available for the acquisition of these books by Rosh Hashanah of 1999 (as the Board opted to make it part of capital fund expenses.) The Vice President with responsibility for this Committee has promised to convey to the President the urgency of this need, and to encourage her to find ways to fulfill it."

Programs and Policies of the Religious Affairs Committee: 1986-1988

Mahzor Hadash was adopted -- and copies purchased for use in the Main Sanctuary service -- before new prayer books were purchased for Shabbat and Festival use. The new mahzor referenced the Holocaust and the State of Israel. Many of the old mahzor editions did not.

Shoshana Silberman published a mahzor for use at family and children's services (*Tiku Shofar*). It is still in use today, and is widely used at other congregations.

The classical service at the Riverside School began in 1996, under the leadership of Rabbi Silverman and Jonathan Gross, and with widespread participation by congregants. The Silverman mahzor continued to be used at Riverside. Religious Affairs has recommended purchase of a new mahzor for Riverside -- if sufficient funds can be raised to purchase 300+ books.

The issue of checking High Holiday tickets has been contentious. At one time, the names of attendees without tickets were recorded on tape for later follow-up. More recently, those without tickets were given a donation envelope and asked to make a contribution to TJC. Announcing High Holiday pledges was also contentious. Rabbi Matt was strongly opposed to requiring tickets or announcing pledge out loud.

Survey Participants

Sally Steinberg Brent
Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins
Rabbi Bob Freedman
Irene and Sam Goldfarb*
Phyllis and Jerry Kurshan*
Alan Medvin
Linda Milstein
Sherry Rosen*
Ruth Schulman*
Shoshana Silberman

*Focus group participants

Rabbis at TJC

Rabbi Irving Levey	1949-1951 (shared with Hillel at Princeton)
Rabbi Sol Loeb	1951
Rabbi Philip Hiat	1952-1953
Rabbi Joseph Gelberman	1955- 1959
Rabbi Selwyn Geller	1959
Rabbi Aaron Krauss	1959-1962
Rabbi Everett Gendler	1962-1968
Rabbi Reeve Brenner	1968- 1970
Rabbi Hershel Matt	1970-1975
Rabbi Melvin Jay Glatt	1975-1985
Rabbi Melvin Glazer	1986- 1991
Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins	1992- 2005
Rabbi Mychal Rosenbaum	2001- 2002
Rabbi Jaymee Alpert	2003-2005
Rabbi Adam Feldman	2005-
Rabbi Annie Tucker	2006-

Cantors at TJC

Cantor Bob Freedman	1982-1996
Cantor Murray E. Simon	1996-

Torah Scroll Donors

Fath Family
Gershen family
Killingsworth family
Shavel family
Zecher family