

BRISBANE PROGRESSIVE JEWISH CONGREGATION INCORPORATED



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Shabbat Services at Brisbane Progressive Jewish Congregation

Welcome to our Shabbat Service

We are pleased to have you join us in our celebration of Shabbat. We hope that the following information will help you follow and understand our service.

Our congregation is a Progressive Jewish congregation. Of the three main branches of modern Judaism (Orthodox, Conservative and Progressive), Progressive Judaism embraces tradition and works to make it meaningful in contemporary life. Judaism is built on the history and laws set out in the Torah (Five Books of Moses). It emphasises ethical behaviour and prescribes a way of life, telling us how to behave, work, rest, eat, celebrate and much more. Progressive Judaism embraces all these traditions and works to make them meaningful parts of contemporary life.

We put particular emphasis on tikkun olam (rebuilding the world), the belief that through social or environmental action we are partners with God in creating the world as it should be.

Progressive Jews believe that the Torah comes to us from God but it is our task to apply its teachings to our times. Halacha, Jewish law, is not a static set of decisions made by past rabbis, but a vital process requiring continuing engagement with our core beliefs in the context of our current world.

Individuals are responsible for developing a personal understanding of what God wants of them. This means Progressive Judaism emphasises education, requiring each person to engage with Jewish texts and traditions.

In line with contemporary understanding, men and women are equal partners. There is no division of seating in our synagogues and women participate equally in services, including serving as rabbis.

Our congregation had its origins leading up to a January 2007 meeting of keen and committed Progressive Jews who, with the guidance and advice of Rabbi Uri Thernal, the then Head of the Union for Progressive Judaism's Rabbinical Council, saw the benefits of creating an entirely new congregation – one that was inclusive, welcoming and responsive. Since then, Brisbane Progressive Jewish Congregation (BPJC) has grown and flourished. But... we are yet to obtain a permanent place of worship, a synagogue (shul) we can call our own. In the meantime we worship on Shabbat mornings and High Holy Days at the Coorparoo School of Arts hall, with our Kabbalat Shabbat (evening) services and festivals functions at Fig Tree Pocket's Cubberla Hall.

What You See in the Sanctuary

The area from where the service is conducted is called the bimah – this is normally a raised platform in synagogues. The reading table in the centre of the bimah is where the prayer leader stands and where the Torah scroll (sefer Torah) is placed and read. The Torah (literally “teaching”) is the compilation of the Five Books of Moses.

The most prominent feature in a synagogue is the Ark (Aron Hakodesh). In our sanctuary this is represented by the covering over our Torah on the reading table. Located at the western side of the hall, in the direction of Jerusalem it is thus the heart of our services. The Torah relates that an Ark was built to hold the two stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments, brought down from Mt. Sinai by Moses. During our services, the congregation rises whenever the Ark is open (the covering is off the Torah), out of respect for the sacred and honoured contents of the Torah. The congregation may sit when the Ark is closed, when the Torah is being read from as part of the service or when the person holding the Torah is sitting down.

In permanent synagogues, above the Ark is located the Eternal Light (Ner Tamid), a symbol of the constant presence of God in our lives. Never extinguished, it symbolizes the perpetual fire on the altar of the Temple in Jerusalem in ancient times.

Special Attire, Books and Decorum

Attire

On entering the sanctuary, all males, Jewish and non-Jewish, are expected to wear a head covering, generally a skullcap, known as a kippah (Hebrew) or yarmulke (Yiddish). Although not obliged to do so, women increasingly observe this custom as well.

The head is covered as a sign of respect for God’s nearness, a centuries-old practice mentioned in the Talmud, the major all-encompassing Rabbinic work on Jewish Law compiled some 1500 years ago.

In Progressive synagogues, it is traditional for Jewish men to wear a tallit, a fringed prayer shawl, while at Shabbat morning and High Holy Days services. Further, at BPJC, Jewish men are required to wear a tallit on the bimah. Many Jewish women choose to wear a tallit as well. The fringes on the four corners of the garment have religious significance. They fulfil the original commandment to Moses that the garments worn by the people of Israel should bear such fringes to remind them to observe God’s laws.

Books

The siddur, or prayer book, contains the entire service except for the weekly Torah portions and ensuing prophetic (Haftarah) readings. It includes prayers derived from the Bible and its commentaries, as well as from rabbinic writings of the past 2500 years. Siddur means “order”, signifying that the prayers are arranged in a set order. The siddur is read from right to left, just as Hebrew is read right to left. At BPJC we use the new Siddur created especially for our region – “Mishkan T’filah”.

The Chumash (from the Hebrew word, five) refers to the bound volume containing the Torah text, the Five Books of Moses, divided into weekly Torah readings. Each weekly Torah portion is followed by a Haftarah reading, one of the select writings by the Prophets drawn from other portions of the Hebrew Bible. The Chumash also includes the Haftarah selections designated for the holidays. At BPJC we use several versions of the Chumash. In all of these, the Hebrew text is constant but the translations and commentaries vary.

Decorum

The Shabbat is a time of worship, reflection, and rest. We do not use cameras, cell phones, or any non-medical electronic devices in the Sanctuary on the Shabbat. Further, it is customary not to applaud during the service.

The entire Shabbat morning service lasts about one and a half hours. Although the service is sufficiently informal that you may go in and out of the Sanctuary during services, please try not to do so when the congregation is standing, the Ark is open, during the Torah reading itself, or during the drasha (sermon). If

you find it necessary to go in or out, please do so during breaks in the reading of the Torah or, in general, when the Ark is closed.

Special Life Cycle Events

While Shabbat itself is a celebration, Shabbat services also provide a spiritual setting for the congregation to mark special occasions in the lives of its members. On Shabbat we celebrate joyous life-cycle events (s'machot), such as the birth and naming of an infant, or the occasion of being called up to the Torah prior to one's wedding, an Aufruf.

The event most frequently celebrated during our Shabbat services is the Bar (m.)/Bat (f.) Mitzvah. Bar/Bat Mitzvah, translated literally as son/daughter of the commandment, refers to the age (usually 13 for boys and girls) at which, according to tradition, a Jewish person leaves childhood behind and is recognized as an adult member of the Jewish community. From that moment on, the individual is understood to be responsible for his or her conduct and to be obligated by the mitzvot, the religiously binding commandments, both ethical and ritual. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony is an initiation rite that marks the young person's transition into his/her new status.

In recent times some Jews who did not celebrate the Bar /Bat Mitzvah at the traditional age have chosen to celebrate this life cycle event as adults. Also, among some Jews, a person who has reached the age of 83 will customarily celebrate a second bar mitzvah, under the logic that a "normal" lifespan is 70 years, so that an 83-year-old can be considered 13 in a second lifespan. This practice has become increasingly common.

The Shabbat Service

Traditionally, Jewish services are conducted three times a day – morning, afternoon, and evening – seven days a week. Shabbat begins at sundown Friday evening. On Shabbat, the biblically ordained day of rest, the morning service is longer and is enriched by additional psalms, by an extensive reading from the Bible, and by participatory congregational singing. (It is not our congregation's practice to include Musaf in our prayers.)

“The Shabbat,” writes Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, “is the day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world... The seventh day is like a palace in time . . . , not a date but an atmosphere.” Shabbat services are intended to help us enter into that atmosphere.

The service is conducted partly in Hebrew, the historical language of the Jewish people. By praying in Hebrew, we reinforce our connection with all Jews and with our ancestors. Shabbat services here are led by members of our congregation and our Cantor David Bentley. These services are similar to those conducted in synagogues all over the world, with prayers that Jews have recited for centuries.

Many of the prayers are chanted or sung, enhancing the beauty of the service. The prayer leader and the congregation face the Ark. Whenever the Ark is open, congregants rise, out of respect for the sacred and honoured contents of the Torah scrolls within.

The organization of the service dates from the early Middle Ages. The prayers are derived from several sources, some of which can be traced back to antiquity. The sources include the Torah of Moses (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible), the Psalms of David, and writings from subsequent centuries up to the present.

Friday evening Shabbat service

Shabbat services begin on Friday evening with the lighting of the Shabbat candles (Hadlakat neiros), followed by the Kabbalat Shabbat, the mystical prelude to Shabbat services composed by 16th century Kabbalists. This Hebrew term literally means "receiving the Sabbath". Kabbalat Shabbat is composed of six Psalms representing the six week-days. Next comes the poem Lecha Dodi, composed by Solomon ha-Levi

Alkabetz in the mid-1500's. It is based on the words of the Talmudic sage Hanina: "Come, let us go out to meet the Queen Sabbath" (Talmud Shabbat 119a). Kabbalat Shabbat is concluded by Psalms 92 and 93 (the recital of which constitute acceptance of the Shabbat and its obligations). The concluding Reader's Kaddish is then followed by the Maariv service.

The Shema section of the Friday night service, commencing with the Barechu (Praise to God) varies in some details from the weekday services — including in the different ending of the Hashkivenu prayer. We commemorate the Shabbat at this point with V'shameru. The custom to recite the biblical passage at this point has its origins in the Lurianic Kabbalah, and does not appear before the 16th century.

The Amidah / Tefilah (standing prayer) is abbreviated. The service then follows with the prayers for thanksgiving (Modim) peace (Shalom rav) and essence of the Tefilah (Mogei avot). Concluding prayers close the service with the Aleinu and the Mourner's Kaddish. Many synagogues end with the singing of Yigdal, a poetic adaptation of Maimonides' 13 principles of Jewish faith. Kiddush is recited in the synagogue following the conclusion of the service.

Our Friday evening Shabbat services are conducted as family services, with special reference to children, with the telling of an erev Shabbat story included in the middle of the service.

Saturday morning Shabbat service

The service is divided into four major parts – Morning blessings and p'sukei d'zimra; Shacharit service; Torah service and Concluding prayers. Additions or modifications may be introduced as appropriate.

1. **Morning blessings and p'sukei d'zimra** (passages of song) are a combination of private and synagogue prayers. P'sukei d'zimra is a preliminary service that draws from Psalms and other inspiring biblical songs of praise to God. These introductory prayers help worshippers enter into a prayerful and spiritual mode.

2. The **Shacharit service** (from the Hebrew *shachar*, meaning dawn) takes place daily. On Shabbat it is suitably changed and embellished to reflect the uniqueness of the day. The Shacharit service includes these special prayers:

- the Barechu, the call to worship;
- the Shema, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one", the core tenet of the Jewish faith, emphasizing the oneness of God; and
- the Amidah (also known as the Tefilah), the central prayer of Jewish worship, recited while standing.

3. **The Torah Service** has at its heart the reading of sacred biblical texts. A great deal of ceremony surrounds the Ark openings before and after the Torah reading. The Torah Service is a symbolic re-enactment each week of God's giving the Torah to the Jewish people on Mt. Sinai. The congregation rises and sings as the Torah – the biblical scroll – is carefully removed from the Ark and carried in a procession through the Sanctuary (Hakafah).

It is customary for everyone to face the Torah as it is paraded around. Congregants show reverence by touching their prayer books or the fringes of their prayer shawls (tallitot) to the scroll as it passes, and then kissing that which touched the Torah mantle. The Torah is returned to the bimah, placed on the reading table and rolled open to the passages appropriate for that particular Shabbat. After the reading is complete and the remainder of the Torah service concluded, a similar processional occurs as the scroll is returned to the Ark.

An authentic Torah is meticulously hand-written with a quill on a parchment scroll by a specially trained scribe / sofer (a technology that predates the codex or sewn book). Each adornment of the Torah scroll, including the decorative mantle, breastplate, pointer (yad) and crown, as well as the ceremony associated with the removal and the return of the scroll, from/to the Ark, testifies to its central role in Judaism. Across the centuries, Jews have believed that the Torah illuminates the human condition and provides the basis for the evolution of Jewish law. Jewish people have held that studying its text with diligence and care and following its instruction give life true meaning.

BPJC currently uses a printed Torah scroll, but is planning to obtain a hand-written one as soon as practicable.

The entire Torah – from the creation of the world, through the Exodus from Egypt, to the moment the Israelites reach the Promised Land - is read on an annual cycle, beginning shortly after the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah). The readings follow the order of the Torah scroll, with a specific and often lengthy portion (a parsha) designated for each week of the year. Each parsha is named by one of the first significant words in the first verse. Jewish calendars list the weekly readings. Thus the same portion of the Torah is read each Shabbat in synagogues around the world.

The weekly parsha is divided into seven major sections, plus a repeated reading of the last several verses, the maftir, which serves as a prelude to the Haftarah, a selection from the prophetic writings of the Bible. Our custom / minchag is to usually read three smaller sections from the parsha.

The public reading of each section is preceded and followed by special blessings. It is considered an honour to recite these blessings. Any Jew who has reached the age of adulthood as defined by Jewish law may be called up for this honour. It is known as an “aliyah”, which means “going up” to the bimah.

Ancient Hebrew is written in consonants only. The biblical text in the hand-written Torah scroll does not contain vowel markings, punctuation, or the prescribed musical notation (trope). Consequently, reading from the Torah requires much preparation. The Talmud specifies that the Torah be read in “musical and sweet tones”, so the Torah is not just read but it is chanted or sung. However, as most of our services are led by a Lay Leader, you may hear the Torah being ‘read’ if the reader is not familiar with a recognised trope.

During the Torah reading there may be a functionary, the Gabbai, who stands to the side of the reading table and supervises the reading. In addition to distributing the honours, the Gabbai ensures that the scroll is read correctly. Since it is considered to be God’s word that is inscribed in the scroll, the accuracy of the public reading must be assured. The Gabbai introduces each reading by calling up the person/s to be honoured with the aliyah for that reading. At the conclusion of each section, an individual blessing is conferred on the honoree/s.

At the conclusion of the Torah reading the person honoured with Hagbahah (lifting) raises the scroll aloft, enabling the congregation to view the Torah script. The congregation rises and responds in Hebrew, “This is the Torah which Moses set before the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 4:44) by the hand of Moses according to the command of God (Numbers 9:23).”

The person honoured with Gelilah (rolling), often a child or children, dresses the Torah, covering it with its mantle and adorning it with the breastplate, pointer, and crown.

[The Haftarah](#)

After the Torah reading, the special Haftarah for that Shabbat is read. This prescribed selection from the Prophets usually contains a clear thematic link to the Torah reading or the liturgical season.

[Special Prayers](#)

Before returning the Torah to the Ark, we recite three prayers – for our congregation, for our nation and for Jews everywhere (the people of Israel).

[Drasha / D’var Torah \(sermon\)](#)

After the Torah Service the service leader usually addresses the congregation, offering thoughts, insights and questions that have emerged out of study of the sacred texts associated with this Shabbat. When there is a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, the young person delivers the address.

4. Concluding prayers close the service with the Aleinu and the Mourner’s Kaddish. The Aleinu refers to a time when idolatry will have vanished from our world and God will be acknowledged by all humanity, sometimes considered a prelude to the messianic age. Kaddish is a prayer which expresses the desire for, and belief in, such a time and is recited in memory of those who have died. The Mourner’s Kaddish contains no mention of death. Its recitation affirms faith in God and in life, even in the face of death. A closing song or hymn such as Adon Olam (“Lord of the World”) is then sung.

5. **Additions or modifications** are introduced on several Shabbats. For example, on the Shabbat prior to each new Jewish month, a special prayer, Birkhat HaChodesh, is chanted for the new moon. Moreover, on a Shabbat coinciding with certain festive days there are notable changes, indicated at appropriate points in the siddur.

Those special days are:

- Shabbat Rosh Chodesh, the start of a new Jewish calendar month,
- the Pilgrimage Holidays: Pesach (Passover), Shavuot (Pentecost) , and Sukkot (Tabernacles), and
- other special observances such as Purim, Chanukah, Tisha b' Av (ninth of Av), Yom HaShoah (Holocaust) and Yom Haatzmaut (Independence).

For the High Holy Days (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), whether they occur on Shabbat or a weekday, we use a different prayer book entirely, there being extensive changes in the service.

Kiddush

When the service is over, it is customary to exchange greetings of “Shabbat shalom” (a peaceful Shabbat) or, in Yiddish, “Gut Shabbos” (good Shabbat). All present are invited to remain for Kiddush, where after blessings over wine and challah, the special braided bread, we join together for some refreshment, to which the congregation and visitors are invited.

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