

# The Etz Chaim Guide for Visitors

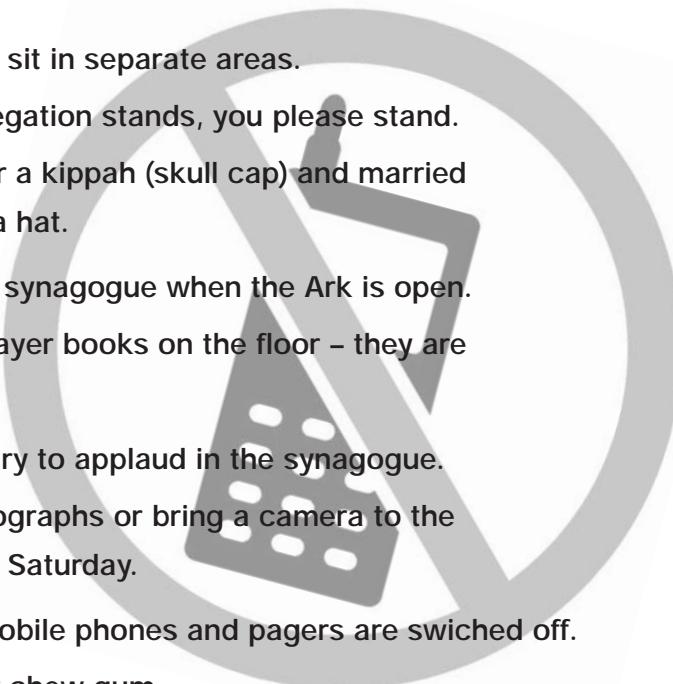
## Shalom and welcome!

WE HOPE you have an enjoyable experience during your visit to the Etz Chaim Synagogue. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the service in an Orthodox synagogue, we hope you will find this little booklet useful and informative. Our aim is to help you understand what happens, how you should dress for the occasion and what to do when you get here.

And remember, if you are not sure, please ask – but be aware that during some sections of the service no speaking is allowed and you may have to wait awhile for an answer.

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## First, a few rules . . .

- Men and women sit in separate areas.
  - When the congregation stands, you please stand.
  - Men should wear a kippah (skull cap) and married women wear a hat.
  - Do not leave the synagogue when the Ark is open.
  - Never put the prayer books on the floor – they are holy books.
  - It is not customary to applaud in the synagogue.
  - Never take photographs or bring a camera to the synagogue on Saturday.
  - Please ensure mobile phones and pagers are switched off.
  - Do not smoke or chew gum.
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# What to wear

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**IT IS CUSTOMARY** for people to cover their heads as a sign of respect for G-d. Men wear a kippah (skullcap) and married women wear a hat or scarf.

A limited number of skullcaps are available for non-Jews who are guests. Wearing one is a sign of respect and not at all inappropriate for people who are not Jewish.

Men should wear a lounge suit and a tallit (prayer shawl) which has special ritual fringes (called tzitzit) on the corners. The Torah commands Jews to wear fringes on the corners of their garments as a reminder of G-d's commandments.

Non-Jewish men are not required to wear a tallit, and if offered one should say a polite 'no thanks'.

Women should wear smart suits, dresses or skirts which cover the elbows and fall to below the knee. Trousers should not be worn by women in the synagogue.

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# What time should we arrive?

**IN A TRADITIONAL** Shabbat (Saturday) morning service, which often lasts for three hours, many people do not arrive the moment the service begins.

The early sections of the service include prayers intended to be said at home upon awakening, and songs intended to cultivate the mood and mindset for prayer. Thus people filter in throughout these early sections of the service.

Guests do not need to arrive from the beginning of the service on Shabbat. The service starts at 9.15am, and we would suggest that you arrive no later than 10am.

As you approach the synagogue (usually at the main entrance) you may notice security staff. If stopped or questioned please be courteous.

Men sit downstairs and ladies upstairs. As you walk in the main entrance, men turn sharp left and enter through the first set of swing doors and take the second swing doors to the right. Women go up the staircase and through the double doors to the ladies gallery.

Cloakrooms (where coats can be left) and toilets are to the right on entering the building.

# Inside the Etz Chaim



**WHEN YOU** enter the synagogue, you will see the Ark on the eastern wall.

It contains the Sifrei Torah, parchment scrolls on which the Torah (Five Books of Moses) is written. The Ark has a curtain and often doors, as well.

Suspended over the Ark is the "Ner Tamid" (eternal light). You will find a Ner Tamid in front of every Ark in every synagogue throughout the world.

Every synagogue in the world is oriented facing towards Jerusalem.

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# About the service

**MANY** of the prayers are sung, music is a natural human language for prayer. Some prayers are recited privately and silently, others communally. For some prayers we stand, because of their importance, and for some we sit.

It is appropriate for all visitors to stand when the congregation stands, and sits when the congregation sits.

The raised platform from which the Torah is read is called the bima (meaning 'high place'). We read the Torah from an elevated platform to signify our respect for its holiness.

To enhance your experience, you might like to read the English translations of some of the prayers in the prayer books you will find in the synagogue.

# Who's who . . .



## Rabbi

**RABBI** means 'teacher', in our communities his role includes preaching from the pulpit, teaching classes, and counselling.

The Rabbi will often represent the congregation to the wider community, officiate at life-cycle events, and render decisions concerning Jewish legal matters.

## Minister/Cantor

**IN MOST** services some prayers are said by everyone, and some are said aloud by the leader of the service. Services for larger congregations will be led by a Chazan.

The Chazan (Cantor) is specially trained in the art of Jewish music and liturgy for this role. In our synagogue, the Chazan is also the Minister who, on occasions, addresses the congregation and also prepares boys for their Barmitzva. This involves teaching them the order of service and various rituals associated with synagogue and home.

## Wearing of a Kippah/Yarmulke

**IT IS CUSTOMARY** for male Jews to wear a head covering when praying. Many Jews wear a head covering whenever they are awake, with the exceptions of bathing and swimming. This is worn out of respect for G-d, and as a sign of recognition that there is something greater and above us. It is called a kippah, which literally means 'dome' or 'cupola.' The Yiddish word is yarmulke. The kippah also serves as a symbol of Jewish identity and loyalty.

# Now read all about it

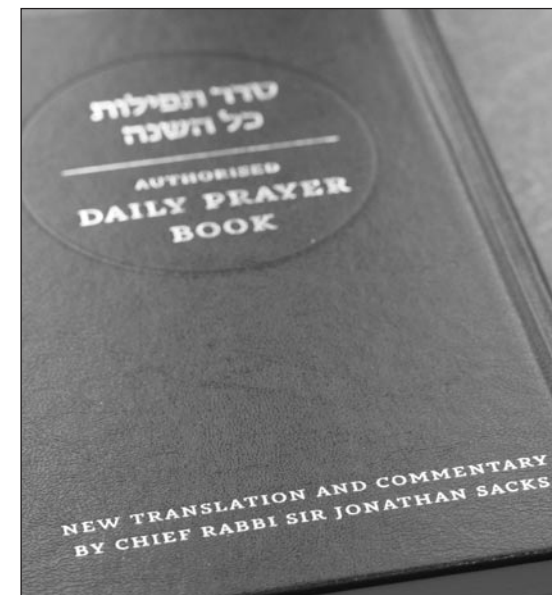
## The Siddur and the Chumash

**TWO BOOKS** are used during the service: the siddur (prayer book) and the Chumash (a printed edition of the Torah).

The term 'siddur' is derived from the Hebrew "order" because the prayers are recited in a prescribed order. The prayer book developed over the course of more than 2,000 years

A printed edition of the Torah, called a Chumash, is used when the Torah is read, so that the congregation can follow along with the reading. Most have the Hebrew text with an English translation printed in facing columns. Below this you will often find a line-by-line commentary giving further interpretations of the text.

Both the siddur and the Chumash are considered sifrei kodesh (holy books) because they contain the Name of G-d written in Hebrew. They should never be placed on the floor or left sitting open and unattended on the chair. If a volume is dropped accidentally, it should be picked up immediately and it is customary to kiss it.



## Torah/Five Books of Moses



**DURING** the service when we read from the Torah (Five Books of Moses) we use a parchment scroll written by hand called a 'Sefer Torah' (Book of the Torah). The elaborate decorated cover highlights its importance.

# Reading from the Torah

**EVERY JEWISH** prayer service contains a study segment. For Jews, study is a form of worship.

On Shabbat, we read from the Torah in public. The Torah is divided into sections or portions, with one or two assigned to each week of the year. In this way, we cycle through the entire Torah in a year. Each Torah portion is approximately three or four biblical chapters long. A number of people will be honoured by being 'called up' (Hebrew: aliyah) to bless the Torah whilst it is being read. When the reading is completed, the congregation will be asked to stand as the Torah is lifted for everyone to see the section that has just been read.

A Haphtarah reading follows the Torah reading. The Haphtarah portions are passages from the books of the prophets that are chosen because they are thematically related to the Torah portion. There is a Haphtarah portion assigned to each Torah portion.

Following the Torah and Haphtarah readings, we may have a D'var Torah, or sermon, when the Rabbi gives an explanation or commentary on the Torah.



# Children in the Synagogue

**CHILDREN** are welcome in the synagogue. They should not be expected to sit for hours throughout a long service. It is perfectly acceptable for them walk out to stretch their legs every now and then.

Non-Jewish parents of children invited to the service are welcome to come into the synagogue and stay with them. Remember that men and women sit separately. You are also welcome to attend the Kiddush after the service.

It is quite acceptable to drop your child near the entrance, for example, just round the corner on Nursery Lane, and to pick him or her up after service, in the same place.

If the child brings a mobile phone this should be switched off during the service and used discreetly afterwards to call for a pick up. The best place to call from is outside the synagogue premises on Harrogate Road. Please don't use a phone inside the synagogue premises.

# Reception after the service

**THERE** will be a reception served after the service. On Friday evenings, it is called Oneg Shabbat (the joy of Shabbat)

On Saturday there will be a Kiddush. This will include wine, soft drinks and snacks. The whole congregation is invited.

In our congregation, in the Saturday morning Kiddush, the appropriate blessings are recited in the reception hall. Please wait for the blessing to be recited before drinking or eating. Kiddush will be in one of the reception halls so please help yourself and enjoy!





## If there's a meal at the synagogue

**A FORMAL** meal in Judaism requires that we first bless and then eat a small portion of bread and salt. For this purpose there will be small loaves on each table.

Before this, guests will be invited to wash their hands. It is customary to remain silent after washing the hands – until the bread and salt are eaten. Hand washing and the accompanying blessing are for spiritual purposes only and not related at all to physical cleanliness.

Non-Jewish guests don't participate in the hand washing, but once the ritual has been performed, all are welcome to have a piece of bread and enjoy the rest of the meal.

At the end of the meal we will recite a group of prayers called 'Grace after Meals' referred to in Yiddish as 'Benching' (Blessing).

These prayers, with English translation, can be found in the small booklets on each table.

# The importance of Shabbat

**SHABBAT** (Saturday) has a special significance in Judaism. It is a day of rest from the routine of everyday life which lasts from dusk on Friday to nightfall on Saturday.

In recognition of G-d's resting from the act of Creation, Jews undertake no creative work of any kind on Shabbat. This includes carrying, handling money, and writing, the use of electrical or electronic devices, smoking and driving or riding in a car. Shabbat is not a day of idleness but rather a separate space for prayer, family and study.

As we can't carry anything to and from the synagogue, cards and gifts are not brought on Saturday morning. The barmitzvah boy will be delighted to accept them before his big day.

Non-Jews are not restricted from driving to the synagogue. However, as the car park is closed, please park legally. It is possible to 'drop-off' passengers around the corner from the synagogue on Nursery Lane, but please do not park outside the synagogue on Harrogate Road.

The Reading of the Law usually begins shortly after 10am and the barmitzvah boy will play his role in this part of the service.

The prayer book (Siddur) containing the prayers and readings are available in the synagogue for all to use, and contain English translations. Please feel free to look through it and read the translations. They contain all of the service, apart from the weekly Readings.

The Readings are taken from the Torah and Haftarah, and can be found in a separate book, the Chumash or Pentateuch (Greek meaning five books).



The Sabbath service is made up of four parts:

- Morning Service (Shacharit)
- Reading of the Law (The Torah and Haftarah)
- Rabbi's Sermon
- Additional Service (Musaph)

# What have we learned so far?

IF YOU'VE found the previous pages of interest, then why not spend a few minutes to see if you can remember what we've written about? Test yourself with these questions – answers at the foot of the page.

1. What is the name of the male head-covering?

2. What time should you arrive at the Synagogue on Shabbat?

3. Name one of the two books used during the service.

4. Where is the Kiddush held after the service?

5. On entering the Synagogue, what will you see on the Eastern wall?

6. Before the meal, we eat a small portion of what?

7. Saturday is considered to be a day of what?

8. Why shouldn't you bring a camera to the Synagogue on the Sabbath?

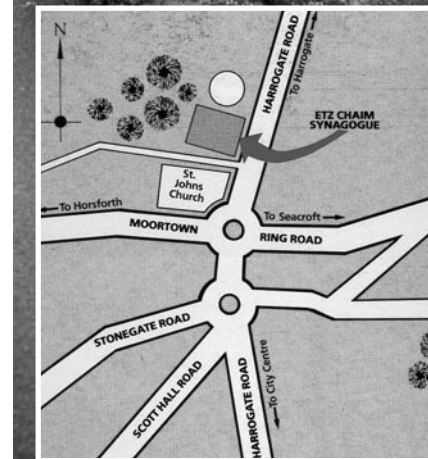
9. What is the more common name for a Rabbi?

10. Every Synagogue is orientated towards facing which holy city?

**Answers:** 1. Kippah or yarmulke; 2. No later than 10am; 3. Siddur or Chumash; 4. Reception room; 5. The Ark; 6. Bread and salt; 7. Rest; 8. You can't take photographs; 9. Teacher; 10. Jerusalem.

# Finally, here's how to find us . . .

Etz Chaim Synagogue and Reuben Vincent Hall is at:  
411 Harrogate Road,  
Leeds LS17 7BY  
(Next to St John's Church)  
Synagogue office:  
Leeds 0113 266 2214  
Website: [www.etzchaim.co.uk](http://www.etzchaim.co.uk)



Please note: The synagogue car park is closed on the Sabbath (sundown on a Friday to nightfall on a Saturday).

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