



ACADEMY
for JEWISH
RELIGION

RITUAL SKILLS HANDBOOK

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AJRSEM.ORG

I. INTRODUCTION

While the Academy for Jewish Religion recognizes multiple approaches to Jewish ritual and הלכה, it believes that effective spiritual leaders must be exposed to and gain competence in the full range of traditional rules and behaviors. Ritual Skills testing is meant to examine the student's assimilation of a range of those rules and behaviors, regardless of the student's own personal and professional religious preferences. These Ritual Skills include the ability to competently perform certain ritual recitations and actions, to be familiar with guiding others in certain life-cycle and religious activities and prayers, and to adequately discharge certain functions commonly held to be the responsibility of clergy. Perfection is certainly not expected; adequacy and competence are.

II. TESTING PROCEDURES

Ritual Skills testing will occur for two weeks each semester. In addition, students may test over the summer as scheduling with appropriate faculty members allows. This testing is open to all AJR students regardless of which year of study one is in at the moment.

III. TEXTS AND MATERIALS

A note on texts and materials from which the tests will be administered:

A. Prayers, procedures, ceremonies and prayer services

Any traditional סידור (ArtScroll, Koren, etc., Silverman, Sim Shalom, etc.) and/or traditional *bencher* (ברכור) (NCSY, B'Kol Echad, UJA-Fed., etc.). Traditional Rabbis' manuals include Goldin's *Hamadriskh* (Orthodox) and the RA's (Conservative) *Moreh Derekh*. At AJR, students are required to learn the traditional versions of prayers and rituals with the assumption that students will then consider whether and how they might adapt or change these.

B. Nusah

Regarding the musical aspects of *davenning*, any version of traditional nusah is acceptable for most prayers, and it is acceptable to demonstrate some texts in melody (ex. *Mi Khamokha*).

C. Cantillation

Students testing for regular (not High Holiday) Torah reading will be tested on the "scroll side" of the תיקון, (the side without vocalization or trope) for the brief passages designated. They will also be tested by the instructors at random passages for sight-reading with trope on the

vocalized side of the תיקון. Students need to bring a תיקון to the test. Students testing for הפטרה, אסתר, שיר השירים/קהלת/רות, and איכה will be tested by the instructors for sight-reading randomly-selected passages with trope on the vocalized side of the תיקון or תנ"ך. Students need to bring a תיקון or תנ"ך to the test.

D. Cantorial Requirements

Since cantorial students study and are tested on many Ritual Skills that involve chanting as a matter of course in their classes, they are only required to be tested on Ritual Skills listed in this handbook that are marked *Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement*. This applies also to ordained cantors who are students in the AJR Rabbinical Program.

IV. RITUAL SKILLS TIME LINE

The Ritual Skills program is divided into five units. All skills will be tested; there will not be “multiple choice” questions. The units must be completed as follows:

- ⇒ Unit *Alef* should be completed by the end of 14 credits.
- ⇒ Unit *Bet* should be completed by the end of 28 credits.
- ⇒ Unit *Gimmel* should be completed by the end of 42 credits.
- ⇒ Unit *Dalet* should be completed by the end of 56 credits.
- ⇒ Unit *Heh* should be completed by the end of the fall semester of the senior year.

V. TEST PARAMETERS AND EXPECTATIONS

The following short descriptions describe the parameters and expectations for each Ritual Skill on the list:

Unit *Alef*

ברכת המזון: שיר המעלות, זימון, and additions for ברית מילה; weddings (except for שבע ברכות, tested in Unit *Bet*); Singing/chanting the entire ברכת המזון. (*Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement*)

הבדלה: Chant from א-ל ישועתי thru the end; Gestures related to blessing on lights; Holding the cup; When is the wine drunk? Why? Differences between

synagogue and home הבדלה. (Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement)

Shabbat & Festival קידוש: Evening and morning; holding the cup; When is the wine drunk? Who drinks first? (Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement)

Torah Cantillation: Chant all sign groups in any combination; Chant these specific selections: Numbers 28:1-4 and 28:11-15 (ראש חודש). These will be chanted from the Torah scroll side of the תיקון; Chant randomly selected passages from vocalized side of תיקון; Blessings before and after an עליה; When is scroll opened and when is it closed? When is it covered? Students need to bring a תיקון to the test. (Rabbinic Requirement)

נוסח של קבלת שבת: Any 4 consecutive pages beginning with לכו נרננה; When does one stand, sit, turn around? (Rabbinic Requirement)

מעריב של שבת: Any 2 consecutive pages beginning with ברכו. Additionally, after the עמידה, chant ויכולו and the three passages that follow it, the ברכת מעין שבע. (Rabbinic Requirement)

שחרית של שבת: Any 5 consecutive pages in פסוקי דזמרה / ברכות השחר. Any 3 pages from end א-ל אדון thru צור ישראל; and any 3 pages in the *Shaharit Amidah* after the קדושה. (Rabbinic Requirement)

“Choreography” of שבת and Weekday Services – Where to stand, sit, and bow during traditional services, including during the עמידה for שבת and weekday services. (Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement)

Donning of

תפילין and טלית : The order of the donning and the blessings; עטיפה. (Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement)

נטילת ידיים: Proper procedure and blessing. (Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement)

Unit Bet

Haftarah Cantillation: Testing on randomly selected passages; Blessings before and after the הפטרה. Students need to bring a תנ"ך, to the test. (Rabbinic Requirement)

נוסח של מערים לחול: Any 4 consecutive pages beginning with ברכו (Rabbinic Requirement)

נוסח של שחרית לחול: Any 5 consecutive pages פסוקי דזמרה / ברכות השחר / ישתבח (note shift in *nusah* from חול של פסוקי דזמרה של חול and different from *nusah* של שבת thru יוצר אור , and any additional 5 pages in the *Shaharit Amidah*. (Rabbinic Requirement)

נוסח של מנחה לחול: Daven all of מנחה , need not do a full repetition. General rules of when תחנון is recited or not; Which passage does one recite as נפילת אפים? What is that prayer posture? (Rabbinic Requirement)

קביעת מזוזה: Proper procedure and blessing; Found in Sim Shalom, original 1985 edition, on page 712. (Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement)

Where to Find: Knowledge of “where to find” the following תפילות and ברכות: ברכות הראייה , and ברכות השמיעה , תפילת הדרך (Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement)

Unit Gimmel

Cantillation of אסתר : Testing of randomly selected passages from the vocalized side of the תיקון. (Rabbinic Requirement)

נוסח של שחרית לשלוש רגלים: Beginning with הא-ל בתעצומות עוזך , and note differences when יום טוב coincides with שבת. Testing of randomly selected passages beginning with לעולם ה' ימלך (end of the קדושה) to end of the עמידה. (Rabbinic Requirement)

נוסח של מוסף לשלוש רגלים ולראש חודש: Any 4 pages in עמידה after the קדושה , plus אבות and גבורות for טל and גשם plus testing of randomly selected verses and passages from each of those פיוטים. (Rabbinic Requirement)

הלל: פסח for הודו ליהוה-ה / אנא יהוה-ה , opening/closing of 4 Psalms, ברכה ,; difference between “Full” הלל and “Half” הלל ; שבועות / סוכות (Rabbinic Requirement)

ארבעה מינים: Demonstration of the proper way to hold the 4 species using simple props (a roll of paper for a לולב , a ball of paper for ארתרוג , etc.); recite the ברכה ; (the gestures and when they are done) by the prayer leader and by the congregation during הלל. Students should bring these materials to the test. Students will be asked to describe the procedure of assembling the three species (not including the ארתרוג) if they all had come separately. (Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement)

Unit Dalet

Cantillation of מגילת איכה : Students will be tested by the instructors at random

passages for sight-reading with trope on the vocalized side of the תיקון. Students need to bring a תיקון or תנ"ך to the test. Note that the cantillation of chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 uses the same melodies for each of the tropes, but that the melody is different for chapter 3. Students must be able to demonstrate knowledge of both melodies. (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

Cantillation of the remaining מגילות: Ability to chant randomly selected passages from

using a text that contains vocalization and trope. Students need to bring a קהלת / רות or תיקון to the test. (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

מעריב לימים נוראים: Any 5 consecutive pages beginning with ברכו. Basic *nusah* only, not melodies for פיוטים. (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

קריאת שם: Naming of a child at a מילה or ברית בת (for conversion, see "Conversion at מקוה.") (*Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement*)

שבע ברכות: For a Wedding Ceremony and for a meal at the wedding and first week of marriage. (*Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement*)

א-ל מלא רחמים: Chant or read this prayer fluently and a Psalm for a Funeral / זיכור; When is it not recited at a funeral, and what is chanted in its place? Chant or read this alternate prayer. (*Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement*)

לוח בית הכנסת: Ability to understand the instructions for conducting a service on one of the following days – שבת בראשית (evening and daytime), any day during חנוכה (morning service), evening service for the First Night of פסח; determining dates of החודש. Rabbinic students will use any Hebrew version of the לוח and cantorial students will use any English version. (*Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement*)

כתובה: Ability to fill out a traditional כתובה with the help of a traditional Rabbi's Manual (*Moreh Derekh*, the Rabbinical Assembly manual, is recommended. It can be found on the reserve shelf of the AJR Library); ability to read כתובה aloud. (*Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement*)

"Basic Gabbai:" Proper procedures for: calling people to the Torah on שבת and weekdays, reciting לחולה מי שברך, reciting הגומל ברכת, reciting לעולה מי שברך, and הגבהה / גלילה. (*Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement*)

Unit Heh

שחרית לימים נוראים: Any 3 consecutive pages in השחר ברכות / פסוקי דזמרה, plus any 3

pages from ברכו onwards. Basic *nusah* only, not melodies for פיוטים. (Rabbinic Requirement)

Cantillation for ימים נוראים: Students will be tested by the instructors at random passages from the Torah readings for שחרית and ראש השנה for sight-reading with trope on the vocalized side of the תיקון. Students need to bring a מחזור or תנ"ך, תיקון to the test. Application of the cantillation tune to calling up עליות. (Rabbinic Requirement)

Ability to tie ציצית: Any strings can be used for demonstration. Diagrams from שער הציונים by R. R. Feldman, are available in as an appendix to the online version of this document found on the AJR website. Students may also consult *The Jewish Catalog* (called *The First Jewish Catalog* when it was reissued), pp. 52-53. Available in the Reserve Section of the AJR library, #BM 700.S48. A number of videos are also available on YouTube (Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement)

Ability to tie and adjust תפילין, knots: The square or *dalet* knot of the Head תפילין; the *Yud* knot of the Hand תפילין; the student should bring a pair of תפילין, whose straps can be used for demonstration; Knots to be made will be additional to the knots already present on the תפילין – no knots should be untied from the existing set. Students should demonstrate the ability to adjust knots for different size heads and arms. Diagrams from שער הציונים by R. R. Feldman are available in an Appendix to this document. A number of videos are also available on YouTube. Students may use charts while being tested. (Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement)

Conversion at מקוה: Knowledge of the procedure for conversion at a מקוה for both male and female, adult and child; (Cf. מורה דרך, the Rabbinical Assembly manual. It can be found on the reserve shelf of the AJR Library). (Rabbinic Requirement)

שופר תקיעת סדר: Ability to identify the three different notes of שופר and their proper order תקיעת שופר (which follows the הפטרה on the ראש השנה). (Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement)

שטר מכירת חמץ: Knowledge of where to find it and the ability to fill it out. (Rabbinic Requirement)

מצבה: Ability to read a מצבה, including ראשי תיבות (For examples cf. *Hamadrikh* (An Orthodox rabbis' manual that is found on the reserve shelf of the AJR Library), pp. 246-252.) (Rabbinic/Cantorial Requirement)