

It is also inappropriate to attend a synagogue wearing religious symbols. In traditional synagogues women should wear dresses with sleeves and men should wear slacks and shirts. Some synagogues are tolerant of women in slack suits; others are not. Check the local policy before sallying forth.

POSTURE AT PRAYER

Jews pray while standing, bowing, swaying, and sitting. Prostration is only observed on Yom Kippur ó the Day of Atonement. The important thing is to stand when the congregation stands and to sit when the congregation is seated. However, just as Jews will not kneel in a church so to is it acceptable for non-Jewish persons to remain seated throughout the service. You should, however, stand when the Ark is opened and the Torah Scrolls are being carried in procession.

Collections

All synagogues have a box called either a Kuppah or a Pushka in which visitors may leave donations (called Tzedakah or charity) on weekdays only. Taking money on the Sabbath is forbidden.

STRUCTURE OF THE SERVICE

There are three daily services:

1. the *Arvit/Ma'ariv* or Evening Service,
2. the *Shacharit* or Morning Service,
3. and the *Minchah* or Afternoon Service.

Services, especially on Shabbat mornings, are somewhat longer than those of other faiths and can last more than three hours. Services include readings from the *Torah* (Saturday, Monday and Thursday mornings, Saturday afternoons and Festivals) and the *Haftarah* from the Prophets. The synagogue service is almost entirely chanted and the Torah readings are sung. There is usually a *Drashah* (sermon) given and sometimes Torah *Shiurim* (Torah Lectures) are given before or after the service.

LANGUAGE OF THE SERVICE

Jewish prayers are in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages and, as we pray as a community, are almost entirely in the plural. An English translation of each prayer follows it or is placed on the page opposite the Hebrew/Aramaic text. Some prayers may be repeated in English. All prayers are directly from the Tanach, the Talmud or the *Zohar*. (The Kabbalist Text)

**Queensland Forum of
Christians, Jews and
Muslims**

**Entering a
SYNAGOGUE**



Synagogues (sometimes called Temples or Shuls) differ from community to community in many respects: dress, seating, the level of decorum expected, and the extent to which they observe—and expect members and visitors to observe—traditional Jewish law.

WELCOME AND ENTERING

Synagogues have an official called a **Shammash** or **Gabbai** who will welcome you, find you seating and provide you with a **Siddur** (prayer book), a **TANAK/Chumash** and a **kippah** (skull cap) if you are a male. In Orthodox synagogues, men and women sit separately and often enter the sanctuary through separate entrances so visitors need to find the appropriate sections and entrances for each gender. You may notice that as people enter the synagogue they touch and kiss an object placed in the upper right doorpost. This is a **mezuzah** required by a commandment in Deuteronomy 6:9.

The letters TANACH stand for the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible ó **Torah** (the first five books of the Bible) **Nevi'im** (the prophetic readings) and **Ketuvim** (the writings eg Chronicles, Job, Proverbs etc.) In a synagogue the Torah is written on scrolls and printed in a book called a Chumash or Pentateuch (meaning five books). A portion from the Torah is sung in Hebrew and the congregation can either follow it in Hebrew or English in their Chumash.

LAYOUT AND SEATING

The service is conducted from a raised platform called a **Bimah**. This is usually placed in the centre of the building. The **Bimah** faces the **Aron HaKodesh** (Holy Ark) housing the **Torah Scrolls**. (Five Books of Moses - Genesis to Deuteronomy) The **Aron HaKodesh** always faces Jerusalem, the direction of our prayer. The attitude to artistic decoration in the synagogue varies; however, the human form is never depicted.

In some synagogues you can sit wherever you like. If you are there for a *simcha* (joyous occasion) such as a bar/bat mitzvah, an usher may show you to the area where the family and relatives are sitting. If it is an Orthodox synagogue, remember that men and women sit in separate areas. In a few synagogues the regular members have customary seats. Sometimes there are seat plaques to indicate such seats as owned in accordance with the **Shulchan Arukh**, (Code of Jewish Law) which requires one **“to fix a place for one’s prayers.” (OH90:19)**

DRESS CODE

When you enter a synagogue, put on a **kippah (sometimes called yarmulke)** if you are a male. Supplies are kept in the front entrance. Keep it on even during the **Kiddush** and/or meal that follows the service. (In some congregations, married women cover their hair as well by wearing a hat, a **tikhel** ó a scarf, or a **sheitl** ó a wig.) The use of head coverings is based on ancient practice as found in the Talmud **“Cover your head so that reverence for G-d be upon you.” (Shabbat 156b)**

In many synagogues men (and women) wear a **tallit** (prayer shawl) during the morning service (both Shabbat and weekdays). On weekdays, men (and in some communities, women also) wear **tefillin** (phylacteries) for the Morning Service. The requirement to wear a **tallit** and **tefillin** is for persons of the Jewish faith only.

For all occasions when you enter a synagogue you should dress appropriately. It is considered inappropriate to approach G-d when you are not carefully attired.