

TORAH SERVICE IN WOMEN'S *TEFILLAH* GROUPS

Compiled by Pam Greenwood and Liat Greenwood

There are many different women's *tefillah* groups around the world, with significant variations in practice. The most variable area concerns the blessings women recite before and after their *aliyot*. Many women's *tefillah* groups frame the Torah service as *Limmud Torah* (Torah Learning), which means that there is no set halakhic formula for the blessings. As the Torah service is often the centerpiece of the service, we are trying to demystify it and have chosen to share some of those variations here. This is not a comprehensive "how-to" guide, or discussion of all of the different practices of a women's *tefillah* group. If you are starting a new women's *tefillah* practice, please consult your local *posek* or *poseket* about how to decide which variation to use. For more information about any of the practices in this document, please contact wtg@jofa.org.

In Spring 2015, JOFA surveyed women's *tefillah* groups to better understand their variety of approaches for conducting the Torah Service. A summary of responses from 23 of those groups follows.

- When asked how each group refers to the Torah Service, 5 groups responded that their service is called a *Limmud Torah* (Torah Learning), 15 responded that their service is called a *Kriyat HaTorah* (Torah Reading) and two reported that they use either term. One group frames the service as *Limmud Torah* by having the congregation recite [Birkat HaTorah](#) together before reading from the Torah.
- In all but two of the groups, a woman approaches the Torah and recites a blessing or Biblical passage before the reading. In many groups -- but not all -- the woman recites a closing blessing/passage as well. The following summary is not exhaustive but includes many of the diverse practices and patterns which emerged from this survey.

Standard *Aliyot* (without *Barchu*)

- The [standard *aliyot* without *Barchu*](#) are recited by women called to the Torah. (10 groups)
- Women who are being called to the Torah are reminded beforehand to omit the recitation of [Birkat HaTorah](#) during the morning service. (1 group)
- A woman recites the standard *aliyah* without *Barchu* but she omits *shem v' malchut* (*Hashem elokeinu melech ha'olam*) if she has already said *Birkat HaTorah* that morning. (2 groups)

Alternatives to Standard Aliyot

- The blessing *Asher natan lanu...noten HaTorah* (i.e. the closing blessing included in a standard *aliyah*) is read by the woman when she first approaches the Torah. (1 group)
- The blessing *Baruch atah Hashem lamdeini chukecha* (*Tehillim* 119:2) is the most popular for alternative *aliyot*. It is used in a variety of ways -- either before or after the Torah reading -- often in combination with other passages. (6 groups)
- [As an alternative to the communal call and response format of the standard aliyah, the woman recites a passage from Tehillim 34:4 after she approaches the Torah; the congregation then responds with a passage from Tehillim 89:53, and the woman concludes with the blessing Lamdeini chukecha.](#) (1 group)
- [A woman who has not yet recited the Birkat HaTorah that morning will recite a standard aliyah, but a woman who has done so already will recite an alternate text ending with Lamdeini Chukecha.](#) (1 group)
- The woman recites *Birkat HaTorah* when she approaches the Torah. (1 group)
- A woman recites the passage *Torah tziva lanu Moshe morasha kehillat Yaakov* (*Devarim* 33:4) either before the *aliyah* (1 group) or after the *aliyah's* completion (1 group). *Torah tziva lanu Moshe* is included in a list of verses along with *Shema bni mussar avicha* (*Mishlei* 1:8) which is said after the morning *Birkat HaTorah*. Alternatively, a woman recites *Shema bni mussar avicha* after the completion of the *aliyah*. (1 group)
- A woman recites verses from *Ahava Rabba*, the text before *Shema*, prior to an *aliyah*. (2 groups) Two options are: *Avinu ha'av harachaman...talmud toratecha b'ahava* or *V'ha'er eineinu*.
- The woman recites the entire passage of *Torat Hashem temima* (*Tehillim* 19:8) after the completion of the *aliyah*. (2 groups) The woman adds a *yehi ratzon* afterwards.¹ (1 group)
- The woman recites *Baruch hamakom baruch hu* from the Passover Seder before the *aliyah* and the passage of *Baruch hu elokeinu she'baranu lichvodo* after the *aliyah*. (1 group)
- The woman recites [verses from the Simchat Torah Haftorah](#) before the *aliyah* is read. (1 group)
- A passage from *Divrei Hayamim I*, 29:10 is recited upon completing each reading.² (1 group)

¹ יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלוקינו ואלוקי אבותינו, שתהא תורתך אמנותינו בעולם הזה, ותהא עמנו לעולם הבא

² ברוך אתה ה' אלוקי ישראל אבינו מעולם ועד עולם

Alternatives to Aliyot

- The reading of the Torah is broken up by short Divrei Torah. (1 group that only meets on Simchat Torah)