

Jofa.

**International Conference on
Feminism and Orthodoxy**

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**So what HAPPENS
during the Torah reading?**

A Feminist Community Toolkit





Dear Friends,

We are thrilled to share Jofa's Feminist Community Toolkit, a practical, welcoming, and beautifully illustrated guide designed in collaboration with Dr. Talia Hurwich from Darkhei Noam to help you build and sustain a partnership-minyan style tefillah wherever you are. At Jofa, we believe that Jewish ritual life should be accessible, meaningful, and empowering for everyone. This toolkit is one more step in our ongoing effort to expand opportunities for full participation in Orthodox communities, grounded in halakhic integrity, feminist values and a deep love of avodat Hashem, worship of God.

Across the world, small groups of committed individuals are creating tefillah spaces that reflect their convictions: that women and men can share in ritual participation, that communities can be enhanced through greater inclusion, and that halakhic observance can be both rigorous and expansive. But too often, these efforts begin without clear guidance or without access to experienced mentors. This toolkit was created to bridge that gap.

Inside, you'll find a how-to map of the Torah-reading service demystified, step by step. We walk you through each role, from the gabbaim/gabbaiyot to the layners/Torah readers to those called for aliyot, using clear instructions and original illustrations by Jofa's Communications Director Sarah Small to make the process intuitive and unintimidating. Whether you are launching a new minyan, strengthening an existing one, or simply learning how partnership tefillah works, this guide is meant to be a companion you can return to again and again.

This printed booklet is designed to pair seamlessly with our Digital Toolkit, which includes audio recordings for leading key parts of the service. Together, these resources reflect our commitment to lowering barriers to participation. You do not need to live in a major city, belong to an established partnership minyan, or have prior Torah-reading experience to step into leadership. You only need interest, curiosity, and the desire to help build an inclusive Orthodox community.

We hope this toolkit empowers you to take the next step, whether that is being called up for an aliyah for the first time, laying from the Torah, organizing a Shabbat morning service, or fostering a space where the voices of all Jews are welcomed and valued. May your learning and your leadership inspire others to join you, your community, and Klal Yisrael in expanding opportunities for meaningful participation for all. Please feel free to reach out to us anytime at jofa@jofa.org with any questions or concerns.

**With gratitude and excitement,
The Jofa Team**

The Cast of Characters.

To understand what happens at the Bimah, we can break it down into four main groups:



The Gabbaim/Gabbaiyot

They call people up to the Torah, check the layner's reading and make corrections as needed, and lead in any misheberakhs. While it's not part of the halakhic requirements, gabbaim tend to similarly make announcements to help the congregation follow along, such as announce page numbers, tell people what to do when a notable portion of the Torah is read (e.g., Shirat haYam or saying "Chazak Chazak") or pause the reading to shush the congregation if the noise level is too high. There should always be two Gabbaim at the Bimah. If a Gabbai becomes a layner for an Aliyah or is an Oleh/Olah, a replacement is found to stand in their stead (who can theoretically at least read along in the Hebrew and correct any mispronunciations).



The Layners/Torah Readers

They have prepared the Torah reading in advance. On a normal Shabbat, the weekly Parsha is divided into seven segments or Aliyot (singular: Aliyah), with a portion of the final Aliyah set aside to be repeated as a "Maftir." On special Shabbatot (e.g., Shabbat Rosh Chodesh, Shabbat Chanukah, Shabbat Parshat Zakhor), a special Maftir Aliyah is read from a different Torah Scroll, creating an eighth Aliyah that must be learned by a layner.



The Olim/Olot

The people who say brachot for each Aliyah. On a regular Shabbat, there are at least eight Aliyot for people to be called up to – each of the seven Aliyot, and the Maftir. In many congregations, the Maftir Aliyah is given to the person reading the Haftorah.

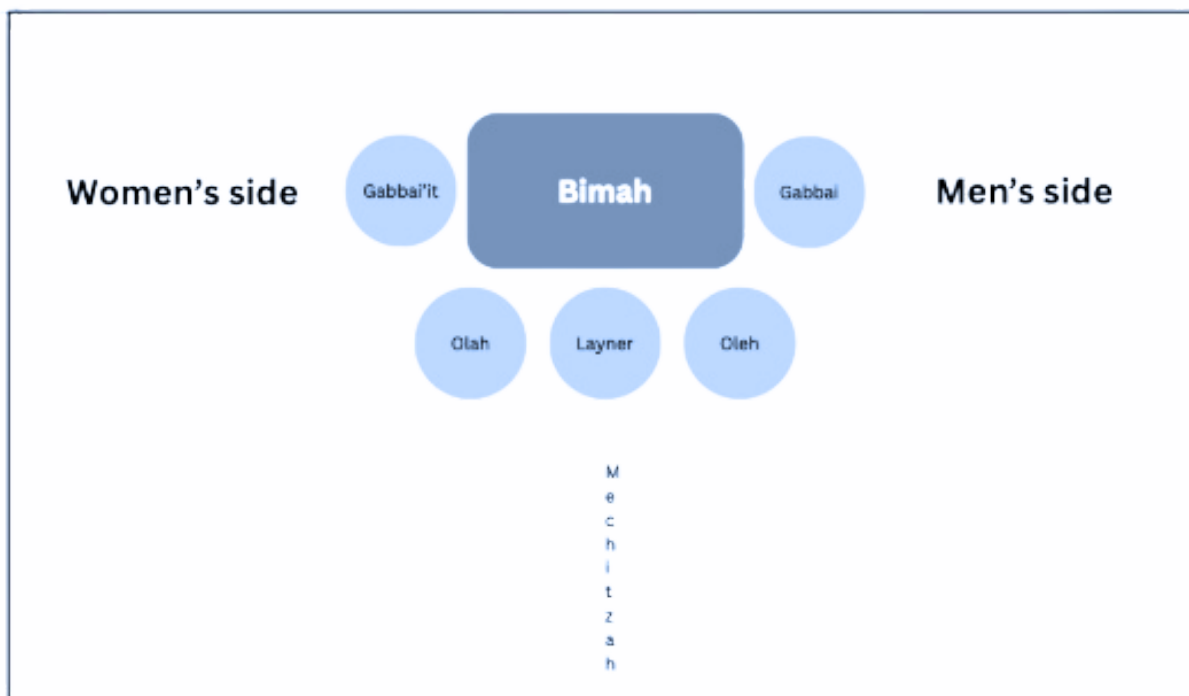


Magbi'ah and Golel/Golelet

At the conclusion of reading the Torah, immediately prior to reading the Haftorah, the Torah scroll is lifted by the Magbi'ah and then rolled, wrapped, and adorned by the Golel/Golelet. Normally, the Gabbaim are on hand to help these people as needed.



**Excluding the *Magbi'ah* and *Golel/Golelet*,
the people are arranged on the *Bimah* as follows**
(assuming that the *Bimah* is in the front of the room):



The Order in Which the *Torah* and *Haftorah* Reading Unfolds: An Overview.

In brief, here is the order:

Welcome the crowd, announce page numbers.

Call up *KOHEN*, read *Aliyah #1*

Call up *LEVI*, read *Aliyah #2*

Call up *SHLISHI/SHLISHIT*, read *Aliyah #3*

Call up *REVI'I/REVI'IT*, read *Aliyah #4*

Call up *CHAMISHI/CHAMISHIT*, read *Aliyah #5*

Call up *SHISHI/SHISHIT*, read *Aliyah #6*

Call up *SHVI'I/SHVI'IT*

Say *Misheberakh* prayers for IDF, the Sick, Hostages, etc.

Read *Aliyah #7*

Say *HALF KADDISH*

Call up *MAFTIR/MAFTIRAH*, read *Maftir Aliyah*

Call up *HAGBAH* and *GELILAH*

Announce pages for the *HAFTORAH*

Say the opening prayers for the *HAFTORAH*

Read the *HAFTORAH*

Say the concluding prayers for the *HAFTORAH*

המלך אחשורוש על כסא מלכותו
יורה בשנת שלוש למלכו עשה מ
י חיל פרס ומדי הפרתמים וש
תמו את אשר כבוד מלכותו ואת



Let's get into the details.

After the Torah is taken out of the *aron kodesh*, it is placed on the *Bimah* and the cover is removed. The *gabbaim* check that the Torah is wound to the correct location. The *gabbaim* welcome the congregation and announce the week's *parsha* along with the page numbers. If there's something special about this particular *Shabbat*, such as celebrating a *Simcha*, or it's *Shabbat Machar Chodesh*, now is the time to do so.



The Kohen Aliyah is called up and read

In a partnership *minyan*, this Aliyah is given to a male *Kohen* – not a *Bat Kohen*. *Bnot Kohen* and *Bnot Levi* in partnership *minyanim* have the status of *Yisrael*, so they can be called up whenever a *Yisrael* is called up.

Different communities have different practices when there are no *Kohanim*. Some have a *Levi* take the first Aliyah instead of a *Kohen* and, if possible, give a *Levi* the second (“*Levi*”) Aliyah. Other communities give both the *Kohen* and *Levi* Aliyah to *Yisraelim*/*Bnot Kohen*/*Bnot Levi*/*Yisraeliyot*.

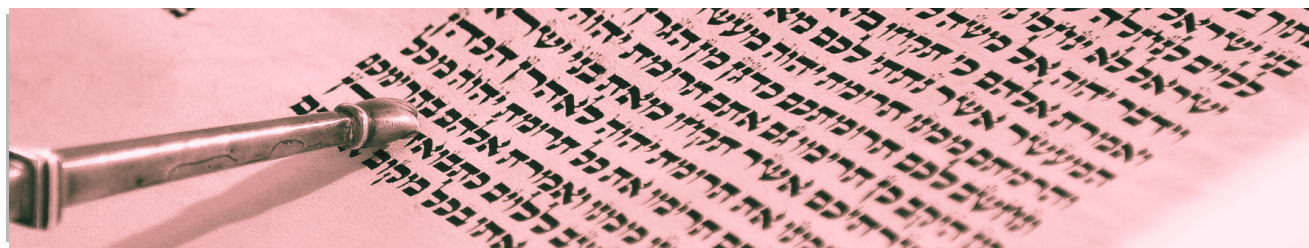
In a Women's *Tefillah* Group, whether the first Aliyah is given to a *Bat Kohen* or any woman is a decision that varies across communities.

Prior to calling up the *Kohen Aliyah*, the “*vatigaleh*” text is said. Please refer to the *gabbai* section of this guide for the text.



The Levi Aliyah is called up and read

Many of the practices of the *Kohen Aliyah* and *Bnot Kohen* apply to the *Levi Aliyah* and *Bnot Levi*. If the first Aliyah was given to a *Yisrael*, the second Aliyah should be given to a *Yisrael* EVEN IF there are *Levi'im* at shul.





Aliyot 3-7 are called up and read

Any Jew above the age of Bar/Bat Mitzvah other than *Kohanim* and *Levi'im* are able to get an *Aliyah* for *Aliyot* 3-7. Children and their parents as well as siblings are not supposed to have consecutive *Aliyot*. Spouses are technically allowed to take consecutive *Aliyot*, but some couples are uncomfortable with that practice and take a more stringent stance.

In many congregations, *Misheberakhs* for those needing healing, the IDF, the hostages, and others are said before the seventh *Aliyah*. Prayers for countries (e.g. Israel, the US) and *Tehillim* normally are *not* said during the Torah reading, but instead afterwards. The placement of *misheberakhs* late in the Torah reading is not a *halakhic* decision, so if there is any reason to move *misheberakhs* to an earlier point in the Torah reading, such as if a Bat Mitzvah *Aliyah* is the seventh *Aliyah* and candy throwing is planned for that *Aliyah*, there is no issue moving *misheberakhs* to the sixth, fifth, or earlier *Aliyot*.

During the *Aliyah* when *misheberakhs* are said, the *Oleh/Olah* is called up, *misheberakhs* are announced and said, the *Oleh/Olah* says the *brakhot*, and the *Aliyah* is finally read.

In a Partnership *Minyan*, immediately after the seventh *Aliyah* is read, the person who *layned* the seventh *Aliyah* recites Half *Kaddish*. Note that a woman is allowed to lead this *Kaddish* even if she isn't obligated to say *kaddish* (i.e., she's an *avei*). If the *layner* is uncomfortable leading *kaddish*, one of the *gabbaim* should lead it. Again, the *Gabbai* leading *kaddish* can be a man or a woman.



Aliyot 3-7 are called up and read The Maftir Aliyah is called up and read

As was previously written, many communities give the person who will read the *Haftorah* the *maftir Aliyah*. *Kohanim* and *Levi'im* are allowed to get the *Maftir Aliyah*.



Hagbah and Gelilah

A man or woman can do *Hagbah* or *Gelilah*. Partnership *Minyanim* often have one man and one woman do it. *Gabbaim* generally should be on hand to help with *Hagbah* and *Gelilah*—make sure that the person doing *Hagbah* doesn't drop the Torah and make sure the person doing *Gelilah* wraps the scroll tightly enough (but not too tightly), makes sure that the clasp holding the scroll together faces away from the person doing *gelilah*, helps get the mantle on the Torah.

Etz Chayim is generally sung during this time, and it's generally a good idea for the *Gabbaim* to be prepared to start the congregation singing *Etz Chayim*.



The Haftorah is read

It's a good practice to announce where the *Haftorah* is from as well as the pages in the *Chumash* in which it's found. The person reading the *Haftorah* says *Brakhot* immediately prior to and following the *Haftorah*. The *Gabbaim* will not be up at the *Bimah* with the person leading the *Haftorah*.

The portion of the service "*Hachnasat haTorah*" (returning the Torah) immediately follows the blessings concluding the *Haftorah* service.

The Oleh or Olah's Guide.

When asked to take an *Aliyah*, the *Gabbai* or *Gabbait* will give you a specific number. Be near the *Bimah* at the conclusion of the *Aliyah* immediately before your own. However, do not approach until the *Gabbai* calls out:

Ya'amod

Or, if you're a woman

Ta'amod

They will pause, and you will approach the *Bimah* and provide the *Gabbai* with your Hebrew name in the following format:

Hebrew Name Bat Father's Hebrew Name (*Ha Kohen* / *Ha Levi*) Vi' Mother's Hebrew Name
E.g.-Devorah Bat Avraham (*Ha Kohen*) Vi' Sarah

The layner will point to the start of the *Aliyah*. If you have a *tallit*, you may use it or the *gartel* (the cloth that wraps shut the Torah scroll) to touch the start of your *Aliyah* and kiss it. You will then hold onto one of the *atzei chayyim* (handles) and say the following:

בָּרְכוּ אֶת יְיָ הַמְּבֹרָךְ. *Barkhu et adonai ha-mevorakh*

The Congregation will respond:

בָּרוּךְ יְיָ הַמְּבֹרָךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד. *Barukh adonai ha-mevorakh le'olam va'ed*

You will then repeat the Congregation's response and continue:

בָּרוּךְ יְיָ הַמְּבֹרָךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד. *Barukh adonai ha-mevorakh le'olam va'ed*
 בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, *Barukh ata adonai eloheinu melek ha'olam*
 אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים *asher bahar banu mi-kol ha'amim*
 וְנָתַן לָנוּ אֶת תּוֹרָתוֹ. *ve-natan lanu et torato.*
 בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה. *Barukh ata adonai notein ha-torah*

The Congregation will answer, "Amen," and the *layner* will start *layning* the *Aliyah*.

During this time, you will continue to hold onto the *Etz Chayyim* (handle) and follow along. At the conclusion of the *Aliyah*, the *layner* will continue to point to the last word of the *Aliyah*. You will take the corner of your *tallit* or the *gartel*, kiss the last word of the *Aliyah*, and recite the closing blessing:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, *Barukh ata adonai eloheinu melek ha'olam*
 אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָנוּ תּוֹרַת אֱמֶת, *asher natan lanu torat emet*
 וַחַיֵּי עוֹלָם נִטַּע בְּתוֹכֵנוּ. *ve-hayei 'olam nata' be-tokheinu*
 בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה. *Barukh ata adonai notein ha-torah*

YOU DO NOT GO BACK TO YOUR SEAT AT THE CONCLUSION OF YOUR ALIYAH,

but will stay at the *Bimah* for the *Aliyah* immediately following your own. One or both of the *Gabbaim* can tell you where on the *Bimah* to move to allow the next *Oleh* or *Olah* to hold onto the *Etz Chayyim* during their *Aliyah*. Note that in some Women's *Tefillah* Groups recite different blessings than the ones traditionally said in men's services. You should check with the *Gabbaiyot* what the brachot are in such circumstances.

The Layner's Guide.

You go up to the *Bimah* at the conclusion of the preceding *Aliyah's* closing blessing. The *Gabbai* will not call you up. Instead, you approach and stand in the center as the *Oleh/Olah* is called up. After the *Oleh/Olah's* name is said, point to the start of your *Aliyah*. If you are struggling to find the start of the *Aliyah*, the *Gabbaim* will try to help you find it. Use the *Yad* (pointer) to show the *Oleh/Olah* the first word, and he/she will say the opening prayers. You respond to the opening *Aliyah* blessings as if you were sitting in the Congregation. Say "Amen" with everyone else and read your *Aliyah*. As you read, the *Gabbaim* will follow along to make sure that you are reading the words correctly. Note that while you should try to chant the cantillations (also known as the troupe) correctly, most *gabbaim* will not correct errors in your cantillation unless you miss the end of the *pasuk*. If you are corrected, repeat the correct version of the *Aliyah* and continue your *layning*.



When you conclude your *Aliyah* keep the *Yad* (pointer) at the final word, allowing the *Oleh/Olah* to kiss the closing word in the *Aliyah*. You may return to your seat after the closing blessing to the *Aliyah*.

If you *layned* the seventh *Aliyah*, *Shvi'i*, you will be asked to recite half *kaddish*. Both men and women are allowed to recite half *kaddish* in this circumstance, even if you aren't normally *chayav* to say *kaddish*. However, if you are uncomfortable saying *kaddish*, it is fine to ask a *gabbai* to recite it instead of you.

While the *layner* is not often also the *Oleh/Olah*, it is permissible. For example, the Bar or Bat Mitzvah can be given an *Aliyah* that they are ultimately *layning*. When that happens, the *layner* need not say "amen" to their own *brachot*.

The *Gabbai's* Guide.

The *gabbai* generally has three responsibilities:

- 1 Hand out and call up the *Olim/Olot*, helping them recite their *brachot* as needed
- 2 Check the *layners'* reading to make sure that they are reading the words correctly and correctly marking the end of the *pasuk*.
- 3 Make announcements to ensure that the congregation isn't lost during the reading.

Additionally, *gabbaim* are generally the people best positioned to avoid awkward silences among the congregation, such as when the Torah is getting rolled. During awkward silences, *gabbaim* can make an announcement (e.g., explaining what is going on and why) or lead a song.

Having two *gabbaim* leads to a division of labor responsibilities among the two *gabbaim*. The most traditional division of responsibilities is one *gabbai* calls up the *olim* and the other announces pages and checks the reading. However, both *gabbaim* should be checking and correcting the reading, and no division of responsibilities need to be set in stone.

Prior to the Torah reading, the *gabbaim* will have handed out all of the *aliyot*. Leading into the Torah reading, one of the *gabbaim* announces the weekly *Parsha* along with its page number. At which point, the other *gabbai* will call up the *Kohen*:

וַיַּעֲזֹר וַיִּגָּן וַיּוֹשִׁיעַ לְכָל הַחוֹסִים בּוֹ, וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן. הֵבֵל הָבוּ גִדְּל
לְאַלְהֵינוּ וְתִנּוּ כְבוֹד לַתּוֹרָה, כֹּהֵן קָרֵב, יַעֲמֵד _____ הַכֹּהֵן,
(אִין כּאן כֹּהֵן יַעֲמֵד _____ בּמקום הַכֹּהֵן) If there is no cohen:
בְּרוּךְ שְׁנַתֵּן תּוֹרָה לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִדְשָׁתוֹ.

In the blank space, the *gabbai* should pause to let the *Kohen* provide his name. Note that the gray text is said when there is no *Kohen*.

Following the final line, the congregation says:

קהל וחזן: ואתם הדבקים ביי אלהיכם, חיים כלכם היום.

And the *Gabbai* repeats.

At this point, the *Oleh* starts his *Aliyah*. The *gabbaim* can silently help the *Oleh* navigate through what they should be doing, such as helping them follow along through the *Aliyah* words, or whispering the instructions of what to do. As always, the *gabbaim* should take visual cues to determine the degree to which them helping guide the *Oleh* is desired.

During the *layning*, the *gabbaim* should both read along and correct the *layner's* reading when necessary. In general, errors in reading the troupe are not corrected, unless the *layner* doesn't read the end of the *pasuk*. Errors in reading the vowels and letters should be corrected.

For the second *Aliyah*, if there is a *Levi*, the *gabbai* calls up:

יעמד... בן... לוי

The *Levi* receiving the *Aliyah* provides his name along with his parents' names. Note that both the father and mother are generally encouraged to be provided, even if the mother isn't a *Bat Levi*. In this scenario, the final "*levi*" refers to the *Aliyah*, not the status of people.

If there is no *Levi*, different congregations have different practices, such as calling up a second Kohen or calling up Yisrael.

When calling up the third through seventh *Aliyah*, employs the following pattern:

יעמד/תעמד ... (Aliyah number) ... (Hebrew name)

Note that the *Aliyah* number similarly maintains the gender declension. If confused how each *Aliyah* is labeled for masculine or feminine, review the overview on **page 8**.

After calling up the seventh *Aliyah*, the *gabbai* in charge of making announcements announces the *misheberakhs* said and leads them. After the congregation recites the *misheberakhs*, the *gabbai* announces, "We continue with the seventh *Aliyah* on page..." The *gabbaim* quietly instruct the *Oleh/Olah* to continue to kiss the start of their *Aliyah* and say the *brachot*.

Upon conclusion of the seventh *Aliyah*, the person who layned the seventh *Aliyah* recites Half *Kaddish*. If the *layner* is uncomfortable leading *kaddish*, one of the *gabbaim* should lead it. The *Gabbai* leading *kaddish* can be a man or a woman.



After Half *Kaddish*, the *Maftir(a)* is called up, and the *Maftir Aliyah* is read. Following *Maftir*, the *gabbai* calls up the *Magbi'a* and *Golel(et)*. *Gabbaim* generally should be on hand to help with *Hagbah* and *Gelilah* by making sure that the person doing *Hagbah* doesn't drop the Torah and make sure the person doing *Gelilah* wraps the scroll tightly enough (but not too tightly), the clasp holding the scroll together faces away from the person doing *gelilah*, getting the mantel on the Torah, etc.

Etz Chayim is generally sung during this time, and it's generally a good idea for the *Gabbaim* to be prepared to start the congregation singing *Etz Chayim*.

During *Gelilah*, one of the *gabbaim* should check in with the person reading the *Haftorah* to see if they would like anything set up, such as a *shtender* to read the *Haftorah* from, or a *siddur* that is open to the pages with the blessings before and after the *Haftorah*. Following *Hagbah* and *Gelilah*, the *gabbai* who makes announcements will announce the *Haftorah* and the page it can be found on. Once the person reading the *Haftorah* starts with the blessings, the *gabbaim* can leave the *Bimah* and return to their seats.



Looking Ahead: Insights and Resources

For more tools, guidance, and learning materials, visit:

- Jofa Prayer Resources: <https://www.jofa.org/prayer-finder>
- Feminist Community Toolkit: <https://www.jofa.org/toolkit>
- Jofa Halakhic & Educational Resources: <https://www.jofa.org/resources>
- Get Involved: <https://www.jofa.org/about-us/contact/>

We are here to support you. Whether you are organizing your first tefillah or developing a thriving feminist Orthodox community, please reach out anytime at jofa@jofa.org.