

Independent Minyan Worship Workshop Guide

What makes an effective prayer leader? How does a *shaliach tzibbur* create a meaningful prayer environment for the *kehilah*? How can independent prayer groups create and foster a core community of worship leaders?

This guide offers a model for developing and training *sh'lichei tzibbur*: worship workshops. Within each community, minyan leaders organize small groups of prayer leaders (maximum of 8 people per group) that meet on a regular basis. These groups provide individual prayer leaders with a space to “workshop” their service-leading skills and ideas in a supportive, collective environment, simultaneously cultivating better honed *sh'lichei tzibbur* and an increased sense of community within the prayer group as a whole.

The guiding principle behind this system is the idea that prayer leaders need opportunities to practice and refine their techniques as they attempt to lead a community. In addition, one does not lead prayer in a vacuum. The essence of communal worship lies in the interplay between the leader and the worshipers – something individuals cannot practice on their own or learn from a recording. Worship workshops enable participants to examine techniques that enhance communication between the prayer leader and the congregation. Focusing on music choice, sound production, and body language, workshop members can explore practical skills and methods that facilitate and encourage congregational singing and fluid davening.

Goals of the workshop

Through this workshop, participants can expect to:

- Acquire a deep understanding of one particular service of their choice in terms of text, nusach, and pacing
- Cultivate a better understanding of themselves as prayer leaders
- Develop skills to ensure a more spiritual prayer experience for both leader and congregant when leading any service in the future
- Gain a support network of fellow *sh'lichei tzibbur* within their community who can offer guidance and encouragement

Worship Workshop Guide Overview

GOAL: Create a core of prayer leaders who consistently provide meaningful worship experiences

METHOD: Worship Workshops

STEP 1: Identify and list prayer leaders or potential prayer leaders in the community

STEP 2: Create groups - divide list into small groups (6-8 max) based on experience and/or service

STEP 3: Assign each person in group a workshop date

STEP 4: Running workshop sessions – detailed explanation below

STEP 4: Running Workshop Sessions

The purpose of each workshop session is to have at least one member of the group practice a large portion of a service or the entire service. The rest of the group members play the part of the congregation in order to simulate a “real” davening environment.

Once the group member has completed the service, the rest of the group participates in a discussion/critique focusing on constructive criticism and suggestions for next time.

Questions to Consider

Content

- Did the leader seem comfortable with all of the Hebrew in the service?
- Did the leader seem sufficiently familiar with all the melodies and tunes?
- Did the leader use appropriate nusach for each section of the service (depending on minhag of the minyan)?

Body Language

Newer Leaders

- Did the leader look relaxed and confident?
 - Firm stance
 - Good posture
 - Relaxed shoulders
 - Normal breathing rhythm
 - Avoid nervous movements (playing with hands or hair, shuffling feet, etc)

More Experienced Leaders

- Did the leader use physical cues to communicate with the congregation and encourage participation?
 - Lift face from siddur to ensure that congregation can hear you well (also changes the sound direction)
 - Lean forward slightly to signal congregation

Use of Voice

Newer Leaders

- Was the leader loud enough or too loud?
- Was the pitch too high or too low for the congregation at any point?
- Did the pitch seem too high or too low for the leader at any point?
- Did the leader seem out of breath at any point?
- Did the leader breathe in effective places?

- Did the leader sound confident with respect to musical choices and general sound production?

More Experienced Leaders

- Did the leader use dynamics to cue the congregation?
 - Begin melodies in a slightly softer voice to bring in the congregation
 - Make sure leader can be heard at key transitional moments (between sections of a tune or during antiphonal moments)
- Did the leader use varying dynamics to illustrate the meaning of particular texts?

Melodies and Tunes

Newer Leaders

- Were the tunes easy for the congregation to sing?
- Did the tunes fit the text easily and appropriately?
 - Correct Hebrew pronunciation (depending on minhag of the minyan)
 - Easily anticipated word placement, i.e. easy for the congregation to figure out how the text will fit with the melody
- Was the leader clear when the congregation should start and stop singing?
 - Begin melodies more slowly to help congregation start
 - End melodies more slowly to signal the congregation to stop
- Did the leader easily transition between chanting and singing?

More Experienced Leaders

- Did the tunes fit with the meaning of the text?
- Did the leader teach new tunes effectively?
 - Begin with niggun, add words later
 - Anticipate difficult parts of melody and make sure that leader can be heard during those moments

Pacing

Newer Leaders

- Did the leader chant or sing too fast or too slow at any point?
 - Hebrew was recognizable and understood
- Did the leader leave enough time or too much time for the congregation to pray in between *chatimot*?

More Experienced Leaders

- Did the leader use varying pacing to illustrate the meanings of particular texts?
 - Slow down to highlight particular passages
 - Change pacing to emphasize poetic rhythm of text

Arc of the Service

Newer Leaders

- Did the service include an effective balance of singing and chanting (depending on minhag of the minyan)?

More Experienced Leaders

- Did the different energy levels at various points in the service seem appropriate?
 - Creating peaks and valleys throughout the service (Pesukei D'zimra vs Kedusha)
 - Building to high energy moments
- Did the leader seem to have a particular goal for the service (highlighting a holiday, utilizing one particular melody, etc)?