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Ritual Skills Handbook

The Academy for Jewish Religion  
Preparing Rabbis and Cantors for *Klal Yisrael*



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### I. INTRODUCTION

While The Academy for Jewish Religion recognizes multiple approaches to Jewish ritual and *halakhab*, 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. While perfection is certainly not expected, adequacy and competence are.

### II. TESTING PROCEDURES

While in the past, testing for Ritual Skills has been done on the basis of students making individual appointments with faculty members, **there will be a new pattern of testing for the 2009-2010 academic year.** Testing will occur over a three-day period two or three times a year with many slots each day to accommodate many students and many ritual skills.

Testing during the Fall 2009 semester will occur on **Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, November 30, December 1 and 2**. Testing during the Spring 2010 semester will be on **Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, April 12, 13, and 14**. (We *may* add a week of testing in the summer as well). This testing is open to all AJR students regardless of which year of study one is in at the moment. Students are asked to arrange for their Ritual Skills testing only at these times; individual faculty members should NOT be contacted for this purpose.

### III. TEXTS AND MATERIALS

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

**Prayers, procedures, ceremonies and prayer services:** Any traditional *siddur* (ArtScroll, Birnbaum, etc., Silverman, Sim Shalom, etc.) and/or traditional “*bencher/birkeon*” (NCSY, B’Kol Echad, UJA-Fed., etc.). Traditional Rabbi’s manuals include Goldin’s *Hamadrikb* (Orthodox) and the RA (Conservative) *Moreh Derekb*. At AJR, we require students to learn the traditional versions of prayers and rituals with the assumption that students will then think about whether and how they might adapt or change these.

**Cantillation:** Students testing for regular (not High Holiday) Torah reading will be tested on the “scroll side” of the *Tikkun* (the side without vocalization or trope) for the brief passages designated in the manual (two five-verse passages). They will also be tested by the instructors at random passages for sight-reading with trope on the vocalized side of the *Tikkun*. Students need to bring a *Tikkun* to the test. Students testing for *Haftarah*, *Esther*, *Shir HaShirim*/*Kohelet*/*Ruth*, and *Eikhab* will be tested by the instructors for sight-reading randomly selected passages with trope on the vocalized side of the *Tikkun* (or *Humasb*). Students need to bring a *Tikkun* or *Tanakh* to the test.

**Cantorial Requirements:** Since cantorial students study and are tested on many ritual skills which involve chanting as a matter of course in their classes, they are only required to be tested on ritual skills listed in this handbook which are followed by the designation (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*).

### IV. RITUAL SKILLS TIMELINE

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* must be completed by the end of 14 credits.

Unit *Bet* must be completed by the end of 28 credits.

Unit *Gimmel* must be completed by the end of 42 credits.

Unit *Dalet* must be completed by the end of 56 credits

Unit *Heb* must 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:

#### A. Unit *Alef*

***Birkat Hamazon*** – *Zimmun* and additions for *brit milab*, *pidyon haben*; Singing/chanting of first blessing; What are the essential components of *Birkat Ha-Mazon*? Cf. the “long” and “short” versions in *B’kol Echad*; When are certain additional paragraphs recited? *Ha-Rahaman* section. (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*)

***Havdalah*** – Chant from *Hinei El Y’shu`ati* thru *Shavu`a Tov*; Gestures related to blessing on lights; Holding the cup; When is the wine drunk? Why? Difference between synagogue and home *Havdalah*. (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*)

**Shabbat and Festival *Kiddush*** – Evening and morning; holding the cup; When is the wine drunk? Who drinks first? (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*)

**Torah cantillation** – Chant all sign groups in any combination; choose any 20 *p’suqim*, plus these selections: Exodus 38:16-20 (*VaYakbel*) and Leviticus 11:29-33 (*Tazria*). These will be chanted from the Torah scroll side of the *Tikkun*; Chant randomly selected passages from vocalized side of *Tikkun*; Blessings before and after an *aliyah*; When is scroll opened and when is it closed? When is it covered? Students need to bring a *Tikkun* to the test. (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

***Kabbalat Shabbat Nusah*** – Any 4 consecutive pages after *L’khu N’ran’na*; When does one stand, sit, turn around? (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

***Ma’ariv shel Shabbat*** – Any 2 consecutive pages after the *Barkbu*, *Vaykbulu* thru *R’zei Vim’nuhateinu*. (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

***Shaharit shel Shabbat*** – Any 5 consecutive pages in *Birkhot Hashahar*/*P’suqei d’Zimrah*, Any 3 pages from end of *El Adon* thru *Tzur Yisrael*; any 3 pages in the *Shaharit Amidah* after the *Kedushah*.

**Minhah shel Shabbat** – Ability to chant the opening and closing lines of *Ashrei* in the correct *nusah*.

“Choreography” of Ma’ariv and Shaḥarit shel Shabbat – Where to stand/sit, bow. (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*)

**Donning of Tallit and Tefillin** – The order of the donning and the blessings; *ʿatifah*. (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*)

**Proper procedure and blessing for Netilat Yadayim** (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*)

## B. Unit Bet

**Haftarah cantillation** – Testing on randomly selected passages; Blessings before and after the *haftarah*. Students need to bring a *Tikkun* or *Tanakh* to the test. (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

**Ma’ariv shel Hol Nusah** – Any 4 consecutive pages after the *Barkhu*. (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

**Minha shel Hol Nusah** – General rules of when *taḥanun* is recited or not; When does one recite it as *nʿfillat appayim*? What is that prayer posture? (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

**Shaḥarit shel Hol Nusah** – Any 5 consecutive pages in *Birkhot Hashabar/P’suqei D’zimra*, *Yishtabah* thru *Yotzer Or*, *Avot-Gevurot-Kedushah*, and any 5 pages in the *Shaḥarit Amidah*. (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

**Proper procedure and blessings for Qeviat mezuzah**

**Where to Find** – Knowledge of “where to find” the following *tefillot* and *berakhot*: *Tefillat HaDerekh*, *Birkhot HaShemī’ah*, and *Birkhot HaRe’iah*. (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*)

## C. Unit Gimmeḥ

**Cantillation of Esther** – Testing of randomly selected passages from the vocalized side of the *Tikkun*. (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

**Shaḥarit L’Shalosh Regalim Nusah** – The beginning before *Barkhu*; Where does it start on *Shabbat*? Any 2 pages after *Barkhu* until *Tzur Yisrael* (assuming *yom tov* is on a weekday) and any 2 pages in the *Amidah*. (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

**Musaf L’Shalosh Regalim (U’leRosh Hodesh) Nusah** – Any 4 pages in *Amidah* after the *Kedushah*, *Avot* and *Gevurot* for *Tal*, any 2 pages from *Geshem*.

**Hallel** – Blessing, opening/closing of 4 Psalms, *Hodu La’adonai/Ana Adonai* for *Sukkot*, *Pesah*, and *Shavuot*; difference between “Full” *Hallel* and “Half” *Hallel*; When is each recited? (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

**Arba’ah minim** – Using simple props (a roll of paper for a *lulav*, a ball of paper for *etrog*, etc.), demonstration of the proper way to hold the 4 species, the order for taking them and making the blessing; *na`anu’im* – the gesture and when it is done – by the prayer leader and by the congregation. Students should bring these materials to the test. Students will be asked to describe the procedure of putting the three species (not including the *etrog*) together if they all had come separately. (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*)

## D. Unit Dalet

**Cantillation of Eikhah** – Students will also be tested by the instructors at random passages for sight-reading with trope on the vocalized side of the *Tikkun*. Students need to bring a *Tikkun* 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. (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

**Megillot Cantillation** – Ability to chant randomly selected passages from *Shir HaShirim/Kobelet/Ruth* using a text that contains vocalization and trope. Students need to bring a *Tikkun* or *Tanakh* to the test. (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

**Ma’ariv L’Yamim Nora’im** – (basic *nusah* only; not melodies for *piyyutim*) Any 5 consecutive pages after the *Barkhu*, 4 prayers from *Kol Nidrei* service after the *Shehebiyanu*. (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

**Keriat shem** – Naming of a child at a *Brit Milah*, *Brit Bat*; (for conversion, see “Conversion and *Mikveh*.”) (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*)

**Sheva Berakhot** – for a Wedding Ceremony and for a meal. (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*)

**El Malei Raḥamim** – Chant this prayer and a Psalm for a Funeral/*Yizkor*; When is this prayer not recited at a funeral? (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*)

**Luah beit haknesset** – Ability to understand the instructions for conducting a service on one of the following days – *Shabbat Bereshit* (evening and daytime), a day during *Hanukah* (morning service), Evening service for the First Night of

*Pesah*; determining dates of *Birkat HaHodesh*. Rabbinic students should consult the Rabbinic Supplement to the Student Handbook for the appropriate version of the *luah* to be used. Cantorial students should consult the Cantorial Supplement to the Student Handbook for the appropriate version of the *luah* to be used. (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*)

**Ketubah** – Ability to fill out a traditional *Ketubah* with the help of a traditional Rabbi's Manual (RA manual is recommended); ability to read the *Ketubah* aloud. (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*)

**“Basic *Gabba*”** – Proper procedure for: Calling people to the Torah, Reciting *MiSheBerakh La-Holeh*, Reciting *Birkat Ha-Gomel*, Reciting *MiSheBerakh La-Oleh*, and *Hagbahah* and *Gelilah*. (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*)

## E. Unit *Heh*

***Shaharit L'Yamim Nora'im*** – basic *nusah* only; not melodies for *piyyutim*; Any 3 consecutive pages in *Birkbot Hashabar/P'suqei D'zimra* plus any 3 pages from *Barukh She'amar* onwards. (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

***Yamim Nora'im Cantillation*** – Students will be tested by the instructors at random passages from the Torah readings for *Shaharit* for *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur* for sight-reading with trope on the vocalized side of the *Tikkun*. Students need to bring a *Tikkun* to the test. Application of the cantillation tune to calling up *aliyot*. (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

**Ability to tie *Tzitzit*** – Any strings can be used for demonstration. Diagrams from *Sha'ar Ha-Tzitzurim* 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. (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*)

**Ability to tie *Tefillin*** – the square knot of the Head *tefillin*; the *Yud* knot of the Hand *tefillin*; the student should bring a pair of *tefillin* whose straps can be used for demonstration; (Knots to be made will be additional to the knots already present on the *tefillin* – no knots should be untied from the existing set. Diagrams, from *Sha'ar Ha-Tzitzurim* by R. R. Feldman, are available in an appendix to this document.) (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*)

**100 Year Calendar** – Calculating a date from the past to the present. Calculating a date into the future; (examples: *bar/bat mitzvah*, *yabrtzeit*); (100- and 150-year calendars are published as independent volumes and one is

published in the first edition of the *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Alternatively, Hebcal.com may be used). (*Rabbinic and Cantorial Requirement*)

**Conversion at *Mikveh*** – Knowledge of the procedure for conversion at a *Mikveh* for both male and female, adult and child; (Cf. *Moreh Derekh*). (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

***Seder Tekiat Shofar*** – Ability to identify the three different notes of *Tekiat Shofar* and their proper order in *Seder Tekiat Shofar* (which follows the *Haftarah* on *Rosh HaShanah*). (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

***Shtar Mekhirat Hametz*** – Knowledge of where to find it and the ability to fill it out. (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

***Matzeivah*** – Ability to read a *Matzeivah*, including *rashei teivot* (For examples cf. *Hamadrikh*, pp. 246-252.) (*Rabbinic Requirement*)