

Messianic Judaism

The Way We Do Things



**Derech
HaMashiach**

Messianic Community

Introduction:

The following is a guide on how we, at Derech HaMashiach, desire to put to practice the concept of being grafted into the Native Olive Tree, Israel. The majority of us are not Jewish, nor have we grown up in the ways of Judaism. It is however our sincere desire is to be obedient to the Words of our Beloved Rebbe, Yeshua HaMashiach, “if you love Me, keep My Mitzvot (commandments).”

We understand that Yeshua was a Jewish Rabbi and taught His Jewish Talmidim (Disciples) how live the Mitzvot of Torah, through loving G-d and loving one another. He told His Jewish Talmidim to go and make Talmidim of all Nations, “teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

This guide is an attempt to explain what this may look like for those of us who know Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah, as their Lord and Saviour, living in Australia and surrounding nations, whose cultural practices are far removed from the practices of Judaism.

The things that are most foreign to us are:

- The ***Mitzvot*** (Commandments) themselves, although those who know Yeshua are most likely keeping around 75% of the relevant Mitzvot, without even knowing that we are.
- ***Halakhah***, meaning the “way we walk out” the Mitzvot. G-d gave Israel the mandate to determine the way The Mitzvot are to be lived out. This is in partnership with HaShem. This keeps Israel in unity, with one another and with G-d.
- ***Minhagim***, which are Customs or Traditions, the way that different sects of Judaism apply these Mitzvot and Halachah, and may even differ across regions, cultures, and countries.
- ***Nusach***, which means Text or Version, and is related to the ways and forms of prayer and liturgy.



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The Mitzvot (Commandments)

In Judaism we have 613 Mitzvot that are based in the Written Torah, the first Five Books of the Bible, also called the Five Books of Moshe. There are several variations of counting the specific Mitzvot, but the most commonly accepted version is based on the list recorded and classified by Maimonides in the 12th century. This listing is taken from his classic compendium of Jewish law, the "Mishneh Torah," which contains 14 primary "books" or sections. Each of these 14 "books" contains a listing of Mitzvot under that subheading. There are 248 Positive ("Do") and 365 Negative Mitzvot ("Don't Do").

Not all the Mitzvot apply to every person. Some apply only to the Kohanim (Priests of the Temple), some only to Kings, some only to men and some only to women. Many, around 220, we cannot carry out properly when there is not Temple and no Priesthood in Jerusalem. This reduces the Mitzvot applicable for today down to around 390. Another 74 are associated with judges, agriculture, and either specific to men or women only. Some Mitzvot are as easy as giving thanks to HaShem for the food we have just eaten.

The majority of those from a Christian background already observe between 200 and 275 Mitzvot, depending on their level of commitment / observance. This represents somewhere between 66% and 85% of applicable Mitzvot. The main difference is that this observance is based on doing them according to "what I think is right in my own opinion" (Refer D'varim 12:8).



Halakhah (The Way We Behave)

Halakhah standardizes the way or path “to walk” (Halakhah) out these 613 Mitzvot. Halakhah is documented in the Oral Torah. Halakhah is the body of Jewish law supplementing the Scriptural or Written Torah and forms especially the legal part of the Talmud. It helps us to know how to put up a Mezuzah, and what it should look like when HaShem tells Israel, in D’varim (Deuteronomy) 6:9, “... and write them [these words, which I am ordering you today] on the doorframes of your house and on your gates.”

HaShem purposely left the Written Torah vague, so that Israel, the people chosen to live by His Covenants and Torah, could work out in unity, how to live or walk out the 613 Mitzvot, as a community, as one body. HaShem is more interested in unity with Him and with one another, than He is with us being right, and consequently living in disunity.

This is one of the reasons for the destruction of the Second Temple, and the subsequent exile that we are still in – baseless hatred (Sinat Chinam). They were all scholars of Torah, but could not live in harmony with one another, because each group thought their understanding of Torah was the only correct one.

Moshe warned Israel (and us today) about the prerequisite to living in the Land of Israel, in D’varim (Deuteronomy) 12:8:

“You will not do things the way we do them here today, where everyone does whatever in his own opinion seems right;”



Minhagim (Customs/Traditions)

Having said that Israel is to obey the Mitzvot in unity, as one people, HaShem knows we are not robots and carbon copies of each other, and so there is room for some variation through something called Minhag (custom). While Minhagim (customs or traditions) were not binding, attempts were made to make them universally binding across all Judaism. However, with the sudden displacement brought about by WWII and the Holocaust, and the large-scale immigration to the US, various European countries, and especially the State of Israel, there has been a mixing of various minhagim and arguably the gradual disuse of certain customs. In addition, the baal teshuva (“master of return/repentance”) movement has created a large group who have no clear tradition from their parents. Consequently, Minhag does not carry the force of Jewish law and is thus not considered mandatory by all traditional Jews.

Nusach (Text/Version)

Nusach, a related concept to Minhag, is the correct wording of a religious text. Thus, the nusach tefillah (“prayer”) is the text of the prayers used by a particular community and can signify the entire liturgical tradition of that community. It includes the musical rendition and melodies used throughout the liturgy service. It is narrower than minhag, which can refer to custom in any field and not necessarily that of communal prayer.

In general, one must pray according to one's "nusach of origin" unless one has formally joined a different community and accepted its minhag.



Derech HaMashiach

Derech HaMashiach is a community that practices Messianic Judaism to the best of its ability and understanding, in the demographic of its location. It is also a developing community, forming its identity in the Diaspora (outside of Israel), specifically in Australia, and is made up of some Jews and mostly those from a Christian background, all at various stages of their journey of understanding and practicing the Mitzvot, the Commandments of Torah, as taught and demonstrated by our beloved Rebbe, Yeshua HaMashiach.

As such, our Minhagim and Nusach is in development and may not be exactly the same as other sects or forms of Judaism. Having said that, we do attempt to align as much as is practicable and possible with Conservative Judaism, given our demographic makeup and stage of development. We do not differ from mainstream Judaism because we “know better”, but to allow the members of our community to participate with the best of their Kavanah (“intention or feeling of the heart”).

Conservative Judaism:

“Conservative Judaism attempts to combine a positive attitude toward modern culture, acceptance of critical secular scholarship regarding Judaism's sacred texts and commitment to Jewish observance. Conservative Judaism believes that scholarly study of Jewish texts indicates that Judaism has constantly been evolving to meet the needs of the Jewish people in varying circumstances, and that a central halachic authority can continue the halachic evolution today.

Conservative Judaism affirms that the halachic process reflects the Divine will. It makes use of Solomon Schechter's concept of Klal Yisrael (the whole of the [observant] Jewish community), in that decisions on Jewish Law are largely determined by the practices of Klal Yisrael.



In Conservative Judaism, the central halachic authority of the movement, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS), will often set out more than one acceptable position. In such a case, the rabbi of the congregation (mara d'atra) is free to choose from the range of acceptable positions (or none of them), and his congregation is expected to abide by his choice. The CJLS speaks for the Conservative movement and offers parameters to guide local rabbis who turn to it for assistance. Local rabbis will make use of traditional sources and, when available, teshuvot written for the CJLS. Although rabbis mostly adhere to the CJLS, they have the ability to make their own halachic decisions when appropriate.”

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The important take away is that Conservative Judaism uses the text of Orthodox Judaism and is not anti or against Orthodox Judaism. For more information on Conservative Judaism, you can refer to the Rabbinical Assembly in the following link: <https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org>

Derech HaMashiach is affiliated with Ahavat Ammi International Association of Shuvu Congregations. As such we come under the guidance of two main Messianic Jewish Rabbis, Rabbi Dr. Itzhak Shapira and Rabbi Dr. Steven Bernstein. One is Mizrachi and the other Ashkenazi, and as such we have a mix of Minhagim and Nusach from both traditions.

There are three main Ethnic Origins (and several other minor ones):

Ashkenazic (Germanic) Jews:

Ashkenazi Jews originally came from Germany, France, and Eastern Europe.

Sephardic (Iberian) Jews:

Sephardic Jews were originally from Portugal and Spain



Mizrachi (Eastern) Jews:

Mizrachi Jews are largely from the Middle East, and share many customs with Sephardic Jews, so much so that, in Israel, many think of them as one group.

There are also Ethiopian Jews, Italkim, and many others.

While Derech HaMashiach takes its guidance from these two Messianic Rabbis of diverse ethnic background, we also recognise our own demographic makeup, and therefore apply their Minhagim and Nusach in a manner that best helps our community to grow in the ways and practice of Messianic Judaism.

One obvious aspect is that we will always perform our services in a combination of Hebrew and English, to ensure that everyone can participate with as much Kavanah (“intention or feeling of the heart”) as possible.

Associated with Kavanah is being Hassidic in our nature and expression. While this name has been with many different movements in Jewish History from the Second Temple period all the way to the 1800s, most are only familiar with the Hassidism of the 1800s, which is also associated with ultra-orthodoxy. While we have many similar beliefs and ideas, this latest version does not dominate the definition of Hassidim or being Hassidic.

Hassidim is based on the Hebrew root “Hesed” which means kindness, grace, steadfast love, loyalty, faithfulness. It is a description of covenantal behaviour, it attributes all the above definitions to the covenant relationship between man and G-d, and between man and man. Therefore, a Hassid is one who conducts their relationship with man and G-d in such a manner. According to the Talmud, a “Hassid” is a person who fulfills his or her duties toward G-d and fellow man “beyond the line of the law” — beyond what is commanded and obligatory.



Being Talmidim of Yeshua, especially those who are grafted in, makes us Hassidic in nature, because we choose to live by His Commandments, because we love Him, not because we are obligated. This brings a dimension of joy as well to our expression.

Yeshua said, in Yochanan (John) 15:10 – 11:

“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and your joy may be full.”

Our goal is not to take all the practices of being Ultra-Orthodox, but to take the ideas of being Hassidic as we see it expressed in the Brit Chadashah. This means we can take from the idea of Hassidism, from all eras of Jewish life and history, and even pioneer our own, just as was being done amongst the early Messianic Community, who were centred around the Messianic Davidic figure, Yeshua HaMashiach.

The following is a guide to the prayers, blessings and melodies that we, at Derech HaMashiach will use when we come together as a community. For those who have Minhagim and Nusach from previous communities, you are welcome to continue them, however when we gather as a community, either small fellowships or large gatherings as on Shabbat, we will be adopting the Minhagim and Nusach of Derech HaMashiach, which may evolve over time as we grow individually and as a community.



Hebrew Language and Phrasing

There are two particularly widespread systems of Hebrew pronunciation encountered today: Ashkenazi and Sephardi.

The Ashkenazi pronunciation has been historically used by Jews who spoke Yiddish (Judeo-German) and their descendants, who migrated throughout central and eastern Europe. Yiddish, which combined Hebrew with German, was only spoken by Ashkenazi Jews.

Sephardic Jews had a variety of other languages, including Ladino and Hakitía, which, in part, combine Hebrew and Spanish, to name just a couple of the many languages. Sephardi pronunciations originated with Judeo-Spanish-speaking Jews who, after their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula in the 15th century, settled throughout the Mediterranean, including North Africa, as well as in some western European countries such as England and the Netherlands.

Sephardi Hebrew is the basis for Modern Israeli Hebrew pronunciation and is the main expression of Hebrew used at Derech HaMashiach.



Kabbalat Shabbat (Friday Night)

Shabbat starts at 18 minutes before sunset on Friday night, also known as Erev Shabbat, the evening of the Sabbath. It is common to gather with family and friends to welcome the Shabbat. The Minhagim and Nusach we use are provided in the Ahavat Olam Siddur (by Ahavat Ammi). This provides the minimum liturgy recommended for use on Erev Shabbat, but individuals and groups are welcome to add as much as will make the evening a special time.

The format (Nusach) is Mizrachi and the blessings can be read in English or Hebrew (and repeated in English if there are non-Hebrew speakers in the gathering). Alternatively, the following melodies can be used:

1. Lecha Dodi (Welcoming the Bride):

<https://youtu.be/BNhUv0UpSVE?si=8yviPXi2BW2Xv0uX>

2. Shalom Aleichem (Welcoming Angels):

<https://youtu.be/7mwEUUDIA28?si=rLjZ9aEs1cu3QMov>

Shabbat Service

A. Shacharit Liturgy

The format (Nusach) of the Shabbat Service is mostly Ashkenazi (except where noted) in the Ahavat Olam Siddur. The liturgy service is read and sung in a combination of both Hebrew (with some Aramaic) and English. At times the Hebrew will be repeated in English, at other times, particularly during the Amida, the Chazzan (the official at a synagogue who leads the congregation in prayer and song) will chant some of the prayers in Hebrew and the Congregation will read along quietly in English. All are welcome to come and participate in this service, which is the best way to learn the Hebrew expression.



The melodies used are a combination of contemporary and traditional melodies.

B. Torah Service

The majority of the Torah Service will be conducted in English, but the Chazzan will chant some parts followed by the English. The blessings for reading the Torah, and other readings will typically be read or chanted in Hebrew, but some who are not well versed in Hebrew, may choose the English reading. The transliteration and English words will always be available so everyone can follow along.

For those that may be called upon to do Aliyah (coming up to do the Torah Reading), the following links will provide the Hebrew chants and melodies for you to practice. The Chazzan will instruct the person doing Aliyah (called the Oleh) on what to do for Aliyah. The Gabbai (who assists the Chazzan) will call up the Oleh, and also provide guidance if required.

Torah Blessing:

Before and after reading the Torah:

<https://youtu.be/w-bQsVDvjCk>

Haftarah Blessing:

Before reading the Haftarah:

<https://youtu.be/Q6STVhg4NrA?si=UKZL-D-tfojKrJFb>

<https://youtu.be/lurGgKVwUbl?si=nQgOdzn0uk89uIGK>

After reading the Haftarah:

<https://youtu.be/FxJyQu2xb1s?feature=shared>

Brit Chadashah Blessing:

Us the same melody as for the Torah Blessings.



C. Music and Singing

It is not unusual for a Torah Service to be followed by the community singing hymns and songs. These songs will be a combination of Hebrew and English. Those with Hebrew words will have an accompanying video which will have the transliteration (to help with singing along) and English subtitles, for those who are not familiar with the Hebrew words.

The focus of many songs will be our Beloved Rebbe, Yeshua, but other songs will simply express our thanks and love towards the Living G-d. Psalms are a beautiful way to express these sentiments.

Havdalah (Saturday Night)

The Shabbat is closed with Havdalah (Separation), which separates the holy Shabbat day from the rest of the working week. Havdalah is performed after nightfall, which is the time when three stars can be seen in the sky, normally around 45 minutes after sundown in Australia.

The typical format (Nusach) is Ashkenazi, and the blessings can be read in English or Hebrew (and repeated in English if there are non-Hebrew speakers in the gathering). Alternatively, the following melodies can be used:

<https://youtu.be/JDCdQTXUfHM?si=JVvSfzwlfh9ulzLI>

The Mizrahi Nusach for Havdalah is also available in the Ahavat Olam Siddur.



A Final Word

The majority of our communal gatherings will be enriched by your participation, to whatever level you are able to. Our participation is the key to experiencing G-d's fullness. We hope and pray you will experience His joy as you join with us.

Also, please remember, we are all at different stages of this walk, and we cannot, and should not, compare ourselves, or others, with anyone. Our patience with one another is the key to growing together as a community of Believers, the Body of Messiah.



Other Guides and Booklets in this series include:

Messianic Synagogue - Order of Service

Meet the Rabbis

The Mitzvot (The Commandments):

A series of small guides on each Mitzvah most relevant to Messianic Judaism in the *Diaspora* (not in Jerusalem)

Why are we Hassidic?

Bar and Bat Mitzvah Guide

The Appointed Times Guides:

Shabbat Guide

Purim Guide

Pesach Guide

Counting the Omer Guide

Shavuot Guide

High Holiday Guide

Hanukkah Guide

