



Parent Page

Look at Me: I Can Learn and Do in the Synagogue

By Maxine Segal Handelman

Dear Parent,

Shalom! Your child has been exploring ***Look at Me: I Can Learn and Do in the Synagogue*** in school. This booklet introduces the key vocabulary of the synagogue, including: sanctuary, Torah, rabbi, ark siddur, prayers, commandment, Hebrew, and Sh'ma. Activities teach the geography and functions of the synagogue while reinforcing key learning-readiness skills, such as counting and making size comparisons. For example, students count the number of people in a prayer service and compare a small and big Torah scroll.

When you share this *Look at Me* booklet with your child, you create an important link between your child's experiences at school and at home. What better way to get to know the synagogue than by letting your child give you the tour, using everything he or she has learned in this booklet. You will delight in joining your child on the journey.

Bringing *Look at Me* to Life

Many pages of this *Look at Me* booklet include drawings of little bears. These bears help bring the *Look at Me* activities to life and ask us to consider the contents of the pages in new ways:

- Sometimes the bears make observations, such as "Our synagogue is beautiful!" (page 13) Invite your child to expand on the thought. What is beautiful about your synagogue? What is beautiful about praying as a community?
- These bears love to sing and dance. They sing in the synagogue school (page 11) and they dance at a wedding (page 8). Does your child love to sing and dance? Think together about times you have sung or danced at a synagogue or Jewish event. Help your child remember the occasion with you, complete with demonstrations.

Enriching Your Synagogue Introduction

As you delve into *Look at Me: I Can Learn and Do in the Synagogue*, consider the many activities you can initiate that build on, expand, and enrich the activities in the booklet. For example, you might:

- Go to your synagogue. Let your child show you around, and tell you about his or her favorite things. Encourage your child to introduce you to the rabbi and cantor.
- Ask a staff member, the rabbi, or the cantor to show you and your child the Torah and the Holy Ark.
- Dance to some fun, modern Jewish music, such as *Friday Night Live* by Craig Taubman, *Live at the Del* by Debbie Friedman, or *Oy Baby!*

- Say the Sh'ma at home before bedtime. Let this ritual open the door for other conversations about Jewish life and God. Visit www.behrmanhouse.net/hin1prayer/ and click on number 3 to hear the Sh'ma read aloud.
- Read some wonderful Jewish storybooks with your child that take you inside a synagogue, such as *Bagels from Benny* by Aubrey Davis (Kids Can Press), *When Zaydeh Danced on Eldridge Street* by Elsa Okon Rael (Simon & Schuster), and *Fancy Aunt Jess* by Amy Hest (Morrow Junior).

Time for Grown-Ups

The synagogue is a center for the entire Jewish community—children and grown-ups alike. The synagogue has played a central role throughout modern Jewish history. Take this time to reflect on the wise words of a beloved Jewish character who sang:

If I were rich, I'd have the time that I lack
To sit in the synagogue and pray.
And maybe have a seat by the Eastern wall.
And I'd discuss the holy books with the learned men,
several hours every day.
That would be the sweetest thing of all.
-Tevye, *Fiddler on the Roof*

A synagogue has many names. Some call it a House of Prayer (*Beit T'fillah*) or a House of Study (*Beit Sefer* or *Beit Midrash*). Others call it a House of Gathering (*Beit Knesset*). Which of these functions does the synagogue serve for Tevye? For you? Which other functions could it serve?

May you and your children dance and sing with friends in the synagogue this week!

B'simchah – In joy and celebration!