ACADEMY *for* JEWISH RELIGION

RITUAL SKILLS HANDBOOK

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I. INTRODUCTION

While the Academy for Jewish Religion embraces multiple approaches to Jewish ritual and practice, we believe that effective spiritual leaders must be exposed to, and gain a degree of competence in, the full range of traditional rituals and melodies that are used in different forms across the Jewish spectrum. Ritual Skills testing is meant to examine students' basic facility with the core rituals and melodies that Jewish clergy may be called upon to perform in various settings, regardless of students' 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. Perfection is certainly not expected; adequacy and competence are.

Since cantorial and *Kol-Bo* students study and are tested on cantillation and *nusah* as a matter of course in their classes and in comprehensive exams, they are only required to be tested on a more limited set of Ritual Skills. This applies also to ordained/invested cantors who are students in the "Cantors to Rabbis" track of the Rabbinical Program. Each requirement in this document is specifically labelled as applying to either rabbinical students (not including Cantors to Rabbis students) or to rabbinical, cantorial, *Kol-Bo*, and Cantors to Rabbis (abbreviated C2R) students.

II. LITURGIES AND *NUSHAOT*

AJR recognizes that there is a wide variety of liturgies used within the Jewish world and there is also a wide range of creative melodies employed for different portions of the liturgy. Even with all of this variation, facility with the standard Ashkenazi *nusah* is still an essential skill for Jewish clergy who work in the United States and Canada (where the majority of our students are currently located). In order to ensure that rabbinical students graduate with competency in basic *nusah,* while embracing the diversity of liturgies used across the Jewish world, for the *nusah* components of the Ritual Skills requirement, students may use any *siddur/mahzor* that contains a version of the specific liturgy they are testing sufficient to demonstrate mastery of the basic *nusah* for that part of the liturgy. For example, students may test *Shabbat Shaharit nusah* in Reform, Orthodox, Reconstructing Judaism, Conservative, etc. *siddurim*, but for *Shabbat Musaf* students will need to use a siddur that contains a version of the *Musaf* service sufficient to demonstrate competency in the *nusah* of this service (which is not included in the Reconstructing Judaism or Reform *siddurim*). The Ritual Skills Resources document (available in the Ritual Skills group in Populi – if you need access to this group, please email mgoldstone@ajr.edu) includes, for each *nusah* skill, page numbers for a variety of *siddurim/mahzorim* that include a version of the particular liturgy that is sufficient for demonstrating competency in that *nusah*. If you have a *siddur/mahzor* that you are interested in using, but which is not listed in the Ritual Skills Resources packet, please reach out to Cantor Michael Kasper (mkasper@ajr.edu).

AJR expects its rabbinical and cantorial students to show a level of prayer/davening proficiency commensurate with their chosen path toward ordination: rabbinical or cantorial. The question of whether to allow students to test these skills in either Ashkenazi or Sefaradi *nusah* has been raised and discussed at length. After consultation we have come to the decision that all students, regardless of heritage or personal preference, will test using the standard Ashkenazi system of *nusah.* The chief determinant in this decision is the fact that a singular Sefaradi *nusah* does not exist; every country or region relies on their own version of prayer chant and there is no single version that can be shown to be widely authoritative.

III. TESTING PROCEDURES

Ritual Skills testing is open to all AJR students who are matriculated into the Rabbinical or Cantorial Program. Students interested in testing should arrange with Rabbi Cantor Sam Levine using his Calendly, you can also contact him directly by email: salevine66@gmail.com. While AJR has a recommended timeline for completing Ritual Skills requirements (see below), students are encouraged to test skills with which they are comfortable early on in their time at AJR and students are welcome to test on the skills in any order. Students may test on a single skill or multiple skills within a single testing session.

Ritual Skills requirements for rabbinical students may be completed by passing one of AJR's cantillation or *nusah* courses, or by leading a prayer service at AJR that involves a sufficient amount of an approved version of the liturgy (students must confirm with the Rabbi-in-Residence in advance of leading a prayer service that they want to count as a Ritual Skills test).

IV. TEXTS AND MATERIALS

The Ritual Skills Resources document (available in the Ritual Skills Populi group – if you need access to this group, please email mgoldstone@ajr.edu) contains a list of approved *siddurim, mahzorim*, and other texts that students may use to test for Ritual Skills. This document also contains resources for learning to perform many of the required Ritual Skills.

With regard to cantillation Ritual Skills, students testing for regular (not High Holiday) Torah reading, as well as איכה, רות\קהלת\שיר השירים, אסתר, הפטרה will be tested by the instructors for sight-reading randomly-selected passages with trope on the vocalized side of the תיקון or תנ"ך. Students testing for regular Torah reading will also be tested on the "scroll side"of the תיקון, (the side without vocalization or trope) for the brief passages designated below.

V. RITUAL SKILLS TIMELINE

AJR highly encourages all students matriculated in the Cantorial or Rabbinical Program to begin learning and testing Ritual Skills early in their time at AJR. In order to support this practice, we have divided the Ritual Skills requirements into five units that generally reflect a common order in which students are asked to perform these skills in internships and in the Jewish community. Students can keep track of their progressing in passing Ritual Skills in their personal "Comps and Ritual Skills" spreadsheet in their Student tab in Populi. This document records all attempted Ritual Skills including the date that a student attempted the skill. A "2" indicates that the skill was passed; a "1" indicates that the skill was passed but the student is encouraged to keep working on this skill because their performance at the Ritual Skill testing was less than optimal; a "0" indicates that the skill was attempted but was not passed.

Unit *Alef* should be completed by the end of 14 credits.
Unit *Bet* should be completed by the end of 28 credits.
Unit *Gimmel* should be completed by the end of 42 credits.
Unit *Dalet* should be completed by the end of 56 credits.
Unit *Heh* should be completed by the end of the fall semester of the senior year.

VI. List of All Ritual Skills

Unit א	**Unit ב**	**Unit ג**	**Unit ד**	**Unit ה**
ברכת המזון	Haftarah Cantillation	Cantillation of אסתר	Cantillation of איכה	שחרית של ימים נוראים
הבדלה	מעריב של חול	שחרית של שלוש רגלים	Cantillation of מגילות Other	Cantillation for ימים נוראים
Shabbat & Festival קידוש	שחרית של חול	מוסף של שלוש רגלים וראש חודש	מעריב של ימים נוראים	Tie ציצית
Torah Cantillation	מנחה של חול	הלל	קריאת שם	Adjust תפילין של ראש
קבלת שבת	קביעת מזוזה	ארבעה מינים	שבע ברכות	סדר תקיעת שופר
מעריב של שבת	Where to find		אל מלא רחמים	מצבה
שחרית של שבת			לוח בית הכנסת	
Choreography of Services			בחובה	
Donning טלית& תפילין			Basic Gabbai	
נטילת ידיים				

VII. TEST PARAMETERS AND EXPECTATIONS

The following short descriptions describe the parameters and expectations for each of the required Ritual Skills. Note that the "Cantors to Rabbis" track is abbreviated as "C2R."

Unit *Alef* (א)

ברכת המזון (*Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement)*

Students are expected to sing or chant the entire ברכת המזון from one of the approved texts (see the Ritual Skills Resources document). As a part of this skill students are also responsible for singing/chanting:

- שיר המעלות
- זימון for a ברית מילה
- זימון for a wedding (שבע ברכות is not included in this skill and is tested in Unit ב)

הבדלה (*Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement)*

Students are expected to sing or chant the introductory verses from הנה אל ישועתי through the end. As a part of this skill student are also responsible for:

- Describing the gestures associated with הבדלה
- Explaining when the wine/grape juice is drunk and why
- Describing the differences between הבדלה when performed after Shabbat as opposed to when performed after a holiday

Shabbat & Festival קידוש (*Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for singing/chanting:

- Shabbat evening קידוש
- Shabbat morning קידוש
- Festival evening קידוש
- Festival morning קידוש

Torah Cantillation (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

Please remember to bring a tikkun to this test.

As a part of this skill students are responsible for chanting:

- All trope symbols in any requested combination
- Selections from the Rosh Hodesh Torah reading – Numbers 28:1-4 and 28:11-15 – from the unvocalized (Torah scroll) side of a *tikkun*
- Randomly selected passages from vocalized side of a *tikkun*
- The blessings before and after an *aliyah*

Students are also responsible for explaining when the Torah scroll is opened and when it is closed or covered, as well as the choreography associated with having an *aliyah*.

קבלת שבת *(Rabbinic Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for chanting/singing:

- The opening and closing verses of the six Psalms from לכו נרננה up to לכה דודי
- The first and last stanzas of לכה דודי
- The opening and closing verses of the two Psalms that follow לכה דודי

Students are also responsible for explaining when people traditionally sit, stand, and turn around during the קבלת שבת service.

מעריב של שבת (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

As part of this skill students are responsible for chanting/singing:

- The ברכו
- The opening and closing of the two blessing paragraphs that follow ברכו
- From ומלכותו ברצון through גאל ישראל, the closing of the השכיבנו, and the ושמרו paragraph
- ויכולו and the מעין שבע paragraphs that follow

שחרית של שבת *(Rabbinic Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for chanting/singing:

- Five of the blessings in ברכות השחר
- The opening and closings of five consecutive psalms in פסוקי דזימרא
- The beginning of שחרית from עד שוכן up until and including ישתבח
- All parts normally chanted by the *Shaliah Tzibbur* from אמת א-לוהיהם ה' through the blessing גאל ישראל
- The first three blessings of the עמידה, including the public recitation of the קדושה

"Choreography" of שבת and Weekday Services *(Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for identifying the traditional choreography associated with Shabbat and Weekday morning services including: where and when to stand, sit, and bow, when to take steps back and forward, when to stand with feet together, etc. This skill is typically tested by moving chronologically through the service and with the tester asking questions about the choreography of different sections.

Donning of טלית & תפילין *(Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement)*

Please remember to bring a tallit and set of tefillin. For those who have a strong custom not to don tallit and/or tefillin, they may fulfill this Ritual Skill by instructing the tester step by step in the process of donning these ritual objects.

As a part of this skill students are responsible for:

- Reciting the proper blessings for donning a full-size טלית (as opposed to a טלית קטן) as well as for the arm and head תפילין.
- Properly donning and removing each of these ritual objects in their traditional order

נטילת ידיים *(Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for:

- Reciting the proper blessing for ritual hand washing
- Demonstrating the handwashing ritual according to one of the widespread customs for נטילת ידיים (before eating bread) including the timing for when the blessing is traditionally recited

Unit *Bet* (ב)

Haftarah Cantillation *(Rabbinic Requirement)*

Please remember to bring a tikkun to this test.

As a part of this skill students are responsible for chanting:

- The blessings before and after the recitation of the הפטרה
- Randomly selected passages from various הפטרות

מעריב של חול *(Rabbinic Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for chanting the following using the proper weekday (as opposed to Shabbat) *nusa<u>h</u>*:

- ברכו
- The opening and closings of the blessings before and after the שמע
- קדיש שלם

שחרית של חול *(Rabbinic Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for chanting the following using the proper weekday (as opposed to Shabbat) *nusa<u>h</u>*:

- Five of the blessings in ברכות השחר
- The opening and closings of five consecutive psalms in פסוקי דזימרא
- ישתבח (marking the shift in *nusa<u>h</u>* from פסוקי דזימרא)
- All parts normally chanted by the *Shalia<u>h</u> Tzibbur* from אמת ויציב through the blessing גאל ישראל
- The first three blessings of the עמידה, including the public recitation of the קדושה

מנחה של חול *(Rabbinic Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for chanting all of the מנחה service (including: אשרי, the חצי קדיש, the first three blessings of the עמידה, תחנון, קדיש שלם, and עלינו) using the proper weekday (as opposed to Shabbat) *nusa<u>h</u>*. Students are also responsible for identifying the general rules regarding when תחנון is recited and when one recites the נפילת אפים paragraph with their head down.

קביעת מזוזה *(Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for:

- Identifying what types of spaces would require a מזוזה
- Noting when the blessing is recited with respect to affixing a מזוזה

- Reciting the proper blessing for affixing a מזוזה
- Identifying where on a door frame a מזוזה should be affixed

Where to Find *(Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for:

- Identifying where one can find the following blessings:
    - תפילת הדרך
    - ברכות הנהנין
    - ברכות השמיעה
    - ברכות הראייה
- Explaining when these different blessings are recited

Unit *Gimmel* (ג)

Cantillation of מגילת אסתר *(Rabbinic Requirement)*

Please remember to bring a tikkun to this test.

As a part of this skill students are responsible for chanting randomly selected passages from the vocalized side of the *tikkun* within מגילת אסתר.

שחרית של שלוש רגלים *(Rabbinic Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for:

- Chanting from האל בתעצומות עוזך through ישתבח
- Noting the differences in שחרית between when a festival falls on a weekday vs. on Shabbat.
- Chanting from the last paragraph of the קדושה through the end of the עמידה
- Explaining how the beginning of the Torah Service for festivals is different from Shabbat

מוסף של שלוש רגלים וראש חודש (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

As a part of this skill students are responsible for:

- Chanting from the last line of the קדושה through the רצה paragraph in the עמידה for *Rosh Hodesh*
- Chanting the קדושה through the beginning of the רצה paragraph in the עמידה for festivals
- Knowing when the פיוטים for טל and גשם are recited
- Reciting short selections from the פיוטים for טל and גשם

הלל (*Rabbinic Requirement*)

As a part of this skill students are responsible for:

- Chanting the blessing before הלל
- Chanting/singing the opening and closing of the Psalms in the full הלל

- Explaining a widespread custom for how the lines הודו לה' and אנא ה' are recited by the prayer leader and congregation
- Noting which lines are traditionally repeated
- Explaining the difference between "full" and "half" הלל and when each is recited

ארבעה מינים (*Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement*)

As a part of this skill students are responsible for:

- Explaining/demonstrating how the ארבעה מינים are assembled and held
- Reciting the proper blessing before taking the ארבעה מינים and explaining how many adjust the way they hold the ארבעה מינים after reciting the blessing
- Demonstrate the waving of the ארבעה מינים

Unit *Dalet* (ד)

Cantillation of מגילת איכה *(Rabbinic Requirement)*

Please remember to bring a tikkun to this test.

As a part of this skill students are responsible for chanting randomly selected passages from the vocalized side of the *tikkun* within מגילת איכה. Note that the cantillation of chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 uses the same melodies for each of the tropes, but that in many communities the melody is different for chapter 3. Students must be able to demonstrate knowledge of both melodies.

Cantillation of the Remaining מגילות *(Rabbinic Requirement)*

Please remember to bring a tikkun to this test.

As a part of this skill students are responsible for chanting randomly selected passages from שיר השירים, קהלת, & רות using the vocalized side of the tikkun.

מעריב של ימים נוראים *(Rabbinic Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for chanting the basic *nusa<u>h</u>* for:

- ברכו
- The opening and closings of the blessings before and after the שמע
- שמע
- חצי קדיש

Students are not expected to demonstrate special melodies for the פיוטים.

קריאת שם *(Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for reading/chanting the Hebrew paragraph used during a ברית מילה or a baby naming ceremony.

שבע ברכות *(Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for:

- Chanting/Reading/Singing the seven blessings done at a wedding and after a meal during the first week of marriage.
- Explaining how these seven blessings are recited differently during a wedding ceremony and after a meal during the week following a wedding.

אל מלא רחמים (*Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement*)

As a part of this skill students are responsible for:

- Reading/Chanting the אל מלא רמחים paragraph recited during a funeral or for a yahrtzeit
- Reading/Chanting Psalm 23
- Familiarity with what אלוה סליחות is and when one might recite it

לוח בית הכנסת (*Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement*)

As a part of this skill students are responsible for:

- Demonstrating how to navigate an English לוח (e.g*., the Ezras Torah Luach* and pages from Miles Cohen and Leslie Rubin's *Luaḥ Hashanah*)
- Finding the page/section in which a particular day is observed
- Interpreting the notations
- Explaining what the information provided means

כתובה (*Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement*)

As a part of this skill students are responsible for:

- Reading the text of either a vocalized or unvocalized Aramaic כתובה
- Explaining what information goes into the blank spaces in an Aramaic כתובה

Basic *Gabbai* *(Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for:

- Reciting the paragraph(s) for calling up a person to the first *aliyah* on Shabbat and on a weekday.
- Reciting a מי שברך לחולה
- Reciting ברכת הגומל
- Calling up a person for הגבהה and גלילה
- Explaining different Hebrew conjugations for calling up women, men, and gender non-conforming individuals

Unit *Heh* (ה)

שחרית של ימים נוראים *(Rabbinic Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for chanting:

- Five of the blessings in ברכות השחר

- The opening and closings of five consecutive psalms in פסוקי דזימרא
- From המלך through ישתבח
- All parts normally chanted by the *Shaliah Tzibbur* from אמת א-לוהיכם ה' through the blessing גאל ישראל
- The first two blessings of the עמידה

Cantillation for ימים נוראים *(Rabbinic Requirement)*

Please remember to bring a tikkun or mahzor to this test.
As a part of this skill students are responsible for:

- Chanting selections from the Torah readings for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur using the High Holiday *nusah* from a *Mahzor* or the vocalized side of a *tikkun.*
- Calling up a person for an *aliyah* using the High Holiday tune

Ability to tie ציצית *(Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement)*

Please remember to bring a set of four strings for demonstrating.
As a part of this skill students are responsible for:

- Reciting the *kavanah* (intention) that is traditionally recited before beginning the tying of *tzitzit*
- Tying one of the four (all white, non-*techelet*) *tzitzit* that would go on a *tallit* (students may use a diagram while tying the *tzitzit*)

Ability to adjust the knot תפילין של ראש *(Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement)*

Please remember to bring a set of tefillin for demonstrating.
As a part of this skill students are responsible for widening and narrowing the space for one's head in the תפילין של ראש by adjusting the knot. Students may use either a square (also known as a מ) knot or a ד knot. AJR encourages students to also learn how to tie the knots for both תפילין and resources are available within the Populi Ritual Skills group – but tying these knots is not a Ritual Skill requirement.

סדר תקיעת שופר *(Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for:

- Identifying the names of the different shofar blasts and how the blasts differ from each other
- Identifying the typical order of shofar blasts during the Shofar Service on Rosh Hashanah

Students are not expected to actually perform the shofar blasts themselves

מצבה *(Rabbinic/Cantorial/C2R/Kol-Bo Requirement)*

As a part of this skill students are responsible for:

- Decoding and translating some of the key acronyms (ראשי תיבות) found on Jewish headstones

- Explaining the usage of common symbols found on Jewish headstones
- Reading the Hebrew text of a מצבה and explaining the basic ideas conveyed