

A Jewish Building by Any Other Name...

Synagogue: Comes from the Greek word "συναγωγή" transliterated *synagogē* meaning 'Assembly'

Shul: Comes from the German word for school.

Beit Midrash: Meaning a 'House of Study'

Beit Tefillah: Meaning a 'House of Prayer'

Beit K'nesset: Meaning a 'House of Meeting' or a 'House of Assembly'

Kehillah Kedosha: Meaning 'holy community'

HaBayit / Temple: Comes from the Hebrew literally meaning 'The House'.
The First Temple stood in Jerusalem until 586 B.C.E.
The Second Temple existed from 516 B.C.E. – 70 C.E.

In America, you may hear Jews say that they are 'going to Temple' – this is just their word for synagogue!
British Jews do not use this terminology.

A few key things to remember:

A synagogue is usually a simple building. There are no requirements for how it is built. That said, it most often faces east, so that when people pray, they are facing Jerusalem. Of course, in parts of the world where Jerusalem is in the west, the opposite is true! Generally, seats are set up so that most people are facing the 'Aron Hakodesh' or the 'ark', where the Torah scrolls are kept.

Space itself is not sacred in Judaism: It is more important to pray **with** people than to pray in a certain type of space. As a result, FRS's building is used for many different purposes: Our main hall is used for services, as a youth club, to feed homeless people, to teach many generations, to throw a party, and so on.

Men are required to wear a 'kippah', also called a 'yarmulke' or a 'skullcap' when inside a synagogue. In Reform or Liberal synagogues, women are invited to do so as well.

Jewish adults, regardless of gender, often wear a 'tallit', or a prayer shawl, but only in a morning service, or if they are leading the service. A person may not hold a scroll during a service without wearing a tallit.

Key Books used in a Synagogue:

Siddur: A Prayer Book. The word 'Siddur' comes from the word 'Seder' meaning 'order'. This is why the Reform Siddur is called 'Seder Hat'fillot', meaning 'the Order of the Prayers'

TaNakh: This is the complete Jewish Bible. It includes:
Torah (the 5 books of Moses)
Nevi'im (the prophets)
K'tuvim (the writings)

A slightly different version of this book (without everything in it) is called a Chumash. At FRS we use (and refer to) the 'Eitz Chayyim Chumash'.

Chumash comes from the word 'chamesh', meaning 5 – representing the 5 books of Moses in the Torah.

The Eitz Chayyim Chumash also contains some of the 'Haftarot' – or additional readings – that we also read on a Shabbat, after the Torah reading.

Machzor: Coming from the word for 'cycle', a machzor is the prayer book that we use for the High Holy Days and for the 3 pilgrim festivals (Succot, Shavuot, and Pesach).

Torah: While technically a scroll, the Torah is a book. We keep it in the ark, do not touch the writing with our hands, and treat the scroll in a manner that reflects the respect it is due.

The oldest biblical manuscript that has been found to date is in the Dead Sea Scrolls. These scrolls include much of the text found in our Torah scrolls, (as well as other material) and are believed to date back to somewhere between 408 B.C.E. and 318 C.E.

Finally: Much of the choreography of a service is organised by the 'warden'. If a warden offers you a 'mitzvah', it will involve some sort of action within the community. For example, they may ask you to open the ark, or to chant the blessings over the Torah.

Some of these actions can be performed by anybody, while others are usually fulfilled by Jews, because the blessing they recite before the action they are doing suggests they are 'commanded' to do so.

If you have any questions just ask someone – they may get to learn the answer at the same time as you!