

Kabbalah Pop Culture
Fall Kallah
November 12, 2005
1:30 PM – 2:30 PM

Program Type: Educational
Program Writer: Kara Tanenbaum- Co-chair/ President
Age Group: High School
Cost: TBD
Theme: Kabbalah
Youth Group: NFTY-MAR
Length of Program: 1 Hour
Number of Participants: 200

Goals:

1. To teach PPs about the difference between myth and fact relating to Kabbalah.
2. To allow PPs to determine how they feel about the reputation Kabbalah in pop culture is giving Judaism.
3. To give PPs and idea of how to react to questions about Judaism.

Objectives:

1. PPs will learn about kabbalah's infiltration into pop culture.
2. PPs will see how Madonna has incorporated Kabbalah into her career
3. PPs will be able to differentiate between traditional and "pop" Kabbalah

Materials:

1. Music Video – Madonnas "Die Another Day"
2. Projection screen
3. DVD/ VHS/ computer? To show music video
4. Myth vs. fact quizzes
5. Pens/ pencils
6. Explanation of Red String

People:

1. Group Leaders: TBD
2. Clergy to wrap up
3. PPs

Time Table:

0-3: Settle in

3-10: Introduction

3-6 Skit about Ashton, Demi, and a NFTY-ite (text to come)

6-10 Watch video

10-12: Break into groups

12-24: Rotation #1 (Reputation) – Everyone does this rotation first. Group leaders have to be prepared to lead all three topics

24-26: Rotate

26-38: Rotation #2 (Myth vs. Fact)

38-40: Rotate

40-52: Rotation #3 (Questions about Judaism)

52-55: Regroup

55-60: Wrap Up

Method:

0-3 *Settle In:* PPs should already know what groups they are in based on nametags received at registration. Group leaders should be trying to quiet PPs down so we can get started.

3-10 *Introduction:*

3-6 Skit – led by PLs, in which NFTYite asks Demi and Ashton questions about Judaism, that they can't answer. They just sell holy water and red strings.

6-10 Show music video, announce where groups will meet

10-12 *Break into groups:* This should give PPs a chance to find their groups and settle into them.

12-24 *Rotation #1- Reputation:* Group leaders will ask a set of questions to get PPs to discuss how they feel about the "reputation" they feel Madonna and other celebrity Kabbalists give us as Jews by making our religion part of pop culture.

- 1) The "Die Another Day" video keeps zooming in on her tattoo, which is one of the many names of G-d in Hebrew used by Kabbalists. Why does she do this? Are we offended by it? What do we think of the irony of getting a tattoo (against Jewish law) of G-d's name?
- 2) Later, Madonna is shown putting on Tfilin and it is implied that it is the Tfilin, which "traps" her in the chair. What message is she trying to send? What is the symbolism involved in using the Tfilin for this? Are we offended? Why?
- 3) Does the overall message of the video have anything to do with Judaism or are these Jewish "features" simply random?
- 4) Is it clear that Madonna is showing her ties with Kabbalah? If we didn't know she was a Kabbalist, would we think she was just Jewish?
- 5) How do we feel in general about the video? Is our "reputation" at stake here?

24-26 *Rotate*

26-38 *Rotation #2- Myth vs. Fact:* Group leaders will give out True or False “quizzes” and give PPs a few minutes to complete. Group leaders will then go through each question one by one and ask PPs to share their answers and why they thought that. Group leaders will reveal the real answers to the questions.

1.F 2.F 3.F 4.T 5.F 6.F 7.F 8.F 9.T 10.T 11.F 12.T 13.T 14.F

- 1) Were you surprised by any of the answers? ** (for 14 – idea is that it’s more than just another variety, it’s an intense way of doing all the things traditional Jews do, and more)
- 2) Do you think most people would know the difference? Why or why not?
- 3) How does the media portray Kabbalah and how does it influence the general population’s knowledge about Kabbalah, to lead to incorrect answers to these questions?
- 4) Do you know about the Red String and what it is? See attachment.

38-40 *Rotate*

40-52 *Rotation #3- Representing Reform Judaism:*

- 1) Now that we’ve talked about what Kabbalah is and isn’t, and we’ve seen how Madonna and other celebrities represent Kabbalah, how does that affect how we’re seen in the world by non-Jews, or other Jews who may confuse this incorrect and loose form of Kabbalah with “Reform”?
- 2) Is just feeling good about Judaism enough to be Jewish?
- 3) How do you feel about not being a competent Jew?
- 4) How do you articulate your pride in being a Reform Jew, even when admitting that you are not the most knowledgeable Jew?
- 5) Can you articulate what Judaism is to you, in defense of Judaism NOT being what Madonna and her friends have taken on as a fad?
- 6) Most likely Lindsay Lohan and Brittany don’t know what the Talmud is, how are we different from them?

52-55 *Regroup*

55-60 *Wrap Up*

MYTH vs. FACT

Kabbalah Style

1. **T or F** Kabbalah is a form of Magic
2. **T or F** Kabbalah provides a form of escape
3. **T or F** Kabbalah is drug induced
4. ~~**T or F** Kabbalah is expressed through action~~
5. **T or F** Kabbalah is meant to deceive others
6. **T or F** Kabbalah is contrary to Jewish practice
7. **T or F** Kabbalists use astrology and horoscopes in practice
8. **T or F** **Kabbalah is a form of a cult**
9. **T or F** Kabbalah is communal
10. **T or F** Kabbalah is reserved for those whose feet are planted firmly on the ground in the community
11. **T or F** **There is no such practice as Kabbalah anymore**
12. **T or F** Kabbalah is always initiated in the Torah
13. **T or F** Kabbalah is subject to all of God's commandments
14. **T or F** Kabbalah is just another variety of Judaism

WHAT IS WITH THE RED STRING?

For celebrities like Demi Moore, Ashton Kutcher, Lindsay Lohan, Britney Spears, Madonna—and even Madonna's daughter Lourdes—it has become fashionable to wear a "Kabbalah" bracelet made out of braided red string to protect them from "the unfriendly stare and unkind glances," as the Kabbalah Centre (where the string sells for \$26 a length) puts it.

Surprisingly, though, this tradition is not explicitly from Kabbalah. Many Mediterranean cultures wear red to ward off the evil eye. According to Jewish folkways, the red string wards off the evil eye. Some trace belief in the evil eye to rabbinic sources and kabbalistic texts, which recommend various remedies such as wearing amulets.

There are biblical traditions associated with a red string as well. Wrapping a red string around the tomb of the matriarch Rachel is supposed to protect women in childbirth. Since Rachel is associated with the Shekhinah (in Kabbalah, the divine presence), there are also some kabbalistic overtones.

This bracelet, called a *bendel*, has adorned the wrists of entertainers such as Madonna and Britney Spears, who have been studying this form of Jewish mysticism at the Kabbalah Centre. An authentic *bendel* is one that has been cut from a string that has been wrapped seven times around the tomb of the biblical matriarch Rachel in Bethlehem and purportedly brings its wearer protection and luck.

One nonsupernatural explanation of the string's power is that it reminds the wearer to bear himself or herself with humility, so as not to attract envy.