

Tallis of Tradition and Today
SAFTY, the TYG of Temple Beth-El of San Antonio, Texas
November 30, 2005
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NORTH AMERICAN TIKKUN OLAM AWARD WINNING PROGRAM

Touchstone Text:

"I am a Jew because the word of Israel is the oldest and the newest"
(Gates of Prayer)

Goals: Through this program, participants will gain a sense of their own link to Jewish tradition. They will explore their Jewish foundations, connect them to their present life, and discover their Jewish community and its future.

Objectives: Participants will spend time exploring their own Jewish foundations through the traditional Torah portion that was read on the Shabbat of their birth. Participants will then explore how that Jewish text affects them today, and will proceed to make a community tallis—to not only carry the community from traditional text to future prayer, but to weave their stories together as well.

Materials:

- Small pieces of paper or note cards(one for each participant)
- A few pens
- Torah translation books (enough to share one for every 2-3 participants)
- Large piece of white fabric (approximately 6' long. Width depends on # of participants. Each should have a 2" wide strip or the 6' fabric)
- Scissors
- Fabric pens/markers (enough to share among participants)
- Old newspapers/recyclables to put under fabric
- Sewing machine
- Sewing machine needles
- Sewing machine thread
- String for tzitzit
- Group leader discussion questions
- Group leader wrap-up notes

People:

- Expected 20-or-so participants, but program may be used for more or fewer
- Participants will be in 6-8 person break out groups
- Each group requires 1-2 group leaders
- Program facilitator
- An available Rabbi or knowledgeable adult is needed to provide assistance in understanding portions. This person will also be used to teach about the kosher tying of knots for tzitzit.
- If the tallis is to be finished during the allotted time, a person who can use the sewing machine is needed

Space Needed: To accommodate the 20-or-so expected participants, a room or rooms with floor space and three tables is preferred. Participants will study their text either in chairs or on the floor and will use the tables for the decoration of their fabric strips.

Time Table:

00:00-00:10 Introduction
00:10-00:15 Break into groups
00:15-01:00 Read/discuss text
01:00-01:10 Wrap-up groups, move to tables
01:10-01:30 Decorate fabric strips
01:30-01:45 Teach tzitzit/sew strips
01:45-02:00 Complete tallis/wrap-up

Detailed Procedure:

If possible, the birth dates of participants and their corresponding Torah portion should be looked up before hand or while they are doing something else (i.e. eating) Use this website to look up Torah portions;
<http://www.chabad.org/calendar/view/year.asp?tDate=12/11/2005> and find the needed date.

00:00-00:10 Introduction

Facilitator welcomes participants and explains what is to be done (they will read the Torah portion from the Shabbat of their birth and take a theme or phrase from it that applies to them now). Every person is given a piece of paper with their birth date and Torah portion written on it.

00:10-00:15 Break into groups

Group leaders take groups of 6-8 to a section of the room to begin reading Torah portions.

00:15-01:00 Read/discuss text

Participants read the first 20-or-so verses of their Torah portion. As they go they can ask their group leader or the available adult for assistance. Participants are asked to examine their text for a theme or phrase that holds significance to them now. They may interpret the text as they wish, and will be guided by group leader discussion questions following their reading. After deciding on their focus, participants should be free to share what they have found with other group members.

01:00-01:10 Wrap-up groups, move to tables

Group leaders will provide further instructions concerning the next part of the program. Participants should be told to decorate their strip of fabric to tell their story. They will decorate their strip with their theme, catch-phrase, quote, or meaning that they found in their Torah portion. The strips will be used to make a community tallis. Once this has been explained, participants will move to the tables to decorate.

01:10-01:30 Decorate fabric strips

Participants will decorate their strip to tell the story of their Torah portion's relation to their present life. They should feel free to write their names, the name of the Torah portion, their birthday or none of the above. They may decorate it however they choose, but should know that what they put on their strip will be on the community tallis.

01:30-01:45 Teach tzitzit/sew strips

The knowledgeable adult will teach the tying of knots in order to make the community tallis a kosher one. They may teach however best suits them, but explanation can be found in the Appendix if necessary.

01:45-02:00 Complete tallis/wrap-up

The tallis will be completed—sewn together and with kosher knots.

The tallis we just made weaves together all of our stories. Each one of us has taken our Jewish tradition and foundation and made it into something of our own. With that we have created this tallis. We have sewn together each of our pasts and each of our presents by decorating these strips, and can pray as a community based on those things. This tallis is a not only a part of our Jewish tradition, but now a part of our Jewish now and future.

Appendix

Group leader discussion questions

Use these questions to help participants gain an understanding of their Torah portion and link their tradition to their personal lives. You may encourage participants to bounce ideas off of one another and share their thoughts with the group. If these questions fail to help a participant they should feel free to go to the knowledgeable adult for guidance.

Is there any single phrase that jumps out at you in this Torah portion? Why?

What might the people in this story be feeling?

What do you think your portion's main character(s) got from this experience?

If your portion discusses laws of some kind, how do you think they affected the people's lives?

Some of the things that are discussed in these texts don't seem to apply directly to today—like animal sacrifices. But how does the *concept* of that apply to your life?

Look at the bigger picture, what *theme* might this portion be discussing?

How does all this ancient stuff have anything to do with the Jews of 2005 sitting right here?

Appendix

Group leader wrap-up

First ask the group if there is anyone who would like to share their story and what significance they drew from it.

Then.... Read wrap-up

You have all read the Torah portion that was read on Shabbat when you were born, and now have discovered the meaning it holds in your present life. You are each going to receive a strip of fabric now. Take this fabric, and the pens and markers on the tables, and decorate it to tell your story. You should decorate use the theme, catch-phrase, quote, or meaning that you found in your portion to do so. You may use pictures, words or both—feel free to use your name, birthday, torah portion, all or none. Once you have completed your strips, they will be used to make a community tallis. Remember this when you are deciding what to put on your strip.

Hand out one strip to each participant.

They should work at tables with the pens and should have newspaper under the fabric so that it doesn't bleed through.

Appendix

Tzitzit Instructions

Tallit, Tefillin and Kippah

by Rabbi Goldie Milgram, ReclaimingJudaism.org

The Meaning of Tallit [Tallis]

Tallit as a Jewish spiritual practice is derived from a verse in the *Torah*:

**" ... And God told Moses 'Speak to the children of Israel, and guided them throughout their generations to make fringes on the corners of their garments.'"
Numbers 15:37-40**

How to Tie Tzitzit

1. Practice first before you start making real tzitzit, yarn works well for this purpose. Start by cutting four pieces -- three short strings measuring 40 inches in length, and one long string measuring 60 inches in length. The long string is called the shamash, or caretaker, like the 9th. candle in the Hanukkah menorah that is used to light the others. The shamash string will be used to wrap around the other strings.

2. Hold one end of all four strings together evenly. Push them through a hole in a square of cardboard or a key ring. It really helps to have someone holding the cardboard or ring while you do this project. Pull the strings until the cardboard is dividing the shorter strings exactly in half. The shamash string will remain longer on one side. This will be the string you use to wrap around the other strings. It may help you to remember which string is the shamash by tying a single knot at the bottom of its long end.

3. With the four short even strings in one hand and the three short strings and shamash in the other, tie two knots about two inches from the hole in the cardboard.

In order to fulfill the mitvah of tzitzit, it is customary for you to say "I'shem mitzvat tzitzit," "for the sake of doing the mitzvah of tzitzit," each time you tie a knot.

4. Hold the shamash in one hand and the other seven strings in the other. Tightly wrap the shamash around the group of seven strings seven times. Count the wraps very carefully. Make sure that the wraps start and end on the same side.

5. Continue wrapping and tying in the same order as in the picture-- two knots followed by eight wraps, two knots followed by eleven wraps, two knots followed by thirteen wraps, and two knots. Be sure to carefully check the number of wraps before each pair of knots. 7 - 8 - 11 -13 is the order of the wraps, with two knots between each.