

TEFILLIN: The Intimacy of Prayer

By Norman I. Kurtz

OBJECTIVE:

To inspire attendees to perform the mitzvah of wearing tefillin

PURPOSES:

- a. To help attendees achieve a better awareness of the mitzvah of wearing tefillin
- b. To make daily prayer more meaningful

FORMAT:

As a program prior to, or contemporaneous with morning minyan

PRESENTER:

Someone knowledgeable about the traditions and symbolism of tefillin; preferably someone who is a motivator and able to create an atmosphere of excitement when discussing the performance of ritual mitzvot

MATERIALS:

Attached text, Ex 13:1-10, 11-16; Deut 6:4-9, 11:13-21]

Extra sets of Tefillin

FJMC film: *The Ties That Bind*

DISCUSSION TOPICS:

I. Motivation. This portion of the program should provide inspiration to the wearing of tefillin.

Central theme of the tefillin is the act of binding - physical and spiritual. Note: Much of the activity of Jewish prayer is in the heart and mind. Binding oneself with Tefillin is a tangible act of union with the Almighty.

Concepts: *In this section we discuss the meaning of tefillin.*

A. One way of looking at the mitzvah of Tefillin is to think of groups of three: Instructor should introduce the three categories and ask the group to provide words which are associated with each. Record these answers on a board or chart. Some suggestions follow:

Head: *Cerebral, seat of thoughts, memory (Zicharon), and memorial*

Arm: *Physical, locus of action and possessions.*



Heart: Center of feelings and will, emotions.

Another group of three:

- Where we have been - (Egypt)
- Who we are - (Nation who received the commandments of mitzvot)
- Where we are going - (Duty of service to God)

We have traded the bondage of slavery to be bound to the service of God.

B.”They shall be for signs...” *In this section we discuss the visible signs of the tefillin.*

One of the names we use for the name of God: “(Shaddai)” is visually portrayed with the tefillin:

shin: on the baytim (boxes) and straps on the hand

dalet: on fingers and on knot on the back of the head

yud: knot next to baiyit shel yad (arm box) and at the end of the strap of the shel rosh (tefillin worn on the head)

C. Betrothal to God: There is nothing more intensely spiritual than the verses of betrothal that are recited as we bind the middle fingers.

a. v'erastikh li l'olam

וְאַרְשִׁיתִי לִי לְעוֹלָם,

b. v'erastikh li b'tzedek u b'mishpat u b'hessed ub'rakhmim.

וְאַרְשִׁיתִי לִי בְצֶדֶק וּבְמִשְׁפָּט וּבְחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים.

c. v'erastikh li be'emunah v'yada'at et Adonai.

וְאַרְשִׁיתִי לִי בְאֱמוּנָה, וְיָדַעְתָּ אֶת־יְהוָה.

“To know” - “Da-at”: Not in the academic sense but in the deepest kind of human emotional experience - sexual intercourse.

D. The Wedding Analogy Continued

The chupah: We wrap ourselves in the Tallit

The wedding vows: We bind ourselves in the tefillin (renewing the betrothal vows)

The worship: We have now prepared ourselves for worship with G-d

II. Practice. Since this program is held along with the morning minyan, have mentors on hand to assist the group with putting on the tefillin. Remember to spend a few minutes on the proper removal of tefillin at the conclusion of the service.

Suggested additional programs:

- Show and discuss the FJMC's Tefillin film *The Ties That Bind* at a men's club meeting or Sunday morning brunch
- Explore the parts of tefillin and discuss its kashrut
- Discuss and compare Halacha (laws) and minhag (customs) concerning tefillin.

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SHEMOT - THE BOOK OF EXODUS, CHAP. 13: 1 - 10

1. The LORD spoke further to Moses, saying,
2. "Consecrate to Me every first-born; man and beast, the first issue of every womb among the Israelites is Mine.
3. And Moses said to the people, "Remember this day, on which you went free from Egypt, the house of bondage, how the LORD freed you from it with a mighty hand: no leavened bread shall be eaten.
4. You go free on this day, in the month of Abib.
5. So, when the LORD has brought you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall observe in this month the following practice:
6. "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival of the LORD.
7. Through out the seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten; no leavened bread shall be found with you, and no leaven shall be found in all your territory.
8. And you shall explain to your son on that day, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I went free from Egypt.'
9. And this shall serve you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead—in order that the Teaching of the LORD may be in your mouth—that with a mighty hand the LORD freed you from Egypt.
10. You shall keep this institution at its set time from year to year.

SHEMOT - THE BOOK OF EXODUS, CHAP. 13: 11 - 16

11. "And when the LORD has brought you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and has given it to you,
12. you shall set apart for the LORD every first issue of the womb: every male firstling that your cattle drop shall be the LORDS.
13. But every firstling ass you shall redeem with a sheep; if you do not redeem it, you must break its neck. And you must redeem every first-born male among your children.
14. And when, in time to come, your son asks you, saying, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, "It was with a mighty hand that the LORD brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage.
15. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD slew every first born in the land of Egypt, the first-born of both man and beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD every first male issue of the womb, but redeem every first-born among my sons.'
16. And so it shall be as a sign upon your hand and as a symbol on your forehead that with a mighty hand the LORD freed us from Egypt."

DEVARIM - THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY, CHAP. 6: 4 - 9

4. Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.
5. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.
6. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day.
7. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up.
8. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead;
9. inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

DEVARIM - THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY, CHAP. 11: 13 - 21

13. If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the LORD your God and serving Him with all your heart and soul,
14. I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil—
15. I will also provide grass in the fields for your cattle — and thus you shall eat your fill.
16. Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them.
17. For the LORD'S anger will flare up against you, and He will shut up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land that the LORD is assigning to you.
18. Therefore impress these My words upon your very heart: bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead,
19. and teach them to your children—reciting them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up;
20. and inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates—
21. to the end that you and your children may endure, in the land that the LORD swore to your father to assign to them, as long as there is a heaven over the earth.