



Torah Service for Young Children

Submitted by: *Rebecca Swartz*

Subject Area: Torah, Prayer, Hebrew

Target Age Group: Early childhood to young primary grades

Lesson Objective:

Through this experience, the children will develop an understanding of the Torah Service as a recurring part of Jewish Life, learn Hebrew vocabulary related to tefillot and ritual objects, learn t'fillot from the Torah Service, begin to experience the stories of the Torah, and develop their identity and connection to the Jewish people through a T'fillah experience. They experience the joy of Jewish Communal Prayer in a setting geared to their needs.

Background Information:

This year at the Boulder Jewish Day School, the early childhood classes have been gathering not only for Kabbalat Shabbat, but for daily tefillot. In order to enhance the children's T'fillah experience, we have added a weekly Torah Service in the communal space upstairs, near the small ark loaned to the day school by Har Hashem and the small Torah from Bonai Shalom.

The children are excited every week to go upstairs and greet the Torah. They have learned the t'fillot, names of ritual object, and are excited to pass the yad, chosen, torah mantle, and binder around. We march with the Torah each week. The Torah service communicates to our youngest children the centrality of Torah in the life of the Jewish people. We are using the upstairs space at BJDS, which helps the children to feel they are going to a special place, the school's Beit Knesset, and doing something important as they have a service with the Torah.

What makes this addition to our curriculum unique is that this T'fillah time is focused on young children, and making their experience with the Torah meaningful. Through singing, marching, discussion, and handling the Torah, the children are connecting with the rituals central to Jews around the world, as well as developing a connection to their home community. Through this addition to



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our T'fillah program, we will to continue to develop this liturgy for young children as well as strategies for making this experience meaningful and successful as a resource for other early childhood and religious school programs for young children.

Explanation of how the Early Childhood Program at the Boulder Jewish Day School conducts their Torah Service:

In the BJDS Early Childhood Program, we gather for daily T'fillah, which includes the prayers of Modeh Ani, Shma, and Oseh Shalom. We also use this time to introduce Modern Hebrew, Holiday Songs and Stories, and study of the weekly Torah Portion. On Fridays, we gather for Kabbalat Shabbat. In order to help the children connect to the weekly cycles of prayer services, we also have added a Torah Service, which is held during our T'fillah time on Thursdays, corresponding to one of the weekday Torah readings, to help the children connect to the Torah as a central component of Jewish Practice, values, and stories that link Jews all over the world. The Liturgy can be adapted to fit into another setting, such as a Tot Shabbat, Family Service, or Religious School Classroom.

Our Early Childhood Torah Service Liturgy:

1. We gather upstairs, sitting in chairs in a circle, and begin by singing Modeh Ani, either with a traditional tune, or using an English version composed for young children.
2. Two children are chosen to help open the ark, and take out the Torah. We sing Ki Mitzion Tezei Torah as we open the ark.
3. We sing the Shma, while standing with the Torah.
4. We all march in a Hakafa (parade) while singing Torah Tzivah Lanu Moshe, using a traditional tune.
5. We are seated, and we begin to undress the Torah, in order to learn the names of all of the items that the Torah is wearing. We often pass around the items, so the children are able to touch the items and learn their names including



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Me'il ha Torah (the Cover), Choshen (breastplate), Yad la Torah (pointer) and Ha Gorah (the belt). The small Torah we use does not have a Keter, but we can borrow one so the children learn the name for the crown of the Torah as needed. As the children have learned the names of the items, we have started to answer riddles, such as, "I am used to point in the Torah and have a finger pointing on the end. Who am I? The yad!" We also learned about how to treat the Torah, such as holding it gently, touching it softly, not touching the letters with your hands, standing when the Torah stands, etc. Experiencing time with the Torah week after week allows the children a chance to become familiar with a synagogue service and hopefully, to participate successfully and understand what is happening when they have the occasion to be in the synagogue on Shabbat or a Holiday.

6. In the beginning of this year, the children were very focused on the things that the Torah is wearing, but as they became more familiar with the items, we were able to sometimes look in the Torah, see the letters were in Hebrew, and not English, listen to simple retellings of the parasha stories, listen to the chanting of a few verses, or act out parts of the parasha. The children learned some simple songs connected to the Parashat ha Shavua, including the MiChamocha when we read Shirat HaYam in Shmot, and songs about Avraham and Sarah, Noach, and Bereishit, the Creation of the world. The goal of the service is to expose the children to the cycle of reading the Torah, and have them experience how it is connected to Jewish Life, so at Chanukah and Purim, we talked about how those stories happened to the Jewish people after the Torah was given, and are in Megilat Ester and Book of the Macabees. During the Month of the High Holidays, we looked in the Torah and chanted some verses, which were explained using a child friendly translation, the mitzvot we needed to do. To prepare for Pesach, we read selections from Shmot and learned the story of Moshe and the Jewish People, in order to illustrate the connection between the Torah and its telling of how the Jewish People became a nation and were freed from bondage. With time, I hope we are able to develop a more comprehensive list of ideas that could be introduced during this time. At BJDS, this part of our service lasts about 5-10 minutes, because our youngest children are 2.5 yrs old, and have a harder time maintaining their attention. With older children this part of the experience could be longer and include more discussion.



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7. We close the Torah scroll, and have a last Hakafa, when the two children who will close the ark will follow the teacher who is holding the Torah around the circle, as the other children are given a chance to touch the Torah and kiss their hands, to bring the sweetness of Torah to their lips. We sing Tree of Life during this Hakafa and Etz Chayim with the tradition tune as we put the Torah back into the ark.

8. We sit down and finish the service, singing Oseh Shalom, which is part of our daily T'fillah liturgy at BJDS in the Early Childhood Program. We also sing Hinei Mah Tov, to show how happy we are to be together and read from the Torah, before dismissing children with their teachers to return to their classrooms.