

Peulat Shabbat for Shabbat Nachamu, Parashat Ve'etchanan, 1 August 2009

Materials:

(Unlit) yizkor candle
 Photo of a fallen soldier
 Crates/ boxes to sit on
 Poem (The Last Butterfly)
 Mirror (with a cloth covering it)
 Story of a fallen soldier
 A song (possibly psalm 23 mizmor l'david heshem ro'i)
 Information about tzedakot
 Prompter questions on index cards for the kids
 What are you doing?
 Can you explain the reason behind that ritual?
 How does this aspect of mourning comfort you?

Set up:

The Beit Am will be divided into four stations or living museum exhibits. One station will be a shiva house, complete with covered mirror, people sitting on boxes or low benches, mourners behaving like mourners and a visitor with the decorum of a visitor to a shiva house; one station will be saying the kaddish and teaching about it's meaning and when it is said; one station will be a memorial service for Israeli soldiers, with a yizkor candle (unlit because it is Shabbat), a photo of a fallen soldier, and someone to tell their story; and the last station will be quiet contemplation or reading a poem. Staff should be prepped for each station to play the role and to be able to answer any questions kids might have. Staff from each group should have discussion questions written out.

Part 1: (30 mins)

The kids will be divided into 4 groups, and will rotate to each of the stations, spending about 6 minutes at each station. They should in a solemn mood, and should be encouraged to ask the actors questions about the customs and practices they see. They should notice that mourning has both communal and personal aspects, and be guided toward the idea of how these practices are comforting.

Station 1: Shiva House. Three staff will be acting at the shiva house. They can be sitting on the floor or on a box, and they should be able to explain why they are sitting on the floor and why there is a covered mirror. One of the actors should be a guest and should teach the kids the proper greeting phrase, "hamakom ynachem etchem btotch avalei tzyion v'yerushalayim."

Station 2: Kaddish. A staff member should explain who you say kaddish for, where kaddish comes from, and what it means.

Station 3: Reflection. A staff member could be reading a poem. Kids can ask any question, but the focus of this station should be personal mourning.

Station 4: Memorial service for fallen Israeli soldiers. This station should have an Israeli or another person competent to talk about a specific soldier. The idea is to model a public communal expression of grief.

Part 2: (15-20 mins)

Staying in the 4 groups, the counselors should lead a discussion about kids' personal experiences with comfort after tragedy. Discussion questions should be provided:

- What is something you have that comforts you when you're upset?
- What is something that other people do that comforts you when you're sad?
- Have you ever experienced a personal 'tragedy'?
- How did it make you feel?
- What made you feel better?
- Have you ever experienced a communal tragedy? (9/11, Katrina, 2nd Lebanon War)
- How has it affected you?
- What did you do as a community to mourn?
- What did you do as a community to take action?
- What parts of the Jewish response to tragedy do you like?
- What do you think should be the Jewish communal response to tragedy?

Part 3: (10-15 min)

Wrap up the program as an entire edah. Come together in the moadon and discuss a final way to respond communally to tragedy: service and tzedakah. Cancer walks, habitat for humanity, hunger relief, etc. Grief and mourning are important and necessary, but at a certain point, it is healthy to channel those emotions into actions that will be a more lasting memorial for the departed than tears. Introduce the idea of giving tzedakah as an edah, and talk about a few tzedakot that are relevant to comfort and/or community. Conclude by singing a song as an edah.