

# Dare to Wear: Tefillin Barbie and Sacred Fashion

*A discussion for girls on Jewish ritual garb and the Mitzvah of Tefillin*

*Created by Amy Greenfeld, USY Education Coordinator*

**Use as a late night, girls only discussion circle at conventions or Shabbatonim. Boys may want to use this time to go over the ritual for those unsure of the process of laying Tefillin and create their own Tefillin bags.**

## **Supplies:**

- You will need enough sets of Tefillin for every 2-3 girls. Try and borrow as many as you can. Facilitator will have to be comfortable teaching how to wrap. There are videos demonstrating the wrapping of Tefillin available on Youtube (see below).
- Enlarged copies of You Can Do It poster and Tefillin Barbie
- Photocopies of the blessing

## **Goals:**

The goal of this session is to give the girls a safe and comfortable space to try Tefillin. Many of them don't partake in this mitzvah because they've never had the chance to try and don't really feel comfortable with it. For some, they have tried it and still aren't comfortable with it and that's okay- we want to give them the opportunity to make the choice themselves.

## **Program:**

1. Warm up: sharing circle

Welcome the girls and ask them to describe one thing they are currently wearing that has special significance for them.

Examples:

- my Hadaya necklace is from my Israel Pilgrimage trip, my first time in Israel
- The ring on my pinky was my grandmother's and she gave it to me when I became Bat Mitzvah
- My sweatpants were my brother's when he was in USY and he passed them down to me
- This anklet is from camp 2 summers ago and was made for me by my campers and I'm still wearing it

**POSE THE CORE QUESTIONS:** How does what you wear, make your FEEL? How are feelings and emotions associated with clothing or garb you wrap yourself in? Think of an article of clothing that changes your mood when you put it on. How does it do that? What is it about that piece of clothing that makes you feel differently? How does it help you express who you are?

*Allow for responses, ask for examples*

2. Jews wear specific prayer “clothing” or garb to help enhance their practice of mitzvot, as a special part of their sacred prayer experiences. Tefillin is one example. Ask the girls to **agree or disagree** with these statements:

- Tefillin look weird on females- it’s just not feminine
- Tefillin look weird on males and females
- Tefillin should be a choice for females
- Tefillin should be required for females

Pass the **Tefillin Barbie and We Can Do it pictures** around the circle and ask for immediate responses. How do you feel when you see this picture? What’s the first thing that comes to mind?

- The We Can Do It is a famous poster from the World War II war effort that encouraged women to work take on traditional male roles and work while men were sent to war. Do you think this is an appropriate marketing tool to promote the wearing of Tefillin for women? Is working outside the home (a traditionally male role in the ‘30s and ‘40s when this poster was produced) comparable to the wearing of Tefillin?
- Why choose Barbie to present a woman wearing Tefillin? What implications does it have? What does Barbie represent to a girl (young child or teen).
- “Barbie represented the fact that women have always had a choice” – *Ruth Handler, Jewish woman, creator of Barbie*. How does Tefillin Barbie demonstrate Handler’s statement?

→ Choices: you choose whether or not to lay Tefillin as a female. Why do you think so many females, including those who are comfortable with Kippah and Tallit, do not lay Tefillin? What is it about Tefillin that makes it remain a “guy thing?”

### 3. Explain:

Tonight, you’re each going to get a chance to make the Mitzvah of Tefillin your own. We’re going to create our **own Project Runway: Tefillin Edition**. In pairs (or groups of 3), you will each have a turn to lay Tefillin (for many it will be the first time so make sure to go through the steps). As a group, you will write our own fashion runway description of the feeling of Tefillin as a prayer. Describe the look, the feeling and emotion of what it feels like to wear Tefillin. Try to choose phrases that help you explain your feelings toward sacred Jewish wear.

4. Facilitator should demonstrate for each girl who chooses to try wrapping. Encourage them to help each other and ask each one to explain their feelings with the Tefillin wrapped around them. Have the partner be the fashion show MC and describe her “look” through words of emotion and feeling  
Eg. Sarah is wrapped in the words of the Shema. The accessory on her head connects her thoughts to her actions (point to shel yad, shel rosh). Although, not the trendiest of hairstyles, Sarah’s leather headband accessory Shel Rosh, reminds her that her decisions are her own and that the head, heart and hands are all connected. Sarah can feel the leather straps around her arm and feels bound by them. Her thoughts are free but her body does not feel the same freedom.

5. Summary discussion (wrap up)

Sacred Choices: For many of you, the choice not to wear Tefillin was based on the fact that you never really had the chance to try it. Now that you have tried it, how do you feel? (it's okay to not feel differently).

Why do you think Tefillin is a mitzvah? How does what we wear become a sacred choice? Did you feel special with the Tefillin on? Did you feel more connected to Judaism, to yourself? To the other girls? Did you feel silly or special? Does it help you connect with Jewish prayer when your body is somehow tied to your words?

*As a young woman, you will constantly be faced with choices. What you wear may influence how you feel about who you are and what you wish to present about yourself to the outside. Think about your Jewish self and apply this concept. You may still not be comfortable with Tefillin, but consider how it can influence your feelings toward being Jewish or you help you connect with Jewish prayer by tying your body to your feelings and thoughts. Laying Tefillin comes down to your own person choice and level of comfort. Tefillin may be something you'll decide on later, or maybe not at all, but use this experience to help guide you toward a comfortable decision.*



*Blessing for laying Tefillin:*

*Baruch ata adonai elokaynu melech ha'olam asher kidshanu  
b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'haniach Tefillin*

*Blessed are You O Lord Our God, King of the Universe, who has  
commanded us regarding the mitzvah of Tefillin*



*Baruch ata adonai elokaynu melech ha'olam asher kidshanu  
b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'haniach Tefillin  
Blessed are You O Lord Our God, King of the Universe, who has  
commanded us regarding the mitzvah of Tefillin*

*For facilitato- you may also want to include any of this information in your discussion*

### **FACTS ON TEFILLIN YOU MAY WANT TO SHARE:**

#### **WOMEN AND TEFILLIN:**

- Michal, daughter of King Saul was said to have worn Tefillin
- According to legend, Rashi's daughters also wore Tefillin
- Sefer Hachinuch (Mitzvah 421) states that a woman may wear Tefillin if she chooses and receives a heavenly reward for doing so

[http://www.uscj.org/Women\\_and\\_Tefillin7649.html](http://www.uscj.org/Women_and_Tefillin7649.html)

### **Excerpted from "Women and Tefillin"**

Rabbi Joshua Cahan

Rabbinic discussion of women wearing tefillin begins with a passage from the Mekhilta, an early midrash on Exodus: "All are obligated in tefillin except for women and slaves. Michal daughter of Saul wore tefillin, the wife of Yonah went up to Jerusalem for festivals, and Tabi, the slave of R. Gamaliel, wore tefillin." There is a contradiction: Women and slaves are not obligated to wear tefillin but Michal and Tabi did wear them. We are told neither why nor what we are to learn. Are we to conclude that women and slaves may wear tefillin? Were these two permitted to do something that normally would have been forbidden?

The Palestinian Talmud adds the words "and the sages did not protest," suggesting that women are indeed permitted to wear tefillin. Then it raises an objection – if the mitzvah does not apply to women then it should be forbidden to them! Rabbi Abahu emends the text to read "and the sages did protest." The Babylonian Talmud, though, sees no such contradiction. It ends the story of Michal with "the sages did not protest."

Early medieval commentators follow the Babylonian Talmud's permissive ruling and reach the broader conclusion that women (and others) may perform all the positive time-bound mitzvot from which they technically are exempted, including sukkah, lulav, tzitzit, and shofar. Indeed, Rabeinu Tam sees tefillin, and in particular the story about Michal, as the proof that women may perform all ritual commandments from which they are exempt. All Ashkenazic scholars through the 13th century follow Rabeinu Tam.

### **Should All Barbies Wear Tefillin?**

By Jen Taylor Friedman, creator of "Tefillin Barbie"

[http://www.uscj.org/Should\\_All\\_Barbies\\_W7650.html](http://www.uscj.org/Should_All_Barbies_W7650.html)

### **Tefillin Vocab:**

**Shel Rosh-** the box that goes right at the hairline. Includes 4 separate compartments with 4 text selections that all relate to the commandment of Tefillin. You may know one from Deuteronomy found in the first paragraph of the Shema!

*("And you shall bind them as a sign upon your arm, and they shall be as totafot between your eyes." - Dvarim 6:8)*

2 from Exodus/Shemot

2 from Dvraim/Deuteronomy

The knot at the head forms the letter daled

**Shel Yad:** has the 4 biblical text selections on 1 piece of parchment

The strap that is goes through the arm tefillin is formed into a knot in the shape of the letter yud (י). The right and left outside parts of the head-tefillin box have the letter shin.

All three form the word Shaddai, a name for God

**Bayit:** The box that houses the parchment with the Torah verses

**Retzuot (retzu'a):** The straps you bind around your arms

### **When:**

We lay Tefillin before weekday Shacharit and do not lay Tefillin on Shabbat or Yom Tov  
Tefillin are worn for Mincha on Tish B'av

### **HOW TO: (Wikipedia)**

#### **On placement of the arm-tefillin**

Before the strap of the arm-tefillin is fastened, the following blessing is said:

ברוך אתה ה' א-לוהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותו וצונו להניח תפילין.

Transliteration: *Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hani'ah t'filin.*

Translation: "Blessed are you, LORD, our God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to put on tefillin."

#### **On placement of the head-tefillin**

Sefardim will most often only say one blessing. Ashkenazic custom says this additional blessing when tightening the shel rosh or head piece.

ברוך אתה ה' א-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל מִצְוַת תְּפִילִין.

Transliteration: *Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al mitzvat t'filin.*

Translation: "Blessed are you, LORD, our God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us regarding the commandment of tefillin."

Because of the doubt as to the necessity of this blessing, it is followed by a statement of praise, so as not to have uttered God's name in vain:

ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד.

Transliteration: *Barukh shem k'vod malkhuto l'olam va'ed.*

Translation: "Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever."

### **On coiling the straps around the middle finger**

The remainder of the arm-tefillin straps are then wound three times around the middle finger and around the hand.



*Video demonstrations:*

FJMC Rap demonstrating Tefillin - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9NJtJJoVIY>

A video produced by Hagalil USYers - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUF0\\_FKbM3o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUF0_FKbM3o)