

## Davening in the Dark Shacharit

### *Exploring without the Eyes*

Prepared by Ethan Feuer (METNY Regional President 15-16)

**Goal:** Have USYers understand praying from a new perspective

**Time:** 45 Minutes

**Space Needed:** Medium Sized Room

**Shabbat Friendly:** Yes

**Participants:** 30-60

**Audience:** Grades 6-8, Grades 9-12

**Keywords:** Dark, Senses, Blindfold, Tefillah

**Materials:**

- Blindfolds
- Siddurim

#### **Ground rules:**

- Blindfolds should be tied so that you cannot see anything
- If at any time you feel uncomfortable with the blindfold on you can take it off, but please be considerate of your surroundings
- When blindfolded you must listen to all instructions as they are important to everyone being safe
- This minyan is based on discussion first and foremost. Your participation will streamline the experience. So please feel free to share thoughts at any time, simply raise your hand

#### **Running the minyan:**

1. Once they are blindfolded, bring them in the room and place them in a seat that was previously placed safely around the room so they lose cognizance of their surroundings. (BE SAFE! 5 foot radius!)
2. Start by introducing yourself as the person who will be facilitating the minyan, and mediating the discussion
  - a. Since you're going to be blindfolding the USYers it's important to create a comfortable, trusting, and stress-free environment
  - b. If there is sufficient time an icebreaker may help put the USYers at ease
    - i. *Name, chapter, and favorite sense or what sense you could not live without or if you needed to lose one sense which would it be.* (Allow them to get speak once they are tapped lightly on their hand)
  - c. If they wish to answer a question, or share a thought, they must raise their hand and the leader will touch their hand, granting the opportunity to speak

- d. Try to set the tone that all outside stressors are released for the duration of this service to enhance the experience

**Get started:**

3. Explain in a calm voice exactly what is going to happen for the duration of this service.

Notes to touch on:

- a. You are all safe. There is a seat behind you at all times, but please when I ask to rise, please rise. Reinforce trust
  - b. Very few Jewish teens truly get the opportunity to do anything, much less pray, in a completely safe and comfortable environment
  - c. Your vision is being taken away simply to solidify and re-establish the purpose of prayer
  - d. I am going to speak softly, yet clearly, to enhance the atmosphere
  - e. Restate: If at any time you feel uncomfortable, feel free to take off your blindfold, just please be considerate of the people around you
4. For *Birkot Hashachar*, do the first half as word by word repeating and the second half as you leading and the USYers responding with “Amen”
  5. Discuss which they liked better and how they felt about having to depend on an outside power to pray
    - a. Also discuss the prayer that thanks G-d for “giving sight to the blind.” (e.g. How do you feel now that one of your senses is now taken away? Does this line now have a greater meaning to you personally? etc.)
    - b. Note: The USYers will stand at times, and they must constantly be reminded after every prayer that they are safe. If they wish to answer a question, or share a thought, they must raise their hand and the leader will touch their hand, granting the opportunity to speak
  6. Offer the opportunity for any USYer who feels strongly about reciting the entire *Shma* and its *brachot* the opportunity, but tell them they must remain quiet
    - a. Reassure the USYers that they need not feel stressed because they are completely safe
  7. Discuss the blessing of *Yotzer Or Uvoreh Hosheh* and the imagery associated with prayer
    - a. a. Read the English and ask for each USYer to pick out an english word that meant something to them, or stood out
      - i. What is the difference between “*Yotzair*” – “fashions”, “*Borei*” – “creates” and “*Oseh*” – “makes”?
      - ii. If, in the *Torah*, darkness exists before light (Gen 1:2), why does the blessing begin with light?

iii. The commentators and frequent students and teachers of *Torah* explain that darkness is a creation itself and not simply the absence of light. It was created before light as it states – The earth was empty and there was darkness over the firmament. (Gen 1:2). Therefore the blessing states “*Uvoreh Choshech*” – “and creates darkness”

8. For *Shma* recite the *Shma* together and have them recite first paragraph aloud with you
9. For *Amidah* have them all take time to pray blindfolded
10. Discuss the subject of a blind *Amidah*. Personal reflection. You can't read the words on the page so talk to yourself, meditate, talk to G-d. Reflect on your night, week, month, year, or even life. Do whatever you need to do. This is your time to fully reconnect with yourself. I just ask that you remain standing
11. Blindfolds come off for discussion. Take a second to blink, laugh, regain eyesight, get back into a circle
12. Discuss how they look at *davening* differently now if time allows