

PURPOSE IN A PANDEMIC

RABBI ANGELA WARNICK BUCHDAHL, ROSH HASHANAH 5781/2020

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

BIG QUESTION: CAN WE FIND PURPOSE IN THE UNPRECEDENTED CIRCUMSTANCES OF THIS MOMENT?

In this sermon, Rabbi Buchdahl addresses the challenges and opportunities brought about by the Coronavirus pandemic, among other issues. This discussion will allow participants to consider how they might grow in this difficult period, and gain insights into themselves and the world around them. If given space to reflect, it may be possible to emerge from this challenging time with a greater sense of understanding and purpose.

DISTRIBUTING THE SERMON:

Links to a video recording of the sermon, as well as a copy of the written text, are available on the Clergy Sermons page of the Central Synagogue website. There is also a link embedded [here](#). A few days before your meeting, you should contact your group members to let them know which sermon you will be discussing, so that they can watch and/or read it in preparation for the discussion. (It is helpful to include a link to the materials in your email). In order to keep the sermon fresh in everyone's minds, you may wish to recommend that participants make a note of any questions or reactions they have immediately after watching it. Even if you saw the sermon at the time it was given, please at least review the written text before the meeting, so that you can participate fully in the discussion.

NAME TAGS:

While of course the need for name tags has shifted with the Zoom format, it is still important that everyone put their name under their video. Sometimes participants have only a last name, initials, or another user's name listed instead of their own; encourage them to hit "rename" and put in the right information. Even if most people know one another, it is important that no one feel uncomfortable for not remembering everyone else's name.

INTRODUCTION AND ICE-BREAKER:

Quarantine "Never Have I Ever"

Ask participants to hold up five fingers. You will read off a series of statements that being "Never have I ever..." If you read off something that a participant *has done*, they will put down a finger. The first person/people to put down all five fingers wins!

1. Never have I ever baked bread during quarantine.
2. Never have I ever read a whole book in less than a week during quarantine.
3. Never have I ever binge-watched a show during quarantine.
4. Never have I ever wiped down something that probably shouldn't have gotten wet during quarantine. (Like mail, for example)
5. Never have I ever worn a silly or creative mask during quarantine.

If nobody has won at this point, feel free to make up your own prompts or take suggestions from the group

OPENING ACTIVITY

Rabbi Buchdahl asked a series of questions within her sermon that were designed to provoke serious contemplation about what we all might learn in this unprecedented period when many of us are confined to our homes and spending more time alone than normal. Below are her four questions:

1. What have you learned about yourself in this time?
2. How has this crisis forced you to think about what is important? What really matters to you?
3. What are your spiritual anchors when life is uncertain?
4. What have you taken for granted?

Ask participants to pick one or more of these questions that speaks to them as prompts to jot down a few notes for 3-5 minutes. After that, put participants into breakout rooms of 2-3 people to share their responses.

TEXT STUDY

Attached is a text-study sheet that you may use to facilitate a discussion of the themes and issues raised by the sermon. You may wish to send this out to participants in advance so they can print it out or set up their electronic devices to make it accessible during the session. You may want to consider using the “share screen” function when reading the text and then returning to gallery view for the discussion so that the text is accessible to all without losing the visual cues necessary to have a good conversation over Zoom.

Here are some things to consider:

- (a) It is customary to recite a blessing before studying Torah.

*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam asher
kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei torah.*
Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe,
who has sanctified us with commandments, and
commanded us to study words of Torah.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הוֹה
הָעוֹלָם—אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
וְצִוָּנוּ לְעֹסֵק בְּדִבְרֵי-תוֹרָה

- (b) Our tradition teaches us that Torah study can be a source of healing and blessing. You may want to ask members of the group if they would like to dedicate their study to anyone in particular. This is a nice way to help the group get to know one another, and to learn about significant events in each other's lives.
- (c) You can choose to either work through the texts as one group, or to break up into breakout rooms as pairs (“hevruta”) for an initial period of discussion, and then allow the pairs to share something they learned with the group.
- (d) The ultimate goal of these groups is not for participants to master a particular number of Jewish texts, but to connect with one another. If group members are sharing their own stories and experiences in a way that seems fruitful, there is no need to cut off that conversation in order to make sure you “finish” the text sheet. If you are unsure, you can always poll the group to decide whether it is time to move on.

CONCLUSION

We recommend that you wind down the text study about 15 minutes before the end of the session, to allow for a meaningful conclusion. This conclusion may take any shape you wish. Some possibilities are:

- (a) Ask each person to name one insight they have gained, or one question that they are taking with them.
- (b) Ask each person to offer a blessing to the group, drawn from your learning together.
- (c) Ask each person to say one word or sentence to represent how they are feeling coming out of your discussion.