

# RACE AND THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

RABBI ANGELA WARNICK BUCHDAHL, YOM KIPPUR 5781/2020

## FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

### BIG QUESTION: CAN WE EMBRACE A NEW MODEL FOR JEWISH IDENTITY NOT BASED ON RACE?

In this sermon, Rabbi Buchdahl discusses the consequences of defining Jewish identity based on race and suggests an alternative model that is more positive and inclusive. This discussion will trace the impact of debunked race theory on the Jewish community, challenge the view that race is a defining feature of Jewish identity, and offer a different approach to identity.

### 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:

Either calling on participants or going "popcorn" style, ask the group to answer the following questions using just one word:

1. How did you feel the first time that you heard this sermon?
2. How do you feel entering into a discussion about race and racism in the Jewish community?
3. How do you hope to feel by the end of this discussion?

Alternatively, or in addition (depending on time), you may wish to answer these questions that require slightly longer answers:

1. When you meet someone new, what leads you to guess that they might be Jewish?
2. In what ways is the idea of having a shared ethnic heritage with other Jews comforting to you? In what ways it is challenging?

## OPENING ACTIVITY

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Rabbi Buchdahl used this sermon to talk about an important, painful, and difficult issue. Sermons that challenge our community to think and act differently often generate feelings of discomfort. It is important to both acknowledge and work through those feelings so that we can hear and internalize the central message of the sermon. To that end, ask participants to spend 5 minutes writing about any discomfort that they felt when hearing/reading this sermon. Then ask yourself why that discomfort arose, what it felt like in your body, and how you want to deal with that feeling within the context of this sermon discussion. Depending on time and willingness to share, you can invite people to talk about what they wrote, or if it feels more appropriate the information can be kept personal.

## TEXT STUDY

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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 יְהוָה  
הָעוֹלָם—אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו  
וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסֵּק 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

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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.