NOTHING MORE WHOLE THAN A BROKEN HEART

RABBI ANGELA W. BUCHDAHL, ROSH HASHANAH 5778

FACILITATOR’S GUIDE

BIG QUESTION: HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND BROKENNESS?

In this sermon, Rabbi Buchdahl encourages thoughtful consideration of imperfection, perceived flaws, and the value of reframing the idea of “brokenness.” This discussion will allow participants to consider what gets labeled as broken, and to consider how brokenness might connect to holiness.

DISTRIBUTING THE SERMON:

Links to a video recording of the sermon, as well as a copy of the written text, are available on the CORE Groups page of the Central Synagogue website. 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 in person, please at least review the written text before the meeting, so that you can participate fully in the discussion.

NAME TAGS:

For at least the first several sessions, please ask everyone in the group to wear a name tag (or, if seated around a table, to place a name card in front of them). 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:

Ask each person to introduce themselves, and to share with the group:

(a) their name; and
(b) what happened/happens in your home when something breaks/is broken OR
(c) a story about when something broke and you chose not to fix it.
OPENING ACTIVITY

Option 1:

*Materials: Images, list of questions.*

This activity will allow participants to reflect on the assumptions they make about brokenness as a positive or negative quality.

*Attached to this guide, you will find pages with pairs of related images. Ask participants to reflect on the different image pairs in small groups, answering the following questions.*

1. What does each image pair say about brokenness/wholeness?
2. Does this match your understanding of brokenness/wholeness? If so, why is this? If not, where do you think the discrepancy comes from?
3. Choose the image pair that resonates most strongly with you. What life experience could you associate with the image of brokenness/wholeness depicted in the image? Why might you associate your experience with this image?

*Allow 2-3 minutes per image pair. When conversations seem to be winding down, ask the group to reassemble to reflect. Choose from the following questions to pose to the group:*

1. What did you find most interesting about the images?
2. For the life experience that you reflected on in relation to brokenness/wholeness, did this activity change how you understand that experience? Why or why not?
3. What questions do you now have about brokenness/wholeness?

Option 2:

*Materials: Post-its, pens*

This activity will allow participants to reflect on the imperfections or “brokenness” in their own lives, and consider when and how they seek to “fix” it.

*Pass out post-its, and ask everyone to take a few minutes to write down some thing or things in their own lives or in the world at large that seem “broken.” When everyone is done, ask them to collectively arrange their post-its into two categories: (1) things that can/should be fixed, and (2) things that can/should be accepted or embraced.*

*Then invite everyone to step back and consider these questions:*

Was there consensus on what kind of problems require “fixing” and which require acceptance? If so, do you see a thematic link between the items on both lists? If not, what differences do you notice?
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. Please make sure to either make a copy for each member or ask everyone to bring it themselves, in paper or electronic form. If you choose the latter course, you may still wish to print a few extra copies for those who may forget to bring theirs.

Here are some things to consider:

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

(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) Depending on the preferences of your group, you may choose to distribute this sheet the week before the meeting, so that participants will be familiar with the texts, and can begin to think about their own responses.

(d) You can choose to either work through the texts as one group, or to break up into pairs (“hevruta”) for an initial period of discussion, and then allow the pairs to share something they learned with the group.

(e) 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 to represent how they are feeling coming out of your discussion.