

AWAKENED BY LOVE

RABBI REBECCA ROSENTHAL, PARASHAT HAAZINU 5778

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

BIG QUESTION: HOW CAN WE POSITIVELY TRANSFORM THE WORLD AND OURSELVES?

In this sermon, Rabbi Rosenthal explores the process of transformation central to the *yamim nora'im* – the Days of Awe. She discusses how frequently change comes about as a result of some negative event, and considers how we might adopt a practice of provoking change within ourselves and in the world through positive action instead. This discussion will allow participants to reflect on times in their lives when they have changed or been changed, and consider how they might apply Rabbi Rosenthal's idea in their own lives.

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) a story about a time in their life when they were transformed; OR
- (c) a brief reflection on their high holy day experience this year.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Materials: pens, blank paper.

This activity will allow participants to reflect on major moments of change in their own lives.

- (1) Pass out pens and a piece of paper to each participant. Ask them to take a few minutes to think about their life's path. What moments have been most transformative, or were major turning points? Ask everyone to graph the trajectory of their life. Each person's graph should include 5 key moments or turning points.
- (2) When people seem to be winding down, ask for volunteers to begin sharing their life-maps. Everyone should have the opportunity to share, with a minimum of at least three sharers.
- (3) Reflect on the maps and on the moments people identified.
 - a. How did you feel doing this activity?
 - b. Did anything surprise you about the maps shared?
 - c. What patterns, if any, did you observe in the moments identified?
 - d. What questions do you now have, or still have, about the events in our lives that cause us to change?

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.

BARUCH atah, Adonai
Eloheinu, Melech haolam,
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav
v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי
אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַיִךְ
וְצִוֵּנוּ לְעִסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

BLESSED ARE YOU, Adonai our God,
Sovereign of the universe,
who hallows us with mitzvot,
commanding us to engage with words of 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.