

CAN WE STILL SING CARLEBACH?

RABBI ANGELA W. BUCHDAHL, PARASHAT BO 5778

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

BIG QUESTION: HOW DO WE RESPOND TO PUBLIC DECLARATIONS OF SUFFERING?

In this sermon, Rabbi Buchdahl explores the Israelites' act of self-identification in advance of the 10th and final plague, and considers what this act of public declaration can teach us about how to respond to the #MeToo movement and other public revelations of abuse in our communities. In particular, Rabbi Buchdahl considers to what extent we can separate the "art" of one of our most beloved Jewish composers from his history sexually assaulting girls and young women. This discussion will allow participants to reflect on how we interact with the artistic legacies of those whose personal actions have left legacies of sexual abuse, and how our tradition understands the accounts of sexual misconduct in our sacred texts.

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 recent revelation of sexual misconduct they found the most surprising or upsetting; OR
- (c) a story about their own reaction to the #MeToo movement.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Materials: pens and handouts.

This activity will allow participants to reflect on their own comfort with where and how they encounter the artistic products of individuals implicated in sexual misconduct.

- (1) Pass out a pen and handout to each participant. Ask them to take a few minutes to fill out the handout.
- (2) When people seem to be winding down, ask participants to reflect on the experience of filling out the form.
 - a. What was it like to consciously consider these categories?
 - b. Did you consider who the audience would be in making your decision? If so, what role did this play in your determination?
 - c. Did you notice any patterns emerging in your answers? What were they?
 - d. What role did sacred space or religious use play, if any, in your decision-making?
 - e. What, if any, kind of “disclaimer or recognition of misconduct would you accept or want to be present in these situations?

OPENING ACTIVITY

Directions: Circle Yes or No for each.

1. Would you be comfortable with Louis CK . . .

Being featured in a video shown to CenSyn Teens?	YES	NO
Appearing on a panel about <i>teshuvah</i> (repentance)?	YES	NO
Hosting Saturday Night Live?	YES	NO

2. Would you be comfortable seeing Woody Allen . . .

Quoted in a High Holy Day sermon?	YES	NO
Honored as an “artist in residence” at the synagogue	YES	NO
Studied in a film class at the NY Public Library?	YES	NO
As a Board Member of the synagogue	YES	NO

3. Would you be comfortable seeing a Picasso painting...

Framed in a rabbi’s office?	YES	NO
Displayed as part of a visual backdrop in a service?	YES	NO
In a museum without explanation?	YES	NO
In a museum with an explanation about Picasso’s history of sexual misconduct?	YES	NO

4. Would you be comfortable attending

A special service featuring Carlebach’s music?	YES	NO
A concert of Carlebach’s music held in the sanctuary?	YES	NO
A concert held in a non-sanctuary space in the synagogue?	YES	NO
A concert of Carlebach’s music at Carnegie Hall?	YES	NO

5. Would you be comfortable encountering depictions of the rape of Tamar (from the book of Second Samuel)...

In a painting in a museum?	YES	NO
In a painting in a synagogue hallway?	YES	NO
In a text study on abuse of power?	YES	NO

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 בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
וְצִוָּנוּ 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.