

“I WILL STAND UP AS YOUR KINSMAN”

RABBI ARI S. LORGE 5776, PARASHAT VAERA 5776

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

BIG QUESTION: WHOM DO WE TREAT “LIKE FAMILY?”

In this sermon, Rabbi Lorge explores the idea of God as a “goel” – a family member who is obligated to redeem or save us – and urges us to step into the role of “goel” for those in need. This discussion will allow participants to consider the circumstances in which we are moved to treat those in need “like family.”

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) one word that comes to mind when they hear the word “redeemer” or “redemption.”

OPENING ACTIVITY

Option #1: Who Would You Redeem?

Materials: pens, copies of *“Who Would You Redeem”* sheet.

This activity will allow participants to reflect on who is “like family” to them, when it comes to their obligation to offer assistance.

1. Distribute copies of the attached sheet: *“Who Would You Redeem?”*.
2. Read through the introductory material as a group.
3. Ask each person to take 5 minutes or so to fill in the sheet.
4. Bring the group together to compare their answers and to discuss what factors went in to their decisions.

Option #2: Who Is God to You?

Materials: pens, copies of *“Who is God to You?”* sheet.

This activity will allow participants to reflect on what metaphors for God resonate most for them, as a precursor to our discussion of God as a “goel” or “redeeming kinsman.”

1. Distribute copies of the attached sheet: *“Who is God to You?”*.
2. Read through the introductory material as a group.
3. Ask each person to take 5 minutes or so to choose 3 names for God that they like the most, and 3 that they like the least.
4. Bring the group together to compare their answers.

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.

WHO WOULD YOU REDEEM?

In the book of Leviticus, God tells Moses at Mount Sinai: “If one of your kin is in straits and has to sell part of a [land] holding, the nearest *go’el* – redeeming kinsman – shall come and redeem what that relative has sold.” (Lev. 25:25) As Rabbi Lorge explains in his sermon, the term *go’el* here refers to a family member who is obligated to “bail out” a relative who has fallen on hard times.

Imagine you learn that one of the following people has had their house destroyed by a flood, or has had a health issue that is putting them at risk of being unable to pay their rent. To whom would you be willing to make a sizable interest-free loan or gift to help them through this difficult time? Try to resist the urge to respond “it depends,” and go with your gut. Once you have filled out the chart, consider what factors played into your decisions.

PERSON

Y/N

Your child	
Your sibling	
Your niece or nephew	
Your cousin	
Your best friend from high school or college	
A childhood friend who you keep up with on Facebook	
A former babysitter for your children	
A colleague at work or volunteer organization	
A maintenance worker at your place of work	
The superintendent of your building	
The owner of a local business you frequent daily	
A panhandler you see every day outside of Starbucks	
Someone you tutor in reading as a volunteer at your local library	

