

A ROAD TO RECONCILIATION

RABBI MAURICE A. SALTH PARASHAT VAYISHLACH 5776

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

BIG QUESTION: HOW CAN WE MAKE PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER?

In this sermon, given on the anniversary of the first meeting of Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, Rabbi Salth reflects on the reunion of Jacob and Esau in Parashat Vayishlach. This discussion will allow participants to reflect on what allows us – both globally and in our personal relationships – to move past pain, hate, fear, and distrust and toward peace and reconciliation.

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 moment when they were surprised by someone's willingness to make peace; OR
- (c) on a scale of 1-10, how prone they are to carrying a grudge.

OPENING ACTIVITIES

Option #1

Pass out the attached sheet, and ask each participant to take a few minutes to complete as many of the sentences as they wish.

Then have them break into groups of 2 or three to discuss their answers. What similarities or differences do they notice in their answers? What new insights can they gain from each other's responses?

NEGOTIATING CONFLICT & FINDING PEACE

World leaders are not the only ones who are required to navigate conflict, or negotiate peace. We all have moments in our lives when we need to confront conflict, and decide whether or not to reconcile. . . Take a few moments to fill in the blanks in the following sentences. Keep in mind that you may be asked to share your responses with at least one other person.

When I have been wronged, I can pursue reconciliation when . . .

It is hardest for me to reconcile when . . .

I was surprised that I was able to reconcile and make peace with . . .

One grudge I hold on to is . . .

One meaningful reconciliation I have witnessed is . . .

Option #2

Ask the participants to take a breath and (if they wish) close their eyes. Then read or paraphrase the following.

Think of a time when there was a rift in a relationship of yours that was later repaired. It can be a central relationship, as with a family member, or a less central one, such as a relationship with a coworker.

Perhaps you were the one who caused the rift. Or perhaps you felt you had been wronged. Perhaps you sought reconciliation, or perhaps you held a grudge. Take a moment and remember what it felt like to have that conflict. Notice what happens to your body as you recall and experience the emotions connected to that time. What are you feeling? Does your chest get tight? Does your breath get faster?

Now think about how that relationship came to be repaired. Did you reach out? Did they? Were you brought together by a third party? What did it feel like as you were anticipating that moment of coming together? And how did it feel when you had reconciled?

Take another moment to remember that feeling of reunion or reconciliation.

Now take another deep breath and open your eyes.

Ask participants to break into pairs, and to discuss the following question:

What was it that allowed the reconciliation to happen? What had to change in you, the other person, or in the surrounding circumstances in order for you to seek peace with one another? You need not share the details of the disagreement. Instead, focus on what personal feelings or circumstances needed to change for healing to occur.

You may wish to have the pairs share their conclusions with the group, or simply move on to the text study.

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.