

THE UNICORN IN YOUR BACK POCKET

RABBI NICOLE ARMENTA AUERBACH, PARASHAT TERUMAH 5776

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

BIG QUESTION: WHAT HIDDEN GIFTS HAVE WE YET TO OFFER?

In this sermon, Rabbi Auerbach considers the meaning behind God's demand that the Israelites hand over the skins of the "*tachash*" – a mystical multicolored animal – in order to build the *mishkan*, or portable sanctuary where God will dwell among them. As she explains, the implication of the texts is that they need not hunt for this rarity, but already carry it with them. She suggests that we likewise carry with us hidden gifts just waiting to be offered. This discussion will allow participants to consider the hidden gifts they have to offer, and how those gifts might be used to strengthen their community.

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 time when they gave or received a gift that was totally unexpected

OPENING ACTIVITY

Materials: 2 colors of post-its; pens.

Distribute the post-its to each person, so that everyone has some of each color.

Read this excerpt from the sermon, which refers to the variety of gifts required to build the *mishkan*, the portable sanctuary that the Israelites carried through the desert:

We all have gifts, of course. Some of us here have talents of music or art, or a knack for spreadsheets. These gifts are our gold and silver. “But remember,” [Irwin] Keller says, “the mishkan was not only built out of gold and silver. There is also acacia wood, and unicorn skins, that have been lugged around, awaiting the opportunity to be useful.”

So he challenges us to look beyond our obvious gifts and says, “What’s the one gift that you have not offered yet? The one no one knows you carry. The one you might not even have thought of as a gift. The one that’s just been waiting. And ask yourself, ‘When will I offer it?’ When will you use it to build a *mishkan*, to make this world a holier place?”

On the *first color*, ask participants to write down gifts (physical, emotional or spiritual) that would be required to create a more vibrant, connected, and holy Jewish community.

On the *second color*, ask them to write down talents, abilities, or gifts that they carry with them, but that they do not get a chance to use in their everyday lives.

Allow 5 minutes or so for people to write down their answers, and then invite everyone to post their answers, organized by color, on a wall or table.

Ask everyone to look at the array of answers and consider:

Is there a consensus about what would be needed to create more vibrant community?

Are there any commonalities in the gifts people listed?

Do you know of any gifts that group members have that they did not think to list?

Which of the gifts listed might be used to address the needs you identified?

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.