

USING THE TOOLS WE'VE BEEN GIVEN

RABBI STEPHANIE D. KOLIN, PARASHAT PEKUDEI 5776

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

BIG QUESTION: CAN WE HOPE TO ACHEIVE WHAT IS DEMANDED OF US?

In this sermon, Rabbi Kolin explores the feelings of demoralization and despair that arise when we believe that we do not have what it takes to realize our greatest aspirations. She draws on a midrash in which God provides a blueprint for the *mishkan* (portable sanctuary) that is seemingly unrealizable by the Israelites, but ultimately assures them that if they do their best with what they have on hand, God will dwell among them. This discussion will allow participants to consider the significant projects in their own lives, and how they might harness their own resources to achieve them.

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 memory of building something, or another "do-it-yourself" project

OPENING ACTIVITY

Materials: Pens, paper.

Ask everyone to take a few minutes to think of a significant goal they feel called to achieve, but which – for whatever reason – seems out of reach. This could be a personal goal, like repairing a relationship or writing a book, or a public one, like addressing racism or economic inequality in our community.

Once each person has identified a goal, have them create two columns on their sheet of paper, labelled “HAVE” and “NEED.” In the have column, they should list the “tools” they already have that could help them achieve their goal. In the “NEED” column, they should list what they do not yet have that they think they would need to make meaningful progress.

Give everyone 5 minutes to make their list.

Once everyone is done, bring the group together to discuss their answers.

Some things you might consider are:

- (a) Do you notice similarities in the participants’ goals?
- (b) Did anyone list something on their “NEED” list that someone else listed on their “HAVE” list?
- (c) How might this group support each of the members in achieving these goals?

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.