

KOL YISRAEL AREVIM ZEH BAZEH

RABBI ANGELA WARNICK BUCHDAHL, PARASHAT CHAYEI SARAH 5776

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

BIG QUESTION: WHAT IS OUR ROLE IN ENSURING JEWISH CONTINUITY?

In this sermon, Rabbi Buchdahl reflects on her recent trip to Europe, reflecting on moments of inspiration and noting the increasing concerns about the future of the Jews in Europe. This discussion will allow participants to reflect on what it means to be part of a global Jewish community, and to explore what Jewish “continuity” means to 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) one word that comes to mind when they hear the phrase “Jewish Continuity”

OPENING ACTIVITIES

Option #1: Your Personal Universe of Responsibility

Materials: *Copies of the attached “bulls-eye” graphic; pens.*

This activity will allow participants to ask themselves: “To whom am I accountable,” and to consider the role of Judaism in their answers to that question.

- (1) Pass out pens and handouts to each participant. Introduce the idea of a “Universe of Responsibility”: Whether we acknowledge it or not, we all have an understanding of who we are responsible for. We can visualize this “universe of responsibility” as a series of concentric circles with those to whom we are most responsible (most often our close relatives or friends) at the center, and moving outward to include others to whom we feel an obligation.

Ask each participant to take a few minutes to fill out the diagram to represent their own universe of responsibility. If they have trouble with the idea, you might suggest that they think about who they would use their time and money to help first. Friends? Family? Jews in Israel? Members of other communities of which they feel a part? The “neediest cases” worldwide?

- (2) When people seem to be winding down, you can bring them all together, or ask them to break up into small groups to discuss their diagrams. You might ask some of these questions: How are group members’ understanding of their obligations similar? How do they differ? Does Judaism play any role in the decisions they made?

Option #2: What are the most pressing challenges to Jewish Continuity?

Materials: *Copies of the attached ranking activity; pens.*

This activity will allow participants to reflect on circumstances that are commonly said to be “threats” to Jewish continuity, and to consider which ones inspire them to act.

- (1) Pass out pens and handouts to each participant. Ask them to read through the list of potential “threats” to Jewish continuity. Ask them to cross out any that they are not concerned about. For any that remain, ask them to rank them, in order of concern.
- (2) Bring the group back together to discuss what they decided. How are members’ concerns similar or different? Which issues are they most likely to take action on? Why? What are members’ greatest sources of hope for the Jewish future?

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

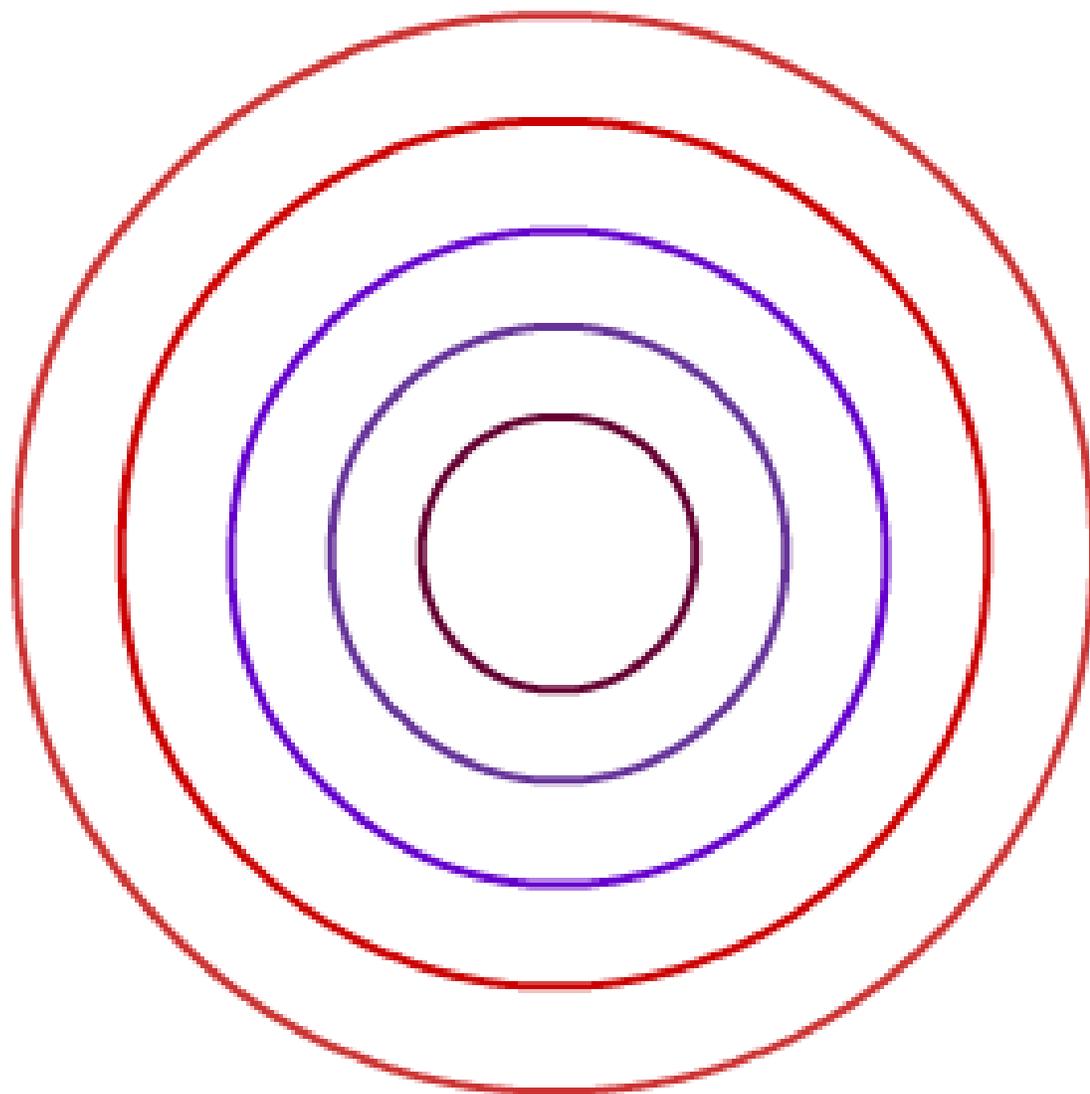
We recommend that you wind down the text study about 15 minutes before the end of the session, to allow for a meaningful conclusion. This conclusion may take any shape you wish. Some possibilities are:

- (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.

YOUR UNIVERSE OF OBLIGATION

The 'Universe of Obligation' is "the circle of individuals and groups toward whom obligations are owed, to whom rules apply, and whose injuries call for amends."

-- Helen Fein



WHAT KEEPS *YOU* UP AT NIGHT?

In every age there have been warnings that Jewish continuity is at risk. Listed below are several examples of what some consider to be contemporary “threats” to the continuation of a vibrant and viable Jewish community. Take a moment to consider which of these cause ***you*** concern. Cross out any that do not. For those that do, please rank them, in order of your concern.

CHALLENGE

RANK

Rising rates of intermarriage in the U.S.	
Increased focus on individual, rather than communal, identity.	
Global anti-semitism.	
Israeli-Palestinian conflict.	
Growing secular-religious divide in Israel.	
Growing divide between orthodoxy and progressive Judaism.	
Low rates of Jewish literacy among progressive or secular Jews.	
Rise of alternative outlets for spiritual seekers (yoga, Buddhist meditation, SoulCycle)	
Resistance of millennial generation to joining traditional Jewish communities.	
Religious extremism.	
Judaism less likely to be considered an “ethnicity.”	
Traditional perception that Judaism is not open to converts.	
Lack of acceptance of Reform or progressive Judaism outside the Unites States.	
Apathy toward Israel.	