

UNPOLISHED: USING OUR ROUGH EDGES TO BUILD SACRED COMMUNITY

RABBI STEPHANIE D. KOLIN, YOM KIPPUR 5776

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

BIG QUESTION: WHAT IF WE ALLOWED OURSELVES TO BE FULLY SEEN?

Rabbi Kolin's sermon considers the fears we have about letting others see the unpolished, un-"retouched" versions of our lives, and urges us to open ourselves up to the holy moments of connection that may occur when we allow ourselves to be seen in our full, messy glory. This discussion will allow participants to reflect on the perceived dangers and possibilities of vulnerability, and to consider how we might work together to build a community based on compassion and authenticity.

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) the place, other than their home, where they feel most able to "be themselves."

OPENING ACTIVITY

Materials: pens, post-its or paper.

This activity will allow participants to reflect on their own experiences of being seen in their “unpolished” state.

- (1) Pass out pens and paper or post-its to each participant. Let them know that you will be reading a prompt, and that once you are done, they will have a few minutes to write down their thoughts. Ask them to get comfortable, and invite them to close their eyes if they are comfortable doing so.
- (2) Read or paraphrase the following:

I invite you to take a deep breath in, and then let it out. Notice how your body feels in the chair. Where is your body coming in contact with the chair, or the floor? Are you hot? Cold? Are you carrying any tension in your body? If so, you don't need to change it. Just notice how you are experiencing this moment.

Take a moment now to think of a time when, as Rabbi Kolin says, “your rough edges were revealed, and instead of the judgment or pity or indifference you expected, someone responded with empathy, their own story, their own cracks.”

[PAUSE to allow participants to think]

Think about the moment before you received that response. Where were you? Who were you with? When you think about the worry or anxiety you had at that moment, where did you feel it in your body? As you recall that moment now, what images or emotions arise for you? What details do you remember most vividly?

And now think about the moment when you were met with compassion, or empathy. What images or feelings arise? How do you tell the story of that moment to yourself or to others? Now take another breath, and let that moment go. You can open your eyes.

- (3) Invite everyone to take two minutes to identify images or emotions that they recall from their personal experience, and to write them down on their paper or post-its.
- (4) Either:
 - a. Ask the group to put up their post-its on a wall or table; and invite conversation about commonalities and differences; or
 - b. Ask participants to break up in to smaller groups of 2-3 to share their images and emotions. NOTE: They need not share the stories behind these emotions or images. The goal is to connect people to their *hearts* and *guts*, rather than their heads.

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.