



SESSION 5

Questions and Answers

1. IF YOU HAD UNLIMITED FUNDS TO LAUNCH SOMETHING NEW...

Imagine there's a very wealthy person who tells you that they will give you an unlimited amount of money, to set up a shop in any place you want, to create a Judaism that will attract all the Jews who won't walk into a synagogue. What does that look like?

2. PRAYER

Would you like to say more about your thinking on the importance of prayer?

Quote for Discussion: "I think that people are profoundly lonely and sad and joyous, and that the full catastrophe of life lends us to singing. And the way that Jews sing is in prayer. And I do think that some Jews care about every single word that they're singing, but many of them don't. And so, when you give them music that runs through their bones and makes them cry and makes them dance, they're going to want to be a part of it. Because we are stuck in this life that is supposed to be X and ends up being X-minus or X-plus, and then we're in it – and it's not easy. And so prayer is something that can transport us to a different place, a more joyous place, or a place where we can just be sad as crap. And that's how human beings have always talked to themselves in their best ways, and to this thing that we may or may not call God." – Rabbi Shira Stutman

3. ISRAEL AND OUR COMMUNITIES

How do we talk about Israel and Palestine in our congregations when the issues can be very divisive?

Quote for Discussion: “We have a saying at Sixth & I – ‘the Torah can take it.’” Trusting that we can handle the hard conversations. We try to do Israel/Palestine programming with as much intellectual honesty as possible. Sixth & I Program: “The Hardest Conversation” – a six week program based on a dual-narrative model: SixthAndI.org/event/the-hardest-conversation-1

4. WHAT DOES SHABBAT MORNING LOOK LIKE POST-PRAYER?

Based on the work you’re doing, what would a Shabbat morning service look like at your dream synagogue in which we’ve moved on from the traditional prayers?

Rabbi Michael Strassfeld: each service would have an overriding theme, and everything that’s said or sung will relate to that theme. The service would be 90 minutes – half study/discussion, half prayer/spirituality. “I’ve been doing such a service now for 3 years once a month, and as an alternative at high holy days.” The service doesn’t use the prayerbook, though it draws on pieces of the liturgy. It’s intended to speak to people’s needs and interests.

5. RITUAL AND CREATIVITY IN RECONSTRUCTIONIST JEWISH LIFE

Would you share about a time when you were able to take a ritual and work it to help someone have a moment of real discovery about the value of Judaism in their life?

Rabbi Lauren Grabelle Herrmann: Mikveh deserves new creative exploration. It’s a beautiful ritual, and for many congregational contexts. Conversion, divorce, cancer, etc. We can reconstruct and utilize this gorgeous ritual.

Rabbi Michael Strassfeld: the person who came to ask if she could come to his synagogue to say mourner’s kaddish for relatives who treat her badly and were still alive. He created a ritual that responded to her needs – and he advises that this is part of the nature of the work. With Jewish ritual, there’s improving and there’s creating. “We’re very much in a place where we need to create.”