

# The Amen Effect: Ancient Wisdom to Mend our Broken Hearts and World

## Chapter 8 Wonder

### 1. Threshold Moments

**Purpose:** *Mark the transition from daily life to sacred encounter.*

- Greet people with soft music, low lighting, and a visual centerpiece a photo of your loved ones on a table next to a lit candle.
- Opening prayer: *Let us pray. Holy God, Open our hearts to Your wonders—in laughter and in lament, in the ordinary and the extraordinary, in the ache of grief and the healing power of love. Help us see with eyes of awe, and live with hearts attuned to Your presence. Amen.*

### 2. Sacred Sparks

**Purpose:** *Create curiosity and open hearts.*

- Pose this provocative question.
- Rabbi Brous writes that the heart of this book is the idea that open-hearted, authentic human connection...
  - is a spiritual and biological necessity
  - is the key to belonging and the antidote to loneliness
  - can be the deepest expression of faith, honouring the image of God
  - gives our life purpose and meaning
  - helps us approach moments of joy and pain authentically
  - helps both the wounded and the healer
  - won't save us, but matters profoundly nonetheless

Which of these statements gave you the most pause for reflection—and why?  
How do you see it playing out in your own life or relationships?
- Have people whip around the circle with their answers.

### 3. Chambers of the Spirit

**Purpose:** *Share lived faith experiences in sacred listening circle.*

Invite everyone to share the answer to one or more questions.

1. Rabbi Brous teaches that our hearts must be capacious enough to hold not only the suffering of one group, but also the suffering of the opposing group. Have you ever witnessed this kind of wisdom or practiced it yourself? What did it look like?
2. She describes two countervailing forces at work in society today: *Social alienation*—the breakdown of communal bonds and *Tribalism*—rigid divisions that isolate us into opposing groups. Have you experienced either (or both) of these forces in your own life or community? How have they shown up?
3. Scholar Sherry Turkle calls these divisions *an erosion of empathy*. How have you seen empathy eroding in today's world? What do you think contributes to that erosion?
4. A growing number of Americans report having little or no interaction with their neighbors. How do you interact with your neighbors? What helps you feel connected—or disconnected—from those who live around you?
5. Political philosopher Hannah Arendt warns that isolation leads to extremism and powerlessness. She writes, "*Alone or apart, humanity is powerless.*" In light of that, how might we, as a parish community at Holy Family, build meaningful "communities of faith" that foster solidarity, justice, and love?
6. Rabbi Brous suggests that curiosity is the birthplace of compassion. How do we foster curiosity—in ourselves, our families, and our faith communities?
7. "A society devoid of empathy is at great risk of falling into patterns of dehumanization that have, throughout history, led to the most extreme acts of violence, including genocide" (p. 155). Do you see signs of dehumanization in our society today? What do they look like, and how do we respond faithfully?
8. The *Amen Effect* speaks of ritualizing encounters with "the other"—as a way to train our hearts to see our deep interconnection. How might we at Holy Family create or ritualize spaces that foster genuine encounter, compassion, and connection with those we might otherwise avoid or overlook?
9. Rabbi Brous quotes Rev. Ed Bacon, saying that in every encounter, we have a choice to be a victim, a hero, or a learner. They encourage us to choose to be learners. Would you describe yourself as a curious person? What are you currently learning—or unlearning?
10. Rabbi Brous tells the story of a former Ku Klux Klan member who experienced a long, gradual awakening—growing in compassion toward those he once hated. Have you experienced a gradual awakening in your own life—an expansion of heart, a change in perspective, or a shift in how you view others?
11. In Jewish tradition, the *menudeh*—the ostracized person—is welcomed and reintegrated into the community. What might we learn from this practice? Who might be our "menudeh" today, and how can we respond with radical welcome?

#### 4. Intentional Sending

**Purpose:** *Leave inspired and committed to live the faith.*

- Use a ritual action:
  - Relight the candle
  - Invite everyone to share the one word or phrase they would like to take into the next week/month (depending how often you are meeting).
- Close with a prayer of sending...

May you walk slowly enough to notice the sacred woven into the ordinary.  
May curiosity forever stir your soul.  
May you weep freely when your heart is heavy, and laugh fully when joy returns.  
May wonder break through, even in the deepest dark.  
May you be seen when you feel invisible,  
And may you never forget: you are never alone.

Amen.

# Homework

1. Read the epilogue, beginning on page 175.
2. Reflect on how the message resonates with you, and begin crafting your own story in response.
3. Read the chapter titled *Practice*, starting on page 179.
4. Let the themes and examples in *Practice* guide and inspire your writing. Come to our next session ready to share your story with the group.
5. And most importantly, enjoy *the Amen Effect*—let its wisdom take root in your heart.