



## Jewish Reconstructionist Communities

In Association with the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College

Shalom!

It is my pleasure to share some resources with you for Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month.

Included here are brief suggestions for tie-ins to four Parshayot that will be read in February of 2014. These ideas can be used as part of a d'var Torah.

Following that are some Biblical and Rabbinic texts that deal with issues of inclusion and disabilities. Similar source sheets are available in other locations online. My goal here was honesty—many times we try very hard to claim that Judaism has always been inclusive and accepting and my goal was to be open to the possibility that this may not be true. Each part can be used separately or the three can be used together.

Lastly there are some links to other resources for Jewish Disability Awareness Month. I hope you will find this information useful.

Rabbi Michelle Greenfield

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Parashat Terumah

Exodus 25:1-2

Moses gives this commandment to all of Bnai Yisrael and so it is the job of the community and its leaders to accept offerings from any member of the community. When all of these offerings are brought together, the mishkan—the holy space where God's presence dwells—can be built. Although each person is invited to bring a gift, the commandment is given in the plural; it cannot be the work of only one person to accept these gifts. The gifts that each person brings into a holy space are what God refers to as “My offerings.”

Everybody has something to give and anybody can be compelled by her own heart to give. It is the responsibility of our whole Jewish community to make sure that we are creating spaces where everybody is able to bring an offering. This means that our spaces should be physically acceptable, but also that we need to be able to accept offerings that may be shared in ways that we are not expecting. What is your community doing to ensure that every person's gifts are accepted? Who is responsible for receiving the gifts that your community members have to offer?

Parashat T'tzaveh

Exodus 29:42-46

Tetzaveh is all about Aron and his sons. There is a lot of physical construction, including the creation of the priestly garments. With the close focus on the special relationship between the priests and God, the question is raised about the access that everybody else has to God. God is among and in the people, but there are also some places where people can go for a special meeting. It is important to make sure that everybody has equal access to the places that are meant to be inclusive, whether that access be access to the physical space, access to learning opportunities, or access to connections with other

people. Are there places in your community where everybody is included and has equal access?

### Parashat Ki Tisa

Exodus 34:14-15

Ki Tisa starts with one of many incidents of census-taking in the Torah. There are no details here as to who is counted, other than age. Here we are dealing with a flat-rate tax and we learn that whoever pays this will also be protecting himself from the plague. It is easy to read this text as a call for equality—it is not only those who can go to war who are being counted or who are paying. Everybody is counted and everybody pays the same rate.

This week's parasha also includes the story of the golden calf and of Moses dropping the commandments. In his book God's Mailbox, Mark Gellman has a wonderful story about Moses being told that he must assemble the broken tablets. Moses, a 'go-fast' person, must learn to work together with the 'go-slow' people who can't always keep up with him. This story is a great read-aloud to engage children.

### Vayakhel

Exodus 35:22-25

Just as in Terumah, each person has a different gift to bring. Some of these are gifts of physical objects and some are particular skills that can be shared. It is only when all of these gifts are used together that the *mishkan* can be completed. Some people have *chochmat lev*, or knowledge of the heart (although the heart was then understood to be the thinking-center of the body). A big part of creating an inclusive community is understanding the gifts that everybody can bring. Sometimes this may mean being an expert in a certain subject area, but it can also mean understanding gifts that cannot be expressed with words.

# Some Biblical and Rabbinic Sources on Disability: An Honest Look

## Part 1: Everybody's favorite texts:

These are texts that are often quoted when talking about inclusion of people with different abilities. They can be positive, but may not be everything that we assume them to be.

Leviticus 19:14	ויקרא יט:יד
You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your God: I am Adonai.	לא תקלל חרש ולפני עור לא תתן מכשל ויראת מאלהיך אני יהוה

What does this mitzvah actually require of people? What are the limitations of this mitzvah? Rabbinic authorities didn't interpret this text literally. They instead understood it as a commandment not to tempt people to do the wrong thing.

Psalm 118:22	תהילים קיח:כב
The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone	אבן מאסו הבונים היתה לראש פינה

This text can be used to speak to the need to change attitudes. Many communities have not been ready to work toward change and to include people with differing abilities, but that does not mean that there is no obligation to do so going forward.

Proverbs 22:6	משלי כב:ו
Educate a child according to his way, for even when he grows old he won't stray from it. Or Teach a child in the way he should go [i.e. the right path]....	תנוד לנער, על-פי דרכו-- גם פי-ינקיו, לא-יסור ממנה.

Exodus 4:10-16	שמות ד:י-יז
<b>10</b> And Moses said to God: 'Please God, I am not a man of words, nor have I ever been, even since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am of a heavy mouth and a heavy tongue.' <b>11</b> And God said to him: 'Who makes a man's mouth? or who makes a man dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? is it not I God? <b>12</b> Now go, and I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you will say' <b>13</b> And he said: 'Oh God, send, I pray, by the hand of him whom You wilt send.' [i.e. send somebody else!] <b>14</b> And the anger of the God was kindled against Moses, and God said: 'Isn't there Aaron? Your brother the Levite? I know that he can really speak. And also he's coming to meet you now and when he sees you, he will be happy. <b>15</b> And you will speak to him, and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what to do. <b>16</b> And he will speak for you to the people; and it will be that he's like a mouth for you, and you will be in	י ויאמר משה אל-יהוה, בי אדוני, לא איש דברים אנכי גם מתמול גם משלשם, גם מאז ודברך אל-עבדך: כי כבד-פה וכבד לשון, אנכי. יא ויאמר יהוה אליו, מי שם פה לאדם, או מי-ישום אלים, או חרש או פקח או עור--הלא אנכי, יהוה. יב ועתה, לך; ואנכי אהיה עם-פיה, והוריתיך אשך תדבר. יג ויאמר, בי אדוני; שלח-נא, ביד-תשלח. יד ויסר-אף יהוה במשה, ויאמר הלא אהרן אחיך הלוי--ידעתי, כי-דבר ידבר הוא; וגם הנה הוא יצא לקראתך, ורצה ושמח בלבבו. טו ודברת אליו, ושמעת את-הדברים בפיו; ואנכי אהיה עם-פיה ועם-פיהו, והוריתי אתכם, את אשך תעשון. טז ודבר-הוא לך, אל-העם; ויהוה הוא יהיה-לך לפה, ואתה תהיה-לו לאלהים.

God's place for him.	
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Pirkei Avot 4:27	מסכת אבות ד:כז
Rabbi Yossef the son of Judah of Kfar HaBavli would say: One who learns Torah from youngsters, whom is he comparable to? To one who eats unripe grapes and drinks [unfermented] wine from the press. One who learns Torah from the old, whom is he comparable to? To one who eats ripened grapes and drinks aged wine.	רבי יוסי ברבי יהודה איש כפר הבבלי אומר, הלמד מן הקטנים, למה הוא דומה--לאוכל ענבים קהות, ושותה יין מגיתו; והלמד מן הזקנים, למה הוא דומה--לאוכל ענבים בשלות, ושותה יין ישן. רבי אומר, <b>אל תסתכל בקנקן, אלא במה שיש בו:</b> יש קנקן חדש, מלא ישן; וישן, אפילו חדש אין בו.
<b>Said Rabbi Meir: Look not at the vessel, but at what it contains.</b> There are new vessels that are filled with old wine, and old vessels that do not even contain new wine.	

While this is often quoted in the context of inclusion of people with disabilities, the text is actually about ageism.

Talmud Shavuot 39a	
<b>All of Israel is responsible for one another</b>	כל ישראל ערביין זה לזה

Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5	סנהדרין ד:ה
An individual person was created to show the greatness of God. While a human being mints many coins from a single cast, and they are all identical. But the Holy One, blessed be God strikes us all from the mold of the first human, and each one of us is unique.	להגיד גדולתו של מלך מלכי המלכים, הקדוש ברוך הוא, שאדם טובע מאה מטבעות בחותם אחד, וכולן דומין זה לזה, מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא טובע את כל האדם בחותמו של אדם הראשון, ואין אחד מהם דומה לחברו. לפיכך לכל אחד ואחד לומר, בשבילי נברא העולם. שמא תאמרו, מה לנו ולצרה הזאת, והלוא כבר נאמר "והוא עד, או ראה או ידע; אם לא יגיד, ונשא עווננו" (ויקרא ה,א). או שמא תאמרו מה לנו לחוב בדמיו של זה, והלוא כבר נאמר "ובאבוד רשעים, רינה" (משלי יא,י).

In the context of this Mishna, the text is proof for why 'humans were created singly' (why all people descend from the same individual). This relates to the text from Exodus where God asks 'Who gives a person his mouth?'

Midrash Tanhuma	
Rabbi Abahu said: For all 40 days that Moses was up there, he would learn Torah and then forget it. Moses said to God, "Master of the Universe! It's been 40 days and I know nothing!" What did God do? When 40 days were up, He gave him Torah as gift.	אמר ר' אמר אבהו כל ארבעים יום שעשה משה למעלה, היה לומד תורה ושוכחה, א"ל משה רבנו של עולם הרי יש לי מ יום ואיני יודע שום דבר, מה עשה הקב"ה כשהשלים מ'יום נתן לו את התורה במתנה

## Part 2: On that day—Radical inclusion or disappearance of disabilities

The prophets here present two different views of what ‘that day’ will look like. They are both talking about a time of perfection, but they do not agree on what that means. For Isaiah, people will no longer have physical challenges. For Jeremiah, the challenges will remain, but everybody will come together despite the challenges. I have labeled these ‘cures’ and ‘acceptance’ to maintain language that is parallel to contemporary discussions.

In the deaf community, cochlear implants have been controversial since they became popular in the 1990s. (<http://gupress.gallaudet.edu/excerpts/CIEP.html>) Similar language is used in the Autism community today as theoretical conversations about cures and acceptance continue.

### Option 1: Cures

Isaiah 29:18	ישעיה כט: יח
On that day, the deaf shall hear even written words, and the eyes of the blind shall see even in darkness and obscurity.	וְשָׁמְעוּ בַיּוֹם-הַהוּא הַחֲרָשִׁים, דְּבָרֵי-סֹפֵר; וּמְאֹפֵל וּמְחֹשֶׁה, עֵינֵי עֹרְרִים תִּרְאֶינָה.

Isaiah 35:5, 6	
Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be opened. Then the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute will shout with you. For waters shall burst forth in the desert, streams in the wilderness.	אֲזַ תִּפְקַחְנָה, עֵינֵי עֹרְרִים; וְאָזְנֵי חֲרָשִׁים, תִּפְתַּחְנָה. וְאֲזַ יִדְלַג כְּאַיִל פֶּסַח, וְתָרַן לְשׁוֹן אֵלֶם: כִּי-נִבְקְעוּ בַמִּדְבָּר מַיִם, וּנְחָלִים בְּעֶרְבָה.

### Option 2: Acceptance

Jeremiah 31:7-9	ירמיהו לא:ז-ח
I will bring them from the northern land and gather them from the ends of the earth—the blind and the lame among them, those with child and those in labor—in a vast throng they shall return here. They shall come weeping, and with compassion I will guide them. I will lead them to streams of water, by a level road where they will not stumble. For I am ever a Father to Israel, Ephraim is My first-born.	הֲנִי מְבִיא אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ צָפוֹן, וְקִבְצָתִים מִיִּרְכַּת־אֶרֶץ--בָּם עוֹר וּפֶסַח, הָרָה וְיֹלְדַת יְחִדּוֹ: קֶהֱל גְדוֹל, יִשׁוּבוּ הִנֵּה. ח בְּבִכִי יָבֹאוּ, וּבְתַחֲנוּנִים אֹבִילֶם--אוֹלִיכֶם אֶל-נְחָלֵי מַיִם, בְּדֶרֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל יִכְשְׁלוּ בָהּ: כִּי-הָיִיתִי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְאָב, וְאֶפְרַיִם בְּכֹרִי הוּא.

### Part 3: Who varies creation

Many people include the following blessing with other sources that talk about inclusion and acceptance of people with differences. Some hold a sense of pride that our tradition includes a special blessing that is said upon seeing somebody who is ‘different.’

However, taken in the context of Rabbinic literature, this blessing may seem less than kind.

Traditional liturgy	
Blessed is the One who makes creations different/who varies creations	ברוך ..... משנה הבריות

Tosefta Brachot 6:6,6:7	תוספתא ברכות ו:ז, ז
One who sees a Cushite or an albino, or [a man] red-spotted in the face, or [a man] white-spotted in the face [a man afflicted with psoriasis or elephantiasis], or a hunchback, or a dwarf (or a deaf man or an imbecile, or a drunk) says “Blessed is the one who creates such varied creatures. [One who sees] an amputee, or a lame man, or a blind man, or a man afflicted with boils, says “Praised be the true judge” One who sees attractive people or attractive trees says, “Praised be the one who created attractive creations”	ו,ו הרואה את הכושי ואת הגיחור ואת הלזקן ואת הקיפח ואת הננס ואת הדרניקוס (ואת החרש ואת השוטה ואת השכור) אומר ברוך משנה הבריות  את החגר ואת הקיטע ואת הסומא ומוכי שחין ואת פתויי ראש ואת הבהקנין אומר ברוך דיין האמת.  ו,ז ראה בני אדם נאין ואילנות נאין אומר ברוך שברא בריות נאות.

Talmud Brachot 58b	ברכות נח:ב
R. Joshua b. Levi said: On seeing pock-marked persons one says: Blessed be He who makes strange creatures. An objection was raised: If one sees a negro, a very red or very white person, a hunchback, a dwarf or a dropsical person, he says: Blessed be He who makes strange creatures. If he sees one with an amputated limb, or blind, or flatheaded, or lame, or smitten with boils, or pock-marked, he says: Blessed be the true Judge! There is no contradiction; one blessing is said if he is so from birth, the other if he became so afterwards. A proof of this is that he is placed in the same category as one with an amputated limb; this proves it. Our Rabbis taught: On seeing an elephant, an ape, or a long-tailed ape, one says: Blessed is He who makes strange creatures. If one sees beautiful creatures and beautiful trees, he says: Blessed is He who has such in His world.	אמר ריב"ל הרואה את הבהקנים אומר ברוך משנה הבריות מיתבי ראה את הכושי ואת הגיחור ואת הלזקן ואת הקפח ואת הננס ואת הדרניקוס אומר ברוך משנה את הבריות את הקטע ואת הסומא ואת פתויי הראש ואת החגר ואת המוכה שחין ואת הבהקנים אומר ברוך דיין אמת ל"ק הא ממעי אמו הא בתר דאיתליד דיקא נמי דקתני דומיא דקטע שמע מינה ת"ר הרואה פיל קוף וקפוף אומר ברוך משנה את הבריות ראה בריות טובות ואילנות טובות אומר ברוך שככה לו בעולמו

#### OTHER JDAM RESOURCES:

Jewish Federations of North America Resource Guide:

[http://www.jewishfederations.org/local\\_includes/downloads/61299.pdf](http://www.jewishfederations.org/local_includes/downloads/61299.pdf)

Video and Resources from a Mini-Course at RRC

<http://www.rrc.edu/resources/disabilities-mini-course>

Information about Celebrations! At Mishkan Shalom (including information about a free Webinar on 2/4)

<http://mishkan.org/celebrations>

Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism's page on Disability Rights

<http://rac.org/advocacy/issues/issuedr/>