CHAPTER 6: TEXT BASED JEWISH VALUES FOR INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

The value of inclusion is profoundly Jewish and resonates with our people’s soul. The Torah teaches that the whole Jewish people stood at Sinai: men, women and children, regardless of ability or difference. And Deuteronomy 5:2-3 says that even those who are not yet born, all of us, “stood” there at that time. Being Jewish is for all of us. Yet, being Jewish, in our history of exiles and wandering, has meant being excluded or oppressed. All too often, our people have been the outsider: We understand well the stigma of exclusion, the damage of isolation.

There are many traditional Jewish texts which speak of differences and disabilities. We can turn to these texts to open our hearts and minds. Some will provoke us, some will encourage us. All will provide an opportunity for us to talk together about this shared value of inclusion. It is our hope that communities of camp lay leaders and staff members will provoke, challenge, and encourage each other in this study and in our work to recognize each other and welcome each other for who we are: different and yet of one people.

How Do Jewish Texts Approach Individuals with Disabilities?

And God created man in His image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. - Genesis 1:26-27

Every Jew is obligated in the study of Torah, whether rich or poor whether healthy or suffering with ailments, young or very old. –Rambam Hilchot Talmud Torah 1:8

Blessing upon seeing someone who is different: Blessed are you, Lord our G-d, who makes G-d’s creations different. –Based on Blessing from Tosefta Brachot 6:1
And Moses said to the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither yesterday nor the day before, nor since you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. And the Lord said to him, Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Is it not I, the Lord? –Exodus 4:10-11

Teach the youth according to his way; and when he is old, he will not depart from it. -Proverbs 22:6

“Who is considered to be a shoteh: one who is repeatedly referred to as one who is free from the commandments and any punishment, whose purchasing is invalid and whose selling is invalid.”

Rashi’s Commentary on Haggigah 3b

17) Speak to Aaron saying: any man from your offspring that has a blemish should not come near to offer the food of G-d.
18) Any man with a blemish should not come close—any blind man, lame man, or man whose nose has no bridge, or man who has one limb longer than the other.
19) Or a man who has a broken foot or hand 20) Or a man who has abnormally long eyebrows, or a membrane on his eye or a blemish in his eye or a dry skin eruption, or a moist skin eruption, or who has crushed testicles
21) Any man with a blemish from the offspring of Aharon the Priest shouldn’t approach to give the offerings of G-d. He has a blemish—he shall not come close to sacrifice. (adapted from English translation of Leviticus 21:17-21 in the ArtScroll/Stone Edition)
Every Jew is obligated in the study of Torah, whether rich or poor whether healthy or suffering with ailments, young or very old. Even the poor who have to beg at the doors, whether married with children (or not) is obligated to establish set times for the study of Torah either day or night as it says, “And you shall meditate on it day and night.” -Joshua 1:8

Ban Azzai taught, “Do not disdain any person. Do not underrate the importance of anything—there is no person who does not have his hour, and there is no thing without its place in the sun.” -Pirkei Avot 4:3

A Tanna retold this before Rabbi Nachman son of Yitzchak: One who embarrasses another in public, it is as if he shed his blood. -Babylonian Talmud, Baba Mezia 58b, American Jewish World Service translation

“Imagine a World…”
By Diana Pastora Carson
Imagine a world where everyone is special.
Imagine a world where respect for all exists.
Imagine people of all races, colors, and abilities valued and loved the same.
Imagine people of all appearances, beliefs, and backgrounds esteemed and honored each day.
Imagine a world where differences are like instruments, bringing unique sounds to a symphony.
Imagine humanity generously dancing and singing along in harmony.
Imagine seeing others’ “differentness” with appreciation and with grace.
Imagine recognizing creation’s ingenious way of designing the human race,
Where everyone is great as they are and no one is better or less;
Where every person has her place in making the world its best.
Imagine us making a difference in the lives of our fellow men
By letting them be who they are and supporting them how we can.
Imagine a world where everyone is special.
Imagine a world where respect for all exists.
Imagine this world and create it now.
Imagine it.
Be it.