

JEWISH CONCEPTS RELATED TO
DISABILITY AWARENESS

1. We are all created in G-d's image and so Judaism teaches us to treat every person with dignity and respect. (Genesis 1:27)

כז וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ, בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ: זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה, בָּרָא אֹתָם.

And G-d created man in His own image, in the image of G-d created He him; male and female created He them.

2. G-d created differences as well as similarities among people. The blessing *MeShaneh HaBriyot* "...who makes people different," can help us express our discomfort when we see people who were born with visible differences and can help us deal with these feelings. It can also remind us to treat all people with respect and to welcome all Jews into the Jewish community.

Baruch Ata Adonai Elohenu Melech HaOlam, Meshaneh Habriyot.

Blessed are you, Adonai, our God Sovereign of the Universe, who makes people different.

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם. משנה הבריות.

3. The transmission of Torah is a mitzvah for the learner as well as for those who enable that learning, as expressed in Pirkei Avot 1:12, "Hillel said: Be like the disciples of Aaron, love peace and pursue peace, love human beings and bring them near to the Torah."

א,יב הלל ושמאי קיבלו מהם. הלל אומר, הוי כתלמידיו של אהרון--אוהב שלום ורודף שלום, אוהב את הבריות ומקרבת לתורה.

When we bring people with disabilities into our community we enable them to learn about their tradition and participate in Jewish life.

4. Jews are part of a community that assumes responsibility for one another: "All Israel is responsible for the other." "*Kol Yisrael Areivim Zeh Ba Zeh*" (*Shavuot 39a*)
5. All Jews have something that they can contribute to the community and to the world, as expressed in Pirkei Avot 4:3: "Do not despise any person and do not disparage any object. For there is no one who does not have his/her hour and there is no object that does not have its place."

ד,ג הוא היה אומר, אל תהי בז לכל אדם, ואל תהי מפליג לכל דבר, שאין לך אדם שאין לו שעה, ואין לך דבר שאין לו מקום.

(Over)

6. We need to provide opportunities for the realization of everyone's contributions and not hinder them in any way. Moreover, it is our responsibility to do whatever is possible to remove or to mitigate physical and/or attitudinal obstacles, as we can learn from "Do not curse a person who is deaf and do not put a stumbling block in front of a person who is blind." (Leviticus 19:14)

י' ל'א-תקלל חרש--וּלְפָנֵי עֵוֶר, ל'א תתן מְקוֹשׁ ל

7. We see ourselves as partners with G-d when we make a contribution to the world or help to make something better. This is *tikun olam* (literally "Repairing the World").