

THE TORAH OF SAFETY, RESPECT, AND EQUITY

UTILIZING JEWISH TEXTS TO DEEPEN OUR PRACTICES OF INCLUSION AND BELONGING

SRE Network guides Jewish organizations to achieve gender equity and cultivate inclusive workplaces and communal spaces where all individuals can succeed and drive change. We envision a Jewish communal landscape that is **safe**, **respectful**, and **equitable**, where every individual thrives and organizations can achieve their missions.

- **Safety:** Environments are free from harassment, abuse, and violence.
- **Respect:** People engage one another with the Jewish value of *kavod habriyot*, recognizing the inherent dignity of every person.
- **Equity:** Meaningful pathways and access to opportunities are provided to close demographic disparities. All people are treated fairly.

2. GOD*

Genesis 1:26 – 27

26) And God said, "Let us make the human in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." 27) And God created the human in God's image, in the image of God, God created him; male through female God created them.**

2a. Rabbi Sandra Lawson

"To be created in God's image is not just about the Awesomeness power of God. It is also a statement of responsibility about the way we are to treat others. Do we see God in others? Do we recognize that all people are created in the image of God? If we truly believe that we are all created in God's image, we should recognize that every day is an opportunity to live our lives in such a way to be God like to be compassionate caring individuals and to do our best to bring justice into the world."

2b. Questions for Further Thought

- What does it mean to be created in the image of God?
- If we were to take this concept seriously, what would it mean about how we must treat everyone, whether or not we are in close proximity to them?

*This verse is found in Chapter 6 of the book of Micah. Here the Prophet Micah teaches the Jewish people that they need to return to God, but that the way to do so is **not** through offering sacrifices to God. Micah teaches that what God really desires is a **change in our behavior**.*

1. Micah 6:8

הִגִּיד לָךְ אָדָם מֵהַטּוֹב וּמִהַ'יָּהוָה דּוֹרָשׁ
מִמָּוֶה כִּי אִם־עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֵסֶד
וְהִצַּנֵּעַ לִכְת עִם־אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

"You have been told, Human being, what is good, and what God seeks from you: Only to do justice, And to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God."

1a. Central Questions

The traits of justice, loving goodness, and humility are fundamental principles of morality and goodness.

- Why do you think this text chose these three as the building blocks for a healthy society that is just or equitable for everybody?
- Please read the above definitions of safety, respect, and equity and consider: how do you understand them to be in conversation with justice, kindness, and humility?
- What do the verbs before each noun teach us about the behaviors we are asked to engage in?

3. JUSTICE

Babylonian Talmud Tractate Sukkah 49b

Rabbi Elazar said: Anyone who performs righteousness and justice is considered as though they filled the whole world in its entirety with kindness, as it is stated: "God loves what is right and just; the earth is full of the kindness of the Lord" (Psalms 33:5).

3a. Rabbi Rachel Barenblat

"Justice, justice shall you pursue!" — doesn't end there. Torah continues, "in order that you may live and inherit the land which Adonai your God is giving you." We pursue justice in order that we may truly live. In order to live life to its fullest, we need to work toward a world that is just, and that requires all of the empathy we can cultivate."

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

"Justice exists in relation to a person, and is something done by a person. An act of injustice is condemned, not because the law is broken, but because a person has been hurt. What is the image of a person? A person is a being whose anguish may reach the heart of God."

4. KINDNESS

Babylonian Talmud Tractate Sotah 14a

Rabbi Chama the son of Rabbi Chanina said: Why is it written, "Walk after the Lord your God"? (Deut. 13:5) Is it possible for a person to walk after the Divine Presence? Furthermore - do we not already have a verse that teaches us that "The Lord your God is a consuming fire"?! (Deut. 4:24) Rather, it means to walk after the ways of the Lord. Just as God clothes the naked, as it is written: "And the Lord God made clothes of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them," so you too should clothe the naked. God visits the sick, as it is written: And the Lord appeared to him (Abraham) in Alonei Mamre", so you too should visit the sick. God comforts the mourners, as it is written: "After the death of Abraham God blessed his son Isaac," so too you should comfort the mourner. Just as God buries the dead, as it is written: "And he was buried in the valley in the land of Moab" (Deuteronomy 34:6), so too, should you bury the dead.

4a. Ruth Messinger

"Service is my way of encountering God in the world, since God can only be found in our response to the needs of others. Through this response we can hope to fulfill the mitzvah of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world)."

4b. Questions for Further Thought

- What does it mean to imitate God through our kindness?
- How does being kind actually bring more justice and morality in the world?
- What does this text teach you about kindness?

5. HUMBLY

Ethics of the Fathers, 4:10

"Rabbi Meir said, ...be humble of spirit before every person..."

5b. Questions for Further Thought

- How does Dr. Brown understand the value of humility?
- How does being humble – in private and in public – enhance my capacity for empathy and understanding?

5a. Dr. Erica Brown

"Walking modestly for the prophet is walking with eyes wide open to the presence of anyone in need, waiting to perform acts of mercy, justice, and lovingkindness. Looking at a glimpse of the exegetical history of Micah 6:8 and its contextual meaning takes us straight back to the Talmud's expansive understanding. Religion stripped to its most essential elements asks both very little and a great deal of us: to return to a state of simplicity, broken and small in God's presence, able, in a state of vulnerability, to make those invisible visible, to create a society where we walk beside others because God is willing to walk beside us."

David Suissa

"Humility opens us up to the possibility that we may not own the whole truth, that maybe those with whom we disagree may own some of that truth....Whether ancient or modern, humility is a mindset. It is the recognition that societies, communities and even relationships never can survive when everyone is determined to get their way. Humility allows us to lower our sights so we can reach a higher plane, the plane of unity."

Living the Values of Safety, Respect, and Equity

- What are the implications to your work if we treated one another in the ways listed above?
- How does treating people in these ways help them "thrive and drive change" as SRE Network envisions?
 - Considering your role, what support might you need to practice kindness?

**A note on God language: We understand that not everyone believes in the concept of God, and that those who do believe have radically different understandings of the Divine. For our purposes, we are understanding God as reference to creating a world where every person is seen, and valued, and that we have a charge to walk through the world in a way that expresses the inherent dignity of every human being. We have chosen not to ascribe any gendered pronouns when we talk about God in this source sheet.*

***Rabbi Marisa Elana James translates this as "male through female" to indicate that all genders were created in the creation of the human.*



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