



Derekh Eretz

R·E·S·P·E·C·T
2012-2013

INTRODUCTION

When a person appears before the Throne of Judgment, the first question asked is **not**, 'Have you believed in God?' or 'Have you prayed or performed ritual acts?' but 'Have you dealt honorably, faithfully in all your dealings with your fellow human beings?'

How we deal with one another, whether through action or language, is a reflection of our commitment to derekh erez – respect. The Yom Kippur liturgy enjoins us to reflect on personal behavior and focuses principally on sins of speech and impaired interpersonal relations.

The rabbis asked: What is the most important day of the year? The answer: the day **after** Yom Kippur. That is when we determine if our prayers were sincere.

This year we hope that our focus on respect/derekh erez will heighten sensitivity within our sisterhoods and in the lives of our members.

Team Work: A Mutual Respect

This year's Divrei Hokhmah project is the result of the energetic and hard-working Women's League for Conservative Judaism Program Advisory Committee (PAC). The PAC creates materials that integrate the work of individual committees with the organization's thematic approach to programming. Many of the entries for the 2012-1213 Divrei Hokhmah were submitted by PAC members.

Thank you to the entire PAC for their hard work, creativity and especially for being an exceptional model for team work.

Judi Kenter, PAC Chair; Renee Glazier, Jewish Studies; Eve Gold, Resources; Ziza Pallia, Tikkun Olam; Illene Rubin, Books; Joyce Weingarten and Lara Werwa, Z'havah Co-Chairs; and PAC committee members, Ellen Kaner Bresnick and Barbara Ezring



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How to Use

Each of these short texts is designed to generate energized and energizing discussions about derekh erez. When people are engaged actively in the process of study – rather than passive recipients, the benefits are more enduring and effective.

- Keep your eye on the clock. The discussion should be no more than 5 to 7 minutes.
- Anyone can lead a discussion. Allow the leader to familiarize herself with the material ahead of time so that she can think about the questions and some possible answers.
- Use the questions that are provided on the back of each card, or feel free to create your own. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers, only thoughtful and challenging ones! Your discussions will be well worth the time.

Our rabbis taught:

What is in your heart about your acquaintance is most likely in her heart about you.

Sifre Deuteronomy, piska 24

Discuss!



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Emma Lazarus

This line from the famous sonnet “The New Colossus” by Emma Lazarus is engraved on a plaque on the Statue of Liberty in 1903.

*Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore...*

Discussion Questions

How does Lazarus’ portrayal of immigrants compare to the quote: “The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself...” (Leviticus 19:34)?

How are newcomers to our communities treated? Are they separated because they speak a different language, come from a different culture, wear different styles of dress?

How do we treat the newcomer to our synagogue or sisterhood?

Emma Lazarus (1849-1887) was one of the first successful Jewish American authors. Throughout her life she experienced unequal treatment as both a Jew and a woman. Through her poem “The New Colossus” (1893), Lazarus endeavored to influence the American attitude toward immigration. She portrayed two images – the condition of the tired immigrants as well as the derision directed toward them as they attempt to begin life anew.

Submitted by Barbara Ezring
PAC member



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Senior Moments Abraham Joshua Heschel

A test of a people is how it behaves toward the elderly. It is easy to love children. Even tyrants and dictators make a point of being fond of children. But the affection and care for the old, the incurable, the helpless are the true gold mine of a culture.

Discussion Questions

What is Heschel’s theological point about the treatment of the elderly?

As we see our Jewish population graying at a disproportionate rate to births, what can we do within our sisterhoods and synagogues to reflect Heschel’s stance?

While we pay much attention to our youth, should we be focusing, as well, on the elderly?

Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), born in Poland with Hasidic roots, was one of the leading Jewish theologians of the 20th century. He joined the JTS faculty and was enormously influential among several generations of Conservative rabbis. Heschel marched alongside Martin Luther King during the civil rights march in Selma, Alabama.

Submitted by Ziza Pallia
Tikkun Olam Chair, PAC



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The Medicine of Friendship

Dr. Jerome Groopman

Dr. Jerome Groopman describes his professional ethos as:

A medicine of friendship...one that is embodied in the prayer for healing (tefillat mi sheberakh l'refuah) and includes the imperative to the doctor that when he or she no longer has the drug to give or the surgery to perform, that they are still there by the patient's bedside... How much could I give someone sometimes? But I was there. That's what you give them.

Discussion questions

How does Dr. Groopman extend the mitzvot of pikuach nefesh (saving a life) and bikkur cholim (visiting the sick) to one that shows derekh eretz, especially in situations when his job appears done?

In what ways that illustrate derekh eretz can we help our sisterhood sisters cope with illness, their own or a family member's?

What kinds of programs would help our membership support those who are ill or their families, yet still respect their privacy and/or personal wishes?

Jerome Groopman, M.D. is the Dina and Raphael Recanati Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School, Chief of Experimental Medicine at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, and one of the world's leading researchers in cancer and AIDS.

Submitted by Ellen Kaner Bresnick

PAC member



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On Keruv

The rabbis taught:

If a person is penitent, we must not say to her: 'Remember your former deeds.' If she is the child of converts, she should not be taunted, 'Remember the deeds of your ancestors.' If she is a convert and comes to study Torah, we must not say to her: 'Shall the mouth that ate unclean and forbidden foods ... come to study Torah and was spoken by the mouth of the All Powerful?'

Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia 58b

Discussion questions

What do the rabbis say here about respect? To whom does this apply?

How is respect integral to issues of keruv in our communities?

What are some possible (requiring little effort) implementations for keruv in any community?

Respect and Self Help

Rabbi Stephen S. Wise

Like others of his generation, Rabbi Stephen Wise, an American Zionist activist ordained by JTS who later became a Reform rabbi, struggled with the dual identities of American Jews. He was nevertheless able to reconcile one with the other and understood that both respect and self respect were integral to the Zionist enterprise. He said the following:

Help and respect can come to a people only through self-help and self-respect.

Discussion questions

How does Rabbi Wise understand the connection between respect and Zionism?

How can Rabbi Wise's idea about the relationship between respect and the achievement of set goals be applied to our present lives?

What role can and should a leader play in fostering respect?

Rabbi Stephen S. Wise (1874-1949) was an early supporter of Zionism, very atypical of American Reform Jews until the mid-20th century. Wise attended the Second Zionist Conference in 1898 and was involved with the establishment of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA). In addition to his active career as a pulpit rabbi, he was a co-founder of the NAACP.

Submitted by Eve Gold

Resources Chair, PAC

The Bride is Beautiful

Our rabbis taught:

How do we speak to a bride? Shammai says: '...the bride is as she is...' Hillel says: 'Every bride is beautiful.' Shammai asks: If she was lame or blind, do you say 'beautiful or graceful bride?' Does the Torah not command, 'stay away from falsehood'? (Ex. 23:7) Hillel answers: According to your words, if a person has made a bad purchase in the market, should one praise it to him or deprecate it? Surely one should praise it to him. Therefore the rabbis teach, "Always should one's disposition be pleasant with people."

Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 16b-17a

Discussion Questions

How do Hillel and Shammai disagree over the meaning of respect?

How do we decide when telling the truth is not an option?

How do we decide when telling the truth is the only option?

Hillel's view prevailed. Do you agree?

Respect - Eye to Eye

From *God's To-Do List: 103 Ways to Be an Angel and Do God's Work on Earth*, by Dr. Ron Wolfson:

Look at every human being you meet,
Face to face,
Eye to eye,
Heart to heart.

Discussion Questions

How does respect effect the way in which we meet or greet people for the first time?

How is looking another in the eye a sign of respect?

What is the difference between hearing and listening? How do we convey that we are listening?

How can we communicate warmth? Concern? Compassion?

Dr. Ron Wolfson is Fingerhut Professor of Education at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles and a cofounder of Synagogue 3000. He is author of many family guidebooks to spiritual celebration, welcoming, mourning and comfort.

Submitted by Joyce B. Weingarten
Z'havah Co-Chair, PAC

The Times ...they are a'changin'

In the introduction to the 1946 RA Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book, the editors discussed their changes to traditional blessings in the Birkot HaShachar. Several of those traditional blessings are "not obligatory in equal measure" for non-Jews (nor for slaves or women). However, the editors felt that the "negative form in which these blessings are couched caused Jewish leadership much concern through the ages." This is one of their changes:

Original blessing: Blessed are You ... who has not made me a heathen (Hebrew: she lo asani goy)

RA version: Blessed are You...who hast made me in Thine image

Discussion Questions

What do you think was the context for this change?

How is the meaning affected by this change?

What does the word "goy" imply for you? Is it a neutral or respectful term today?