

JECEI Lenses: An Introductory Statement

The work of the Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative (JECEI) is rooted in foundational Jewish ideas and values through which we view and experience our world. We have grouped these core concepts, drawn from Jewish wisdom, into seven interconnected categories, which we call lenses. These lenses provide an ethical model for living, a set of resources designed to help us experience increased sanctity in an increasingly confusing, commercial, and difficult world, and a language through which we can articulate a shared vision that we want to pass on to future generations. For each lens there is a Hebrew word which captures the essence of the lens, a literal translation of the Hebrew, and a more interpretive word or phrase which illuminates JECEI's understanding of the core value within each category.

The lenses are:

- **Masa** (Journey) reflection, return and renewal
- **B'rit** (Covenant) belonging and commitment
- **Tzelem Elohim** (Divine Image) dignity and potential
- **K'dusha** (Holiness) intentionality and presence
- **Hitorerut** (Awakening) amazement and gratitude
- **D'rash** (Interpretation) inquiry, dialogue, and transmission
- **Tikkun Olam** (Repair of the World) - responsibility

The lenses open windows to transcendent Jewish values, serve as foundational and transformative guides, and are lived in the classroom as well as the extended school community.

These lenses articulate our approach to our work, and beyond that become our very paradigm for being. They are ideally manifest daily in each of our early childhood centers - in the ways in which we structure our time, our curricula and our classrooms; the quality of our relationships with our students, our faculties, our host institutions; and the partnerships we forge with the families in our communities. They improve and sharpen our vision, and enable us to see our world more clearly and in a particularly focused way.

The internalization of these lenses by those who partner with JECEI is crucial to our approach to Jewish early childhood education. We seek to provide bridges between inspiration and information, the concrete and the abstract, the intellectual and the emotional, the individual and the community. JECEI places unparalleled emphasis on the importance of deep Jewish engagement on the part of the entire family and community. We hope to empower our partners of all ages to see themselves as capable Jews who look at the world through a unique set of lenses that will actually make a difference in their lives and in the world. Our Hebrew and English labels reflect the Jewish tradition of continual intellectual tension and discussion as a source of growth and learning. Independent of one's upbringing, denomination, beliefs, or practice, we believe that interaction with Jewish texts and a deep understanding of the foundational vision of Judaism provide invaluable opportunities to enhance awareness of what is essential in everyday life, to forge stronger webs of communal

relations, and to celebrate sacred time. We believe that this kind of engagement can transform the face of the families and communities with whom we are involved.

Masa (Journey): Reflection, Return, and Renewal

Judaism calls upon us to understand that our individual life journeys are both reflected in and illuminated by the larger journeys of our people (and vice versa), and that our success in life depends as much upon the integrity with which we progress as it does upon reaching our goals. Our Jewish paths are full of paradoxes. Through our forward movement we seek teshuvah/return. Our journeys to distant lands serve to take us deeper into our own selves. Our commitment to the telling and retelling of past stories equips us to face the future. The Jewish path, both communal and individual, comes with baggage that carries us as much as we carry it. It also comes with a promise and a vision - our lives are merely a blip on the cosmic radar screen, and yet every step we take is of the utmost importance to those we know and the overall picture. Our person has been motivated in its journeys by sacred calling, by seemingly chance encounters, by fear, by wonder, by oppression and by the promise of a better life. And the documentation of these journeys, our Torah, helps us both to make sense of it all and to better gauge our next steps.

Our language of journey is borrowed from the book of Genesis, Chapter 12. When *Avram* responds to God's call to *lech lecha* from your land, and from your place of birth, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you, the story of the world becomes the story of our people. Jewish learning and identity begin.

But it is important to understand that even our most individual journeys are somehow a continuation of those that came before, and are shaped in part by those with whom we travel. If one turns back to Chapter 11 in Genesis, it is actually *Terach*, *Avram's* father, who begins a journey of this sort for no apparent reason. He simply picks up his entire family and goes. Torah tells us that he settles at a crossroads. It is there that he dies, and *Avram* first hears the compelling voice that motivates him to actually continue the journey that his father began. We are all on a continuation of someone else's journey. We are moved by multiple voices, and often settle at crossroads for unknown reasons. The stories of the Torah hold valuable lessons for each of us.

The order in which *Avram* is told to go seems to be backward. Wouldn't it make more sense, in a geographical journey, for one to first leave one's father's house, then one's city/village of birth, and then one's land? Torah speaks to the need to travel internally as well as externally - first to leave our place of cultural comfort, then the ways of thinking into which we were born, and finally separate ourselves entirely from our parents in order to become what we must become. This journey travels not from land to land, but from the periphery of one's being to the core - *lecha* (literally "to you") - to one's true self.

Is the journey a means to an end, or is the journey the end in itself? In Chapter 33 of the book of Numbers, almost at the conclusion of our 40 years in the desert, we are presented with a recap of sorts -

These are the journeys of the Children of Israel who went out of the Land of Egypt to/for the purpose of their multitudes by the hand of Moses and Aaron. Moses wrote their **goings out** (*motz'eihem*) **for the purpose of their journeys** (*mas'eihem*), according to God - and these are their **journeys** (*mas'eihem*) **for the purpose of their goings out** (*motz'eihem*).

Following these verses, the Torah lists 42 different journeys that we took on our way to the Promised Land; honoring, recording, reflecting upon smaller pieces of a larger journey is essential for learning and growth. Samson Raphael Hirsch draws our attention to two different perspectives on these verses. From God's vantage point, we leave our current place, or state of being, for the sake of the journey. From our perspective, we journey only in order to leave a place of discomfort or dissatisfaction. Our nature is to seek foundation. Our desire is to be settled and secure, even as we understand the need and the value of change, leaving behind, yearning and aspiring almost constantly for something more. Each small leg of a longer journey carries unique significance. Each step affords us the opportunity for growth and learning.

While time as we know it continues to take us forward, we seemingly return over and over in our Torah study, in our holy days, in our remembrances and our celebrations. Central to Jewish thought is the concept of return - *Tshuvah*. Reflecting upon and learning from our journey thus far is vital to the realization of our vision. And while we speak of our lives as well as our natural world as cyclical, the Jewish journey is more like a spiral by nature. Each time we return to our age old rituals, study and commemorations, we acknowledge that everything about them is the same, and yet it is all new, because it is we who have changed. There are always new things to be learned, as we bring new gifts and skills and needs to the table from year to year. Our weekly, monthly, annual, and life cycles become recursive - although we have momentarily returned to the same place, everything within our world and our soul is different.

In our secular lives, we are used to phrases such as, that was then; this is now, or it's all in the past. In our religious lives we are more in tune with there is no before or after in Torah. Learning is timeless; return to the re-enactment of a previous time takes us forward. We need only to think of Pesach to understand - the entire point is to tell the story of past journeys, so that we may hear what we need to hear each year in order to go forward with purpose, vision and strength.

Our journeys span generations, and we are deeply affected by those who came before. There are times when we stay in one place for years, and times when we are constantly growing and changing. Internal journeys are sometimes even more important than external ones. We most often need to embark on one in order to realize the other. Reflection through documentation enables others to benefit from our journeys. Our holy days, our rituals, our attention to text, our commentaries, are all tools for reflection, growth and renewal.

Brit (Covenant): Belonging and Commitment

The Hebrew word *b'rit* means covenant. A covenantal relationship enables us to partner with others in pursuit of shared vision, to grow, to risk, and to communicate with honesty. Like many

relationships typical of business and politics, these relationships are enacted through mutual understanding of specific rights and responsibilities. But covenantal relationships are valued in and of themselves, not just as a means to realize other ends. Our lives revolve around our inescapable relationships - to our environment, our families, our friends, our colleagues and our world. Both our personal and professional lives are enriched by binding relationships in which we feel a true sense of security; relationships in which our individuality is honored, our opinions are heard, our needs are considered.

The first covenants were those forged between humanity and the Divine and, rather than representing mutual contracts, were agreements passed from God to us for our own protection and definition. God places a rainbow in the sky following the flood, as a sign of a covenant - the world will never again be brought to this level of destruction. In relation to Abraham, God enters into what is called the covenant of the pieces (the sign being an elaborate layout of animal sacrifices), in which God makes promises to Abraham of longevity and land. This is followed by yet another covenant - that of circumcision - the sign of which is placed upon our reproductive organs. In a relationship as seemingly lop-sided as that between a human being and God, a sort of *tzimtzum*/contraction takes place - the more powerful agrees to self-limitation, smaller definition in relation to the less powerful. These covenants create and ensure, as do ours today, a safe space for ongoing relationship, risk, growth and fulfillment.

Covenantal relationship carries with it a sense of eternity and obligation. The covenants of the rainbow, circumcision and Shabbat - each one is defined as a *brit olam* - limitless in terms of both time and space. The reiteration of the covenant in the book of Deuteronomy (Parshat Nitzavim) defines it as one made not with you alone ... not only with all those standing here with you today before God [but with] all those who are not with you today. We have a responsibility beyond ourselves and our own time, and are mindful of how the quality of our current relationships will affect those who come after us. Additionally, we share something deep and eternal with all those who enter into this covenant with us, and commit ourselves to preparing future generations to honor these relationships as well.

Covenantal relationships also carry with them the experience that the 20th century philosopher Martin Buber called I-Thou. Neither party serves as a means to an end, or an object to be used in pursuit of a more significant ultimate goal. When conflict arises or difficulties surface, the value of the relationship itself enables us to more effectively see it through. I-Thou relationships require that we make ourselves available to each other and listen carefully to one another - through the realization of the transcendent possibilities of our specific interactions all partners are enhanced. When the first *Aron*/Ark of the Covenant was constructed in the desert, God tells Moses to fashion on top of the cover two *k'ruvim* (winged angels) who face each other with wings spread in protection of the covenant. God then tells Moses, "I will meet you there and I will speak with you from on top of the cover - from between the two *k'ruvim* that are on the *aron* I will command you for the Children of Israel" (Exodus 25:22). God models for us the idea that there is something unique and sacred in the space "between". The face to face encounter has its own commanding presence.

Relationships of this sort are not only nurtured between individuals. It is possible to be part of a covenantal community. Through participation in such communities, we accept certain standards of behavior - we agree to communicate honestly, treat others with respect, understand our individual needs in light of the needs of the community, work toward our shared visions, and create space in which others are able to do the same. Two common Hebrew words for community are *Kahal* and *Kehillah*. The first is more of a gathering, possibly of those who come together circumstantially for a specific purpose or short-term task. By contrast, the word *kehillah* is often used in conjunction with the adjective *k'doshah/sacred*. The difference between *kahal* and *kehillah* lies in the addition of two letters, *yod* and *heh*, which, when taken by themselves, spell one of the names of God.

Relating to others in a covenantal way elevates the partners, the vision, and the community in which these kinds of relationships take place. Even as we may have terms of agreement or professional limits and conditions enumerated in a written contract, the quality of our interactions regarding those agreements is enriched and enhanced through the idea of covenant. When we intentionally raise the level of our interactions with others, our shared vision is more clearly articulated and communicated, and our community becomes more than just a random gathering of souls. We become bound to each other over time, mundane obligations are elevated to the level of sacred responsibility, and trusting, secure partnerships are nourished.

Tzelem Elohim (Divine Image): Dignity and Potential

One of the most famous and often quoted passages from Torah tells us that humankind was created in the image of God – *B'tzelem Elohim*. As God has no physical image, we need to look to other aspects of each human being in order to make sense of this idea. Being created *b'tzelem Elohim* unifies all of humankind, while at the same time distinguishing each human being from all others. Just when our awareness of being created in the Divine image might fill us with egotistical urges and an overblown sense of self, we are reminded that each of us is equal in our divine nature, and that our treatment of others is a reflection of our faith and our respect for our role in our society and our universe. We are powerful, unique, dynamic individuals who are also, at the same time, exactly like everyone else. Looking at a person's origin, power, and responsibility through this lens impacts our thoughts, our emotions and our actions each and every day. This is a lens of responsibility, compassion, and self esteem.

Judaism teaches that each human soul is unique in its essence, its capacity and its mission. Our limited view of existence does not afford us the position from which to state that one life is more important than another, even if one person's role or task seems to impact on many others, while another's role may seem infinitely small. One person can never take the place of another, one life can never objectively be held as more valuable than another. The *Mishnah* states (Sanhedrin 4:5), "When a human being makes many coins in the same mint, they all come out the same. God makes every person in the same image - God's image and each is different." Each of us is unique, and still we share a Divine quality at our core.

Elohim is only one of many different names by which God is known in Torah. Many times particular names seem to refer to various aspects of God's character or behavior. No aspect of God has physical form, however, and God's fullness remains beyond all description and definition. What does it mean then to be created in the "image" of *Elohim*?

Elohim is the source of all creative energy, the One who takes from nothing and makes everything. According to Torah, it is through the Divine will expressed through speech that the entirety of everything we know comes into being. It is an image which addresses our own capacity to create, to form and to shape the world according to our own will. The potential that exists in our power to communicate concepts, shape ideas, and manipulate our material world is mind boggling. We are able to think, to feel, to reason, to act, to choose, to create. We have enormous capacity for dignity, courage, wisdom and love. It is our powers, the qualities of our soul that are in the image of the Divine, as opposed to any physical attributes we might possess. Rabbi Harold Schulweiss tells us, "Where there is *imago Dei* - the image of God in us, there is the possibility of *immitatio Dei* the imitation of God's attributes." We are created both in the image *and* likeness of God - one is given, the other is ours to realize.

Our amazement at our creative capacity, our competency, and our potential must extend beyond our individual selves. We must, in response to our amazement, admit to this same Divine potential in everyone with whom we come in contact. It is easy to see those we love, our families and friends, as unique and valuable individuals. It is harder to see the image of the Divine in the stranger - the differently abled, the homeless or infirmed, those of different nationality, faith, or philosophy. The supreme challenge is to see God's image in the one who is not in our image, says Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. This perspective is not always an easy one. But it is more likely to make an impact on the world than those that are easier to live by.

Great growth and enlightenment spring from difference of opinion, healthy tension within respectful dialogue, and arguments *l'shem shamayim* (literally "for the sake of heaven"). It is from the divine potential in those different that ourselves that we gain both strength and humility. Each person brings a unique contribution to the table. A realization of the unity of humankind beneath surface differences sheds light on the unity of the Divine which is so central to Jewish belief.

Rabbi Yitz Greenberg recognizes three dignities within the understanding of *Tzelem Elohim*: each soul is distinct, of infinite value, and equal to all other souls. The capacity, dignity, and value inherent in each human being, along with a deep appreciation for the areas in which we are remarkably similar to, and vastly different from each other, will impact deeply on our behavior from day to day. Each of us possesses enormous potential and unique gifts. We have both the capacity and the responsibility to acknowledge and realize our own strengths, and to take advantage of our potential to nurture the Divine capacity within others.

K'dusha (Holiness): Intentionality and Presence

Within Judaism, *k'dusha* is viewed as separate realm; restricted, unique, limited, different, wholly other. Holy times are ones in which various mundane activities are either suspended or imbued with special meaning; holy places are those in which we feel ourselves to be fully present enough to appreciate the unique, the extraordinary, the divine. Human beings have the opportunity to be holy when we bring a particular intention and response to the world in which we live and the community of which we are a part. A time, place, or community becomes sacred to an individual when it is treasured, treated differently, accorded a sense of powerful significance in one's life. At the same time, certain moments and places are considered by Judaism to be inherently sacred. We enhance our capacity to participate in this sort of *k'dusha* through rituals, behavior, and full presence.

After Moses has smashed the first set of tablets at the foot of Mount Sinai, God has what appears to be an unusual request:

Be ready at the morning, go up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and be there for me on top of the mountain. (*Shemot 34:2*)

Why would God insist that Moses be prepared, go up and be there? Once he went, isn't that where he would be? Possibly not. Whether *k'dusha* begins internally or externally, full presence and intention seems to be a prerequisite for recognition of the sacred.

The first thing to be sanctified in Jewish tradition is time - Shabbat. In Genesis 2:1, God both blesses and sanctifies the seventh day by ceasing from all activities of creation. Is there a difference between blessing something and making it holy? RaSHI (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, one of Judaism's most renowned medieval commentators) suggests that blessing involves setting the stage for holiness to happen. The blessing of Shabbat arrives in advance - it is in our preparation, our anticipation, our knowledge that at the end of the week there will be a moment of rest. By contrast, the holiness of Shabbat is in the cessation of that which happens on all of the other days. Time is sanctified/distinguished/set apart by the actual absence of the ordinary, and we participate by being fully present, undistracted by the mundane. It is in our hands to shape our time in a way that enables us to appreciate this distinction between that which is sacred and that which is not.

Sacred presence is everywhere - it is through the movement of our hearts and minds, and the intentional construction of our material world that this Presence can be repeatedly and consistently realized. The purposeful use of materials, the manner in which work is completed, the reverence with which a space is used, all contribute to a shift in our perception. We move from a place of self-absorption to a place that leaves room for an encounter with the extra-ordinary, the sacred.

Torah gives us, in the instructions concerning the building of the Tabernacle, the most famous reference to the construction of holy space. "They will make Me a *mikdash* and I will dwell among them. (*Shemot 25:8*)" We so often think that the *mishkan* in the desert was built as a dwelling place for God. But we know from all of our teachings that there is no place devoid of Divine presence - how can we possibly confine God to a single building, or *aron*/ark, or day, or hour? An alternative reading of the verse is that if we build a holy structure, God will dwell not among, but *in* us. Because we purposefully build a structure that is sacred to us, we are personally transformed by both the process and the product.

Certain times are sanctified; space can be sacred. But Torah never refers to individual human beings as “*kadosh*” in and of themselves. That title is reserved for God. Individuals can be pure; individuals can be righteous. In the book of Leviticus, *VaYikra*, God tells Moses, “Speak to *all the community* of the Children of Israel - say to them, You (pl) will be holy, because I, your God, am holy.” God commands us to be set apart, to be extra-ordinary, a holy people. What follows this verse is an extensive list of behavioral commandments - observe Shabbat, honor one’s parents, leave the corners of the field for the poor, do not place a stumbling block before the blind, and do not stand idly by the blood of one’s neighbor (just to name a few). The reminder that God is holy is liberally sprinkled throughout this passage of Torah, commonly known as “the Holiness Code.” Our collective behavior has the capacity to raise us communally to the status of *k’doshim*.

Each of us (all humanity) is created *b’tzelem Elohim* (in the image of God). We can take this a step further, and become a sacred community by setting ourselves apart through action, not just thought or belief. The way in which we become holy is through our behavior. Making room for a Divine Presence in our community comes with a mandate to manifest that holiness through our behavior toward others.

We find confirmation of this idea each time we recite a blessing connected to our behavior in the world - each time we say, “*asher kidshanu b’mitzvotav*.” We are made holy through *mitzvot*. According to Jastrow’s Talmudic Dictionary, the Hebrew root of “*mitzvah*” carries the meaning not only of commandment, but of connection. We are sanctified through connection - through the whole-hearted participation in a moment or a ritual, a relationship or a glance. We are not alone in the world - our lives are not random acts or unrelated incidents. Our community becomes a holy one when each of us is fully present and intentionally open to the potential synergy of people coming together when the significance of the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

K’dushah calls upon us to infuse our days, our environments and our communities with added significance through full presence and intention. “Entrances to holiness are everywhere. The possibility of ascent is all the time, even at unlikely times and through unlikely places.” (*Bamidbar Rabbah*, 12:4)

Hit’orerut (Awakening): Amazement and Gratitude

Today’s world is centered on intellect, information and technology. It would appear that the more civilized we become; the less “wonder-full” all of our new learning seems to be. What we often forget is that although we continually expand our capacity for knowledge and extend our intellectual boundaries, there are questions that cannot be answered by technology or science, and information is not synonymous with revelation, insight, and wisdom.

Spiritual awakening and the ability to sustain a sense of awe in today’s world requires a different type of preparation and orientation than we usually encounter in our daily lives. This perspective is experienced and then reflected upon ñ what we glean from our most profound experiences is often difficult, or even impossible to articulate. While it may be possible to increase the potential for these

moments in our lives, they often take us by surprise. But to what we cannot articulate, we are compelled to respond, through a deep sense of awe, gratitude, and humility. Although the potential for these “awakenings” exists every day, our lives are filled with emotional and material obstacles and blinders which we need to remove if we are to live in a state of awe and readiness. Judaism provides the tools that we need to sharpen our skills and maintain this kind of focus. Ultimately, it is a rich life that is able to, in the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel, “take notice of the wonder, to regain a sense of the mystery that animates all beings, the divine margin in all attainments.”

Transcendent experiences are difficult to speak about by definition. True amazement is hard to record. Our quintessential Torah illustration is the story of Jacob who, fleeing the wrath of his brother Esau, settles for a night with a rock under his head and has a most unusual dream of ladders and angels and a conversation with God.

Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely God is in this place and I, I didn’t know.” He was awestruck, and said, “How awesome is this place - this is none other than God’s house, and this is Heaven’s gate.”

(Breishit 28:16-17)

The text makes it clear that nothing about Jacob’s physical space has changed ñ the realization was purely internal. We often walk sightless among miracles, and sleep our way through the majority of our lives. But if we are lucky, once awakened, everything about our lives has been re-arranged and must be re-evaluated in light of our experience. Trivial matters take on new significance, routine is somehow renewed, and our lives are re-energized.

While it would seem that such moments most often take us by surprise, there are ways of maximizing the possibility that other such experiences will occur. One way of looking at Jacob’s awakening is through his repetition of the word “I” in his exclamation it was due to his inflated ego, his grandiose sense of self, that he had previously left no room in his life for the possibility of wonder, of Divine encounter. So often we are consumed with our own selves, and a narrow sense of our own lives. Struggling to maintain some sort of control over a seemingly random array of events, there is little space for anything else. Wonder requires time, a letting go, an open-ness to possibilities other than the obvious, and space that is not automatically filled with our thoughts, our emotions, our anxieties, and our activity. If we strive to be patient, to not always assume that we have, or need, the most immediate answers or most obvious explanations for our existence, we might find ourselves in a position to be better awakened to something new, different, and truly full of awe.

Awe and wonder often leave us feeling both larger and smaller. Larger, in the sense that we understand something about our connection to the world, to others, to something beyond, that we may not have understood before. And smaller, in that such feelings leave us humbled, and aware of how much more there is that we may never experience or be able to understand. We hold the most minute piece of an infinitely large puzzle, and we are grateful for this momentary feeling of both deep humility and profound connectivity.

Our ritual response to these moments is blessing. Jews have specific and unique phrases for acknowledging the “beyond-ness” of our everyday lives. Our food, our bodily functions, our families, the cycles of our days and our years, are all opportunities for awakening, and our formulaic expressions of gratitude serve as alarms. The habit of blessing (its recommended that Jews recite at least one hundred blessings every day) keeps us keyed in to life’s potential for holiness. While Judaism does not place enormous emphasis on the ability of singular ecstatic experiences to sustain faith, it does emphasize daily practice that will continually open our eyes to the possible recognition of something significant that we otherwise might have trivialized.

In the same way that we go to sleep each evening and must awaken each new day, we need to pay attention to the daily awakening of our spirit. In the midst of daily routine and repetitive cycles of activity, we are moved and even commanded to acknowledge that “*m’chadeish b’chol yom tamid ma-aseh v’reishit.*” - the work of creation is continually renewed each day. The seeming repetition is in itself a miracle. We simply need to open our eyes differently. Albert Einstein tells us, “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.” Awakening and maintaining our sense of wonder immeasurably elevates our experiences, enhances our relationships, and increases our joy.

D’rash (Interpretation): Inquiry, Dialogue and Transmission

The spirit of inquiry within human nature is the impetus for growth and reflection. It leads to discovery, broadens ones horizons, and uncovers information from which others will grow and learn. The Jewish understanding of inquiry, contained in the term *d’rash*, takes this several steps further. *D’rash* goes beyond inquiry to interpretation, interaction, and transmission. It engages the knowledge and experience of the past in conversation with the present, and documents the new learning for the benefit of future generations. The art of inquiry within Judaism is a time-honored tradition. We are a people who wrestle with, and demand of the unknown. The written Torah lays the foundation for inquiry and instruction, which are our eternal partners, teachers and companions.

Whether one considers the Five Books of Moses a divine text handed to Moses atop Mount Sinai, a collection of stories and laws written by human beings, a blueprint for the entire universe or a metaphorical collection of poetry and legend, it is the basis for Jewish inquiry, and continues to be the context through which many Jews interpret much of today’s world. *Torah* literally means instruction, and shares a root with the Hebrew words for teacher (*moreh* or *morah*), parents (*horim*), and the trajectory of an arrow. The Jewish tradition continually acknowledges both the primacy of the written Torah and the wealth of documentation and interpretation that has followed as significant teachers and guides for our lives today. The oral traditions that surround the text are considered torah as well. We create our own instruction each time we document our current conversations in light of our dialogue with the past. There are at least three partners in each conversation; the one who inquires, the inquiry which takes on a life of its own and grows and changes over the years, and the text from which one inquires.

The value which Judaism places on the inclusion of and commitment to multiple interpretations of any given inquiry is unparalleled. *Torah* commentaries often include at least two sides to every story. *Talmud* (the wisdom tradition of the rabbis, compiled between the 2nd and 6th centuries) honors both majority and minority opinions, and refers to conflicting interpretations of the same passage as *d'verei Elohim chayyim*, the words of the living God. Our response to our wrestling with the text is more text ñ documentation of both our journey and our response, as a signpost for those who come after us. Here is how we transmit our story. This is what it meant in this time, in this place, to be in conversation with my ancestors and see my life reflected in theirs.

Our documentation from the past acts as a mirror. The eternal challenge is to see ones life reflected in our ancient texts, and to allow the lessons from the text to be reflected in our present day experience. Ancient texts take on new life as we infuse them with significance from our own experience, and our lives are enriched by the lessons of the past and the interpretations and documentation of those who came before. The conversations that we hold with the text today inspire more inquiry, and will become the torah for others in the future. By engaging in the ancient process of *midrash* (interpretation), we allow our natural curiosity, along with the enormous emphasis that Judaism places on learning and inquiry, to become a vehicle for transmission of our values and our struggles for the next generation. We are part of an ongoing, sacred, historical conversation with the human condition and the universe.

The Torah is referred to as *Eitz Chayyim*, a Tree of Life. It provides protection, shelter, and sustenance. We return the favor through our inquiry. We keep *Torah* alive, we engage it in challenging conversation, we listen to it, we add to its lessons with the context of our own generations, and we pass it along to those who will come after. To ask, to argue, to interpret, and to transmit are all essential elements of our growth and maturity as human beings. To constantly be both the teacher and the student, placing equal emphasis on the answers we have already received, and allowing them to give birth to new questions and challenges within our own lives is to take advantage of the spirit of *d'rash* and its important place in the life of the Jewish people.

Tikkun Olam- (Repair of the World) - Responsibility

The Jewish imperative for involvement in the healing and unification of a broken world is an ancient one. It is only in modern times, however, that we have begun to associate this responsibility with an older Hebrew phrase, *tikkun olam* (literally, reparation of the universe). We live in a fragmented world, and it is our nature to be somewhat dis-satisfied with the acceptance of things the way that they are. We speak and yearn for a time of increased harmony, unity, synthesis and partnership with others. Judaism places an enormous and unique emphasis on our role in bringing about this redemption of the world. We are reminded in myriad ways of what it means to be alien, homeless, orphaned, oppressed, and how that gives way to our commandment to see that others do not suffer the same fate as we once did, when we were strangers in a strange land, enslaved in Egypt. Our responsibility extends from the environment to interpersonal ethics, from political action

to small, everyday kindnesses. What we do matters not only in our lives today, but in the lives of all the generations to follow.

Historically, the phrase *tikkun olam* first appears in the *Mishnah* (rabbinic wisdom from the 2nd century C.E.), and refers to emendations that our Rabbis made in Jewish law. In the 12th century, Rambam (Rabbi Moses Maimonides) suggested that the entire rabbinic legal tradition was based on making Jewish law apply fairly and effectively to contemporary circumstances. In the Kabbalistic interpretation of the story of creation first put forth by Rabbi Isaac Luria (from the 16th century Sfat tradition), the fragmentation of the world first comes into being through the scattering of the Divine essence, leading to the presence of holy sparks throughout all of creation. Through Torah study, the performance of *mitzvot* with proper intention, the contemplation of the Divine through prayer, and the mending of one's own inner life, we become the fixers of our shattered world. Acts of *chesed* (loving-kindness), *mishpat* (social legislation), and *tzedakah* (righteousness) give us the most common context for today's understanding of *tikkun olam*.

Tikkun Olam is a responsibility for every Jew. While many religions place emphasis on the need for its adherents to be involved in the larger community, and to volunteer or donate funds to worthy causes, Judaism's terminology clarifies its particular stance. The English word for the donation of funds to help the oppressed, hungry, or homeless is "charity," derived from the Latin root, *caritas*, to care. It implies that charitable acts are committed by good people who are going beyond the call of duty, possibly out of a deep love for humanity or the world at large. The Hebrew word for the same act of giving is *tzedakah*, which literally means righteousness, and implies that caring for the poor is not an unusually good act, but rather simply that the balance of wealth is what should be. The Jewish attitude toward giving has little to do with love and generosity - it has to do with justice and responsibility, and repair.

This responsibility extends to our behavior concerning our environment. According to the Torah, our role on earth is both that of master and steward. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch phrases it beautifully, "The earth does not belong to you, rather you are given to it. You must respect it as holy ground and view every creature as a creation of God, loving it and helping it fulfill its destiny, they have all been given you on loan, and they all will appear someday to testify either for you or against you, if you ignored them or used them, whether for blessing or for curse." We have great control, but our stay is a temporary one, and others will follow. Our tradition teaches that although we are not required to complete the task, neither are we free to desist from it. The word "*olam*" in *tikkun olam* connotes transcendence, both in space and time - as partners with the Divine, we are involved in continual redemption and reparation of our world.

The Jewish response to the needs of others, and the responsibility to fix what is broken, stems from our communal story. The expectation that we care for the homeless, the hungry, the stranger, the widowed, and the orphaned, is motivated by our own knowledge of what it feels like to be broken. We have been enslaved, we have wandered, and we have felt abandoned and abused. In place of resentment and anger, Judaism demands generosity and social action. Just as God, according to our tradition, clothed the naked, visited the sick, buried the dead, comforted mourners, so should we all. Deuteronomy, Chapter 15 reminds us, "If there is a needy person among you, one of your kin within

your gates, in your land that God gives you, do not harden your heart or close your hand against your needy kin. Rather you must open your hand and give him enough resources for whatever he is lacking Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and God saved you, therefore I command this of you today.” This is one of dozens of places in which Torah reminds us that we must be mindful of the needs of the stranger, as we were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Repair is built into the ritual life of the Jew. *Purim*, *Sukkot*, *Pesach*, all contain *mitzvot* designed to remind us to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, free those who are enslaved. Our *haftarah* on Yom Kippur, from the prophet Isaiah, reminds us, “This is the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to untie the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every slave collar... share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked to cover them, and do not hide yourself from your own kin.” We are held communally accountable for the well-being others.

Tikkun Olam takes us from understanding to action, from the potential to the possible, and from capacity to responsibility. We inhabit this earth guided by a vision of *shalom*, of wholeness, and acknowledge that until this vision is real, we are not able to be entirely whole ourselves. At the same time, we are heartened by the realization that what we do matters ñ through our ritual lives; our behavior toward the environment, the needy, those with whom we come in contact every day, we are making a difference. Inaction is not an option for the Jew. Our mastery of the earth is about the cultivation of our own potential for responsible behavior. Our communal memory informs our treatment of others. Our tradition expects this of us, whether or not each of us arrives at this way of life through our own accord. It is simply our way of being in the world.

In Conclusion

The JECEI lenses speak to a way of seeing, thinking, and acting. Their integration informs and impacts one’s experience as a member of the Jewish community and the world. As much as they have been articulated here as separate entities listed in a particular order, they function more as a web. There are numerous areas in which they intersect with, support, and strengthen one another. Together they provide the transformative building blocks for the culture within which we relate to one another, communicate our curriculum, reflect on Judaism’s role in our lives, and understand our place in the world at large.

When we first stood at Mount Sinai and prepared to enter into covenant with God and with each other, we proclaimed, according to Torah, “*na-aseh v’nishma!*” We will do and we will understand. The passage has sparked much discussion within the tradition. Are we to first do and then reflect on the reasons? Or do we first need to understand, and allow our behavior to follow from the integration of these values or this newly acquired knowledge? The JECEI answer to both questions is “yes.” We strive to simultaneously learn and do. To allow one lens to inform our knowledge of others; to be moved to act in a particular way even as we continue to delve more deeply into the reasons for doing so; and to allow our vision to inform our reflection and vice versa.

It is difficult to define strict boundaries between one lens and another. The parts have meaning within the whole, and the whole becomes much more than the sum of its parts. The realization of divine potential within others is bound to affect our relationships, as well as our sense of responsibility to the larger world. Our natural curiosity will lead to a sense of wonder and gratitude. Our reflection on space, time and community as sacred aspects of our lives will bring us back to covenantal relationship. Together with other basic Jewish ideas, the lenses contextualize, and allow us to co-create meaning in our world. *Torah* acts as the documentation of our relationships to our community, our world and to God; *Mitzvot* provide the chance to ritualize and call attention to the positive intrusion of the sacred into our everyday lives; and *Halacha* (literally “the way” - our evolving body of Jewish law) records the reflection on and evolution of the ways in which Judaism becomes part of the fabric of our existence. This integrated view is worthy of transmission. Not only from generation to generation, but from our personal to our professional lives, from our families to our friends and associates.

The lenses give us a shared language and perspective for enhancing our communities, piquing our curiosity, enhancing our relationships, and improving our world. They are visionary even as they are rooted in our tradition. They provide the context and shape the culture in which we raise and educate ourselves and our children. Articulation of these lenses is in itself an ongoing conversation, which welcomes all voices and invites all levels of engagement.

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