



# High Holidays

## Inclusive Congregations Guide

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## **High Holidays Inclusive Congregation Guide**

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## What is Inclusion?

**A human being mints many coins from the same mold but the Holy One, Blessed be God strikes us all from the mold of the first human and each one of us is unique. Therefore every single person is obligated to say, 'The world was created for my sake.'"**

*(Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5)*

The relationship between Judaism and disability goes back to our roots. Why did Eve listen to the snake and engage in risk-taking behavior after being warned by G-d to not to eat the apple? Some might say she had ADHD or oppositional-defiant disorder. Jacob challenged the angel and consequently emerged with a physical disability. And Moses cited his speech disability as the reason he couldn't fulfill his leadership role. God knew differently and appointed Aaron as the first known reasonable accommodation so Moses could speak to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites on their journey.

Having a disability is not, and should never be, used as a reason to exclude someone from meaningful participation and contribution to this wonderful place we call "The Jewish Community."

Inclusion is the opportunity for *every* person, regardless of ability, to participate in meaningful ways in the life of the Jewish community. *How do we know what is meaningful and important to another person?* We open our doors, **we ask** and we take the journey together.

We do not do things **for** people with disabilities. We do things **with** people with disabilities. We don't need "special" programs as a default. Inclusion, as my years of involvement have taught me, is not something superficial that we "do." Inclusion is who we are as Jews, as holy congregations, as G-d's partners. True inclusion means that we regard others with dignity, respect and a genuine belief that each one of us, without regard to ability, is responsible to participate in that sacred partnership. Inclusion is achieved when people know that they **BELONG**. That is how we achieve inclusion and meaningful participation.

The *High Holiday Inclusive Congregations Guide* provides practical ideas to incorporate inclusion of people with disabilities into your High Holiday rituals, services and celebrations. While we always want to do the right thing, sometimes we need a little guidance, some creativity and resources to ensure that we are doing that right thing!

Make this the year of Inclusion where all people know that they belong!

Warmest regards,

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## **Be A House of Prayer for All People**

The High Holidays provide us with a time of reflection and renewal. During this time it is especially appropriate to consider what makes us feel that we *belong* to our community.

Our Days of Awe can inspire us become more aware that there are Jews who do not feel that sense of belonging.

Each of us also carries the responsibility to perform *mitzvot*, to follow God's commandments. Yet there are Jews who are not able to perform *mitzvot*. It is not for a lack of will or desire. It is because the doors to the synagogue and Jewish life are entirely closed to them or they do not have the same opportunity to determine how they would like to participate—like anyone else.

During the Days of Awe, we are all responsible to open those doors to a meaningful and self-directed Jewish life where everyone's gifts, talents and strengths are valued, and where one's need for comfort, prayer, learning and community are satisfied.

As Jews, we have a responsibility to one another. The responsibility to empower people with disabilities to live the kind of Jewish life that they want must belong to each and every one of us.

We must release our fears of saying or doing the wrong thing when we are with a person who lives with a disability. We must understand inclusion of people with disabilities as a matter of belonging and safe access, not as a matter of expensive renovations to our buildings or separate programs and services.

We can and we must look at each human being as a creation of the Holy One, made in the Image of God. Access to God must have no barriers.

## During the High Holidays

Deliver a sermon on Inclusion. Topics could include:

- The Americans with Disabilities Act—Civil Rights and Moral Mandate
- We are Not Your Mitzvah Project: Perspectives on participation from people with disabilities
- How Do We Welcome the Stranger?
- Biblical and Historical Perspectives on Disability Inclusion
- Presenting a Challenge to the Congregation: What is Your Role in Welcoming People with Disabilities?
- Inclusion: What is it and How Can We Achieve It?
- Creating a Roadmap for Inclusion: Why? How? When?
- Disability is Normal and Affects Us All
- The Year Ahead: How Our Congregation Supports People with Disabilities in Congregational Life
- Use “A Few Words About Inclusion” at the end of this guide to inspire you

Plan your Yom Kippur afternoon “Food for Thought” program around inclusion. Invite speakers from a disability advocacy organization, JCRC or convene a panel of inclusion committee members, people with disabilities and family members to lead a discussion on inclusion. Topics could include:

- Personal stories about why inclusion is important
- Topics on disability inclusion as social justice
- Trends in employment and housing initiatives
- People with Disabilities in the *Tanakh*/Contributions, Strengths and Gifts
- Discussion on how the synagogue can support life cycle events for people with disabilities. Include people with disabilities.
- Discussion on inclusive supports for students with disabilities in pre-school, religious school, confirmation, *b’nai mitzvah* and youth groups.

Offer tours of the sanctuary to people who are new or visiting so they can become familiar with it and feel more comfortable worshipping there. They can see and touch ritual items, explore the *mahzor*, stand on the *bimah*, hold the Torah, and find a seat where they will be comfortable sitting. Familiarity can help ease some anxiety about a new situation.

Announce page numbers often. Describe the prayer book and commentary by color and size, in addition to name.

Ask people with disabilities ahead of time to participate in rituals and prayers during the service. Honor them with *aliyot* and help them practice the *b’rachot*. Ask people with disabilities and their family members to give the *d’var* Torah, carry the Torah for *hakafah*, recite the Torah or *Haftarah* blessings, light candles and recite the *Kiddush*.

If your *bimah* is not accessible, move the reading desk to the main level of the sanctuary so the Torah itself is accessible to all.

Train ushers to welcome and seat people with disabilities. Make sure they know where assistive listening devices and large print prayer books are located. Do not create a separate section for people with disabilities to sit unless they use a sign language interpreter. In that case, seat them in the front row so they have access to the interpreter.

During the month of *Elul* or the Days of Awe, incorporate inclusion in Torah study. *Parshah Nitzavim* is a great one to study with its reminder that we were all present at Sinai to make the covenant with God. What does that mean? How does that inform our congregational culture?

Have a board member lead a discussion on inclusion at the board meeting preceding the high holidays.

Lack of transportation is a tremendous barrier. Purchase ride vouchers from your community's accessible public transportation provider so people with disabilities who use that service can come to services. Volunteer drivers can assist in providing transportation, too! Finally, designate additional accessible parking spaces, and offer valet parking so family members can enter the building with their loved ones who have a disability.

Use social media to promote inclusion. Post your events. Quote text that resonates with Jewish values about inclusion. Record a short Torah commentary about inclusion for YouTube.

Provide prayer books and Torah commentaries in accessible format (i.e. Braille, large print, audio versions).

Make your worship service accessible to people who have diverse sensory needs, such as sign language interpretation (set seats aside so those worshipers can see the interpreter clearly) and picture schedule of the service order. Include in your service handout the start and ending times of services, the prayer order and the location of restrooms and drinking fountains. Make your sanctuary fragrance free so that people with extreme chemical sensitivity do not have severe reactions. Make sure all lights are working and that there is plenty of light in the sanctuary for people who have low vision.

Start each service with the opportunity for congregants to turn to their neighbors and introduce themselves. Make sure that every person has someone with whom to share this greeting.

## The High Holidays are the Beginning

- Start your Inclusion Committee or expand membership. How active is your committee? Are people with disabilities members? Promote the committee from your *bimah*, social media, and website.
- As you are thanking your lay leaders and committee members during services, you can indicate what changes to the service, the physical plant, or programming are results of the inclusion initiative.
- Identify obstacles to participation within the organization. Examine:
  - Architectural barriers
  - Communication barriers
  - Attitudinal barriers
- What does your organizational mission statement say about inclusion? Charge your Inclusion Committee to review the congregation's mission statement and advise changes to advance inclusion.
- Promote Inclusion. Every time you advertise an organizational event or program, include an accessibility statement (see the end of this guide for examples of accessibility statements). Include a simple statement on all of your printed materials and website that support inclusion of people with disabilities.
- Braille signage on elevators, room and directional signs.
- Look at where the *mezuzot* are placed to determine whether someone who uses a wheelchair can reach it. Discuss if *halachically* the *mezuzot* can be lowered.
- Start an inclusion or accessibility fund to help provide money for accommodations and modifications and accessible transportation.
- Evaluate each of the programming areas as well as architecture to identify barriers to inclusion. Use these evaluations to set priorities and goals for inclusion in your organization.
- Write a monthly column for the bulletin on different aspects of inclusion in your congregation.
- Use language that promotes respect and dignity. For example, Sam is not handicapped or disabled. Sam is a person with a disability. Using Person First language is respectful and does not define a person by their disability, rather, having a disability is just one aspect of who they are.
- Feeling that one belongs also means that people with disabilities contribute to the well-being of the congregation and community. How are people included in leadership roles, the board, and committees, leading and participating in services? Are people with disabilities employed at your congregation?

## Plan Ahead for Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month

February is Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month (JDAIM). Planning can start right after the High Holidays. Here are some suggestions for activities. You don't have to wait for February to incorporate these ideas. They can highlight inclusion and support your vision all year long!

- Start a JDAIM Reads! Book Club. See the end of this guide for list of suggestions.
- Host a congregational Shabbat dinner to kick-off JDAIM. Invite all members of your congregation, as well as other members of the Jewish community to join you. Put requests for accommodations on the invitation. If someone requests that food be cut, do that in the kitchen, not in the dining area. Continue the Shabbat celebration with a unique *Erev Shabbat* service recognizing that we are all created in the Divine Image—*B'zelem Elohim*.
- Host a congregational *Havdallah* service with activities. Advertise this to your entire community, and encourage people with disabilities and their families to attend. The music and the scents of *Havdallah* provide a beautiful setting for art activities, games and stories.
- Integrate Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month into other activities:
  - The youth group can provide afternoon activities for children with disabilities so parents and siblings have special time together.
  - The Men's Club or Brotherhood could sponsor a breakfast and invite a speaker from the community to talk about disability services (such as training service dogs).
  - Coordinate a program for parents of children with disabilities to bring them together and minimize isolation. Invite a speaker from Jewish Family Services to lead a parent education group. Provide child care.
  - Organize a program for siblings, such as SibShops, or invite a family life educator to come talk about sibling needs.
  - Torah Study can include other citations in our text that help us wrestle with inclusion.
  - Lunch and Learn following Shabbat morning services or on Sunday afternoon brings people together to process what they have learned and experienced from the weekend.
- Your religious school can have age appropriate programming for students focused on the concept of *B'zelem Elohim*—we are created in the Divine Image. Read books and stories written by or about children with a diverse range of abilities. See the list at the end of this Guide for book ideas. Prepare teachers to try a different teaching strategy to engage all learners. Invite parents of students who have disabilities to come to class and share their family's story.
- Be responsive to concerns expressed by people with disabilities and their families. Is there something that would be appropriate to address with programming during the month?
- This is a time for your organization to do some self-examination and self-discovery.
- Encourage your community to like the JDAM Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/JewishDisabilityAwarenessMonth?ref=hl>



## **The Language of *Kavod* (Respect)**

*When you use words with kavod, you encourage equality for everyone. If you're in doubt, use people first language (e.g., "a person with a disability"; not "a disabled person").*

**USE:** Person with a disability **NOT:** Cripple, handicapped, handicap, invalid (literally means "not valid")

**USE:** Person who has, person with (e.g., person who has cerebral palsy) **NOT:** Victim, afflicted with (e.g., victim of cerebral palsy)

**USE:** Uses a wheelchair **NOT:** Restricted or confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound

**USE:** Person without a disability, non-disabled person **NOT:** Normal (referring to nondisabled persons as "normal" insinuates that people with disabilities are abnormal)

**USE:** Deaf, Hard of Hearing **NOT:** Deaf-mute, Deaf and dumb

**USE:** Has had a disability since birth, born with **NOT:** Birth defect

**USE:** Has a mental health condition **NOT:** Crazy, insane, mental patient, a lunatic, a psychotic, a schizophrenic

**USE:** Has a seizure disorder **NOT:** Fits

**USE:** Learning disability, intellectual disability, developmental disability, cognitive disability, ADD/ADHD **NOT:** Mental retardation, slow, retarded, lazy, stupid, underachiever

**USE:** Blind (no visual capability) Legally blind, low vision (some visual capability) Hearing loss, Hard of Hearing (some hearing capability), Hemiplegia (paralysis of one side of the body), Paraplegia (loss of function in the lower body only), Quadriplegia (paralysis of both arms and legs)

*Other terms that should be **avoided** because they have negative connotations and tend to evoke pity and fear:* abnormal, burdened with, deformed, differently-abled, disfigured, handicapable, moron, incapacitated, palsied, imbecile, manic, physically-challenged, maimed, retard or retarded, spastic, stricken with, suffers from, tragedy, unfortunate victim.

## **Disability Etiquette**

*Adapted from Parquad, St. Louis, MO*

Make reference to the person first, then the disability. Say “a person with a disability” rather than “a disabled person.” Avoid antiquated language such as “handicapped,” “crippled” or “retarded.”

People with disabilities do not want to be the recipients of charity or pity. They want to participate equally with the rest of the community. A disability is a functional limitation that interferes with a person’s ability to walk, hear, talk, learn, think, see, etc.

If the disability isn’t relevant to the story or conversation, don’t mention it. Remember: A person who has a disability isn’t necessarily chronically sick or unhealthy.

A person is not their disability, so avoid describing a person as such. Don’t present someone as “an epileptic” or “a post-polio.” Instead, say “a person with epilepsy” or “a person who has had polio.”

Don’t act as a caregiver to people with disabilities. Ask if help is needed, but always wait until your offer is accepted. Listen to any instructions the person may have.

Leaning on a person’s wheelchair is similar to leaning or hanging on a person. It is considered annoying and rude. The chair is part of a person’s personal body space.

Share the same social courtesies with people with disabilities that you would share with someone else. If you shake hands with people you meet, offer your hand to everyone you meet, regardless of disability. If the person is unable to shake your hand, he or she will tell you.

When offering assistance to a person with a visual impairment, allow that person to take your arm. This will enable you to guide, rather than propel or lead the person. Use specific directions, such as “left in 100 feet” or “right in two yards” when directing a person with a visual impairment.

When planning events even if people with disabilities might not attend, select an accessible spot. You wouldn’t think of holding an event where other minorities could not attend, so don’t exclude people with disabilities.

When speaking about people with disabilities, emphasize achievements, abilities and individual qualities. Portray them as they are in real life: parents, employees, business owners, etc.

When talking to a person who has a physical disability or a developmental disability, speak directly to that person. Don’t speak through a companion or refer to him or her in the third person while in his or her presence. For people who communicate through sign language, speak to them, not to the interpreter.

Relax. Don’t be embarrassed if you use common expressions such as “see you later” or “gotta run.”

To get the attention of a person who has a hearing loss, tap them on the shoulder or wave. Look

directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly and expressively to establish if they read lips. Not all people with hearing loss can read lips. Stay in the light and keep food, hands and other objects away from your mouth. Shouting won't help; written notes will. Use an interpreter, if necessary.

When talking to a person who uses a wheelchair, place yourself at eye level with that person. This will spare both of you a sore neck.

When greeting a person with a severe loss of vision, always identify yourself and others. For example, say, "On my right is John Smith." Remember to identify persons to whom you are speaking. Speak in a normal tone of voice and indicate when the conversation is over. Let them know when you move from one place to another.

## **Communicate Accessibility Auxiliary Aids and Services Request Statements**

When you include an accommodation statement in all of your communications, you are demonstrating inclusion and welcoming. Your website, bulletins, weekly service programs, invitations to events and notices about programs should clearly state that your institution is accessible to people with disabilities.

Be sure that you have a contact person and a due date for requests in the event that you need to hire an interpreter, provide large print materials or ensure that someone who uses a wheelchair can sit with his or her family and friends at services or at an event.

The following examples support the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and are provided by the Great Lakes ADA Center. These statements may be used to communicate that you are an inclusive organization and invite individuals to let you know about their need for special accommodations. The regulations implementing the ADA do not require specific language to be used in notifying the public. The obligation under the ADA is for entities covered to provide appropriate auxiliary aids and services in order to allow for individuals with disabilities to participate in the programs, activities or services.

Individuals with disabilities needing accommodations to participate in the meeting should contact \_\_\_\_\_ at 222-222-2222 or (email address) no later than \_\_\_\_\_. (Make sure the request due date gives you reasonable amount of time to make the accommodation.

Accommodation requests by people with disabilities should be directed to \_\_\_\_\_ at 222-222-2222 or you can (email address) no later than \_\_\_\_\_.

Requests for sign language interpreter or materials in alternative format should be made no later than \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ at 222-222-2222 or email them at (email address).

Individuals with disabilities requiring additional services to participate in the service should call \_\_\_\_\_ 222-222-2222 by \_\_\_\_\_ or make the request by email (email address).

Additional language may be added to state that requests for accommodations made after the advertised date will be honored to the maximum extent feasible.

## **A Few Words about Inclusion**

These are some of my favorite quotations about inclusion.

1. "I love my new life!" Community Member
  
2. "It's true I will always use a wheelchair and that my speech will always be hard to understand. If people would only let themselves look at me without having any fear of what they see in front of them we all would get along just fine."  
Community Member
  
2. "To be known, you have to be shown."  
My Zadie Max z'l
  
4. "Good intentions alone not accompanied by action are without value. The main thing is the action as this is what makes the intention so profound."  
HaYehudi Hakadosh
  
5. "No one does this alone."
  
6. "We don't do things for people with disabilities. We do things WITH them."
  
7. "Inclusion is not up to one person or one committee-everyone has a role to play."
  
8. "Inclusion is woven into the fabric of Jewish life."
  
9. "A procession of angels pass before each person, and the heralds go before them saying 'make way for the image of G-d'  
(Deut. Rabbah 4:4)
  
10. "All I've ever wanted was to belong."  
Community Member

## **Judaism and Disability Resources Publications**

Christensen, Shelly. Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities  
Available at [www.inclusioninnovations.com](http://www.inclusioninnovations.com)

Belser Julia Watts. Guide to Jewish Values and Disability Rights  
<https://www.jfunders.org/resources/philanthropic-resources/guide-jewish-values-and-disability-rights>

Eidelman, Steven, ed. A Guide to Funding Disabilities and Special Needs. Jewish Funders Network. <https://www.jfunders.org/resources/philanthropic-resources/guide-funding-disabilities-and-special-needs>

Gaventa, William. Jewish Perspectives on Theology and the Human Experience of Disability Available at <http://www.amazon.com/Jewish-Perspectives-Theology-Experience-Disability/dp/078903445X>

Levin, Jeff and Prince, Michele. Judaism and Health: A Handbook of Practical, Professional and Scholarly Resources. Jewish Lights.  
<http://www.jewishlights.com/page/product/978-1-58023-714-7>

Pinsky, Mark I. Amazing Gifts: Stories of Faith, Disability and Inclusion. Alban Institute.  
<http://markpinsky.com/books/amazing-gifts/>

Prosser, Ora Horn Esau's Blessing: How the Bible embraces those with Special Needs. Ben Yehuda Press. 2011. <http://www.benyehudapress.com/catalog/prouser-eb/>

Simon, Sara Rubinow, Forrest, Linda & Fishman, Ellen, eds. V'khol Banayikh: Jewish Education for All, eds. Available at  
[http://www.torahaura.com/item/Jewish\\_Educations\\_for\\_All.aspx](http://www.torahaura.com/item/Jewish_Educations_for_All.aspx)

## **Online Resources**

Inclusion Innovations, [www.inclusioninnovations.com](http://www.inclusioninnovations.com) (Information, blogs, Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month, etc.) [Shelly@inclusioninnovations.com](mailto:Shelly@inclusioninnovations.com).

Jewish Leadership Institute on Disabilities and Inclusion funded by the Ruderman Family Foundation, <http://www.nlcdd.org/jli.html>.

Jewish Federations of North America Ensuring that every Jew can participate in Jewish life is a significant Federation priority. The Washington office is part of a coalition of groups advocating for legislation that expands support in all areas of life for those with disabilities. It also works with local Federations to help them develop programs and facilities that make Jewish life accessible to all members of their communities.

<https://jewishfederations.org/about-jfna/washington-office>

### **Chabad -- Ruderman Chabad Inclusion Initiative (RCII)**

Every Jew Included. The Ruderman-Chabad Inclusion Initiative (RCII) will utilize Chabad's network of human and educational resources to create a culture of inclusion so that all Jews feel welcomed, supported, and valued throughout their entire life cycle. Disability Inclusion Resource Hub, blogs, webinars and video presentations.

[www.rcii.org](http://www.rcii.org).

### **Jewish Reconstructionist Communities**

Inclusive Communities. <http://jewishrecon.org/resources/400>. Disabilities Mini-Course: Look Into My Eyes: Coming Face to Face with Disability, a mini-course held at RRC, was designed to help participants increase their capacity to work with people of differing abilities. We've recreated it here in video and articles that offer insights from Jewish tradition, explorations of the heart, and teachings from rabbis who are leaders in serving diverse communities. <http://www.rrc.edu/resources/disabilities-mini-course>

### **Union for Reform Judaism**

This is the place to access webinars, videos, and written resources from top professionals, interact with experts, and consult other congregations and Reform Movement staff members on involving people with disabilities and their families.

[www.Disabilitiesinclusion.org](http://www.Disabilitiesinclusion.org)

### **United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism Inclusion Initiative**

United Synagogue works with its affiliated kehillot, sacred communities, to develop comprehensive visions and action plans on inclusion. The goal is to create congregations where everything – from the entryway to the bimah, from education

programs to prayer services, from social activities to the very attitudes of congregants and leaders – allows people with disabilities and their families to participate fully and comfortably in congregational life. Contact [inclusion@uscj.org](mailto:inclusion@uscj.org).

<http://www.uscj.org/JewishLivingandLearning/SocialAction/Accessibility/>

<http://www.uscj.org/JewishLivingandLearning/InclusionInitiative/default.aspx>

### **Yachad, the National Jewish Council for Disabilities**

<https://www.njcd.org>

Yachad / NJCD is dedicated to enhancing the life opportunities of individuals with disabilities, ensuring their participation in the full spectrum of Jewish life.

### **RespectAbility**

Empowering people with disabilities to achieve the American dream. Research, resources, information and advocacy. <http://www.respectabilityusa.org/>

**Ruderman Family Foundation** brings voices to the discussion on inclusion, living with disability, policy, family, and many more important topics.

[www.Rudermanfoundation.org](http://www.Rudermanfoundation.org)

## **Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month**

Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion on Facebook ,

<https://www.facebook.com/JewishDisabilityAwarenessMonth>

For information and a free guide for JDAIM visit [www.inclusioninnovations.com](http://www.inclusioninnovations.com)

## **Blogs**

The New Normal. <http://www.thejewishweek.com/blogs/the-new-normal>. Hosted by The Jewish Week. Again, top bloggers and experts in inclusion and disabilities blog about their experiences across the spectrum of Jewish life.

Jewish Special Needs Education: Removing the Stumbling Block.

<http://jewishspecialneeds.blogspot.com/>. Blogging by Lisa Friedman, a special education specialist who co-directs a synagogue religious school.

## **Books on Disability and Inclusion**

These books are all selections of JDAIM Reads! Book Club. Start reading now for your February 2017 JDAIM book discussion.



**New for 2017--Ketchup is My Favorite Vegetable: A Family Grows Up with Autism.**

**Liane Kupferberg Carter.** If you've ever wondered how families adapt and adjust to a diagnosis of autism or any other disability, you must read Liane's masterfully written open-book and open-hearted account. After reading this book, you will never look at parenting of any child the same way. A 2017 JDAIM Reads Selection!

**New for 2017--Little Gate Crasher—the Life and Photos of Mace Bugen. Gabrielle**

**Kaplan-Mayer.** Mace Bugen might have been an achondroplastic dwarf—forty-three inches tall with an average-sized head and a torso set on small, twisted legs—but that didn't mean he was a pushover. In truth, he was smarter than most; over the years, he learned to effectively turn what society in those days called a handicap into a powerful tool he could use to his advantage. Written from a loving perspective by one of our favorite writers, Gabrielle Kaplan-Mayer, *Little Gate Crasher* is a 2017 JDAIM Reads Selection!

**Uniquely Human: A Different Way of Seeing Autism. Barry M. Prizant, PhD with Tom Fields-Meyer**

Essential reading! Dr. Prizant casts a spotlight on behavior and how it can be a way of communicating feelings or needs. This book is not another "autism" book—rather, it's a book about what being human really is, sharing stories and providing insight for how we treat each other. Written with Tom Fields-Meyer.

**Following Ezra:What One Father Learned About Gumby, Otters, Autism, and Love From His Extraordinary Son. Tom Fields-Meyer.**

You will laugh and cry as author Tom Fields-Meyer engages you with his compelling memoir. The book is not about autism—it's about a family learning to adapt to the unexpected challenges and gifts of raising a child with a disability.

**Life, Animated. Ron Suskind.** Imagine being trapped inside a Disney movie and having to learn about life, language, and emotion mostly from animated characters dancing across a screen of color. A fantasy? A nightmare?

Actually, it's the real-life story of Owen Suskind, who is the son of the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Ron Suskind and his irrepressible wife, Cornelia. At its core, this brilliantly crafted narrative—written by the father, but shaped by his wife and children—isn't about autism or Disney, though you'll never view either one quite the same, again. It's the story of a family's resilience when their world is turned upside down. It's about perseverance and hope. A child disappeared into confusion, frustration, and silence. But deep inside his dark cave of isolation, he and his family began to dig for diamonds, working year by year, trial by trial, on a most improbable project: to find a way each of us can learn to animate our lives. Just released as a documentary featuring Owen Suskind and his family.

**A Life Notwithstanding. Chava Willig-Levy.** At six, she could spell twelve-letter words. At fifteen, she could converse in three languages and sing in five. Her marathon phone conversations, Saturday-night songfests and word-for-word reenactments of *Casablanca's* best scenes delighted her friends. She graduated from college summa cum laude. She completed her master's degree and pursued doctoral work in psychology at Columbia and New York University. She held challenging jobs

in the public sector and the corporate arena. In her spare time, she gave sold-out concerts at Carnegie Recital Hall. She embraced life. Still, most people did not consider her embraceable. People said it just wasn't realistic for her to dream of marriage. People said, "She may be congenial, charismatic, talented and kind but, let's face it, who would want to marry a woman with a paralyzed and deformed body who gets around in a motorized wheelchair?" An autobiographical account that tells life like it is!

**Wonder. R.J. Palacio.** It's a fictional story of August Pullman, a 10-year-old with a very different looking face—the result of a chromosomal abnormality and an illness—and his journey from the nest of homeschooling to the wilds of middle school. Auggie knows that his appearance shocks people, yet he's got enough confidence to try to make friends. This is a book for young teens through older adults and will make you cry, laugh and everything in between. The life lessons about how we "see" people

**Hope Will Find You. Rabbi Naomi Levy.** *How can I get my life off hold? When will my life really begin?* We all ask ourselves the same questions when we are struggling to move forward. As a rabbi, Naomi Levy frequently offered spiritual guidance to people seeking the answers. But when a doctor told her that her young daughter, Noa, had a fatal degenerative disease, Rabbi Levy's own insights could not prevent her whole life from unraveling. In *Hope Will Find You*, Naomi Levy shares her journey and the wisdom she gained. She describes with humor and honesty how she came through a time of uncertainty and fear and learned how to stop waiting for life to begin. A natural and engaging storyteller, Levy has written a book filled with invaluable lessons for living in the present and for opening the door to an extraordinary future. *Hope Will Find You* is a book that will be passed to friends when life gets confusing, a book that will rest on our bedside tables when we are searching for hope and direction.

**Now I See the Moon: A Mother, A Son, A Miracle. Elaine Hall.** In this especially timely, painstakingly positive work, a children's film coach recounts her adoption of a troubled Russian toddler and her long, tortuous, ultimately enlightening journey to treat his nonverbal autism. Hall was a successful "baby wrangler" for Hollywood feature films, former actress, 40-something wife and active in her Jewish faith. You will be moved by Hall's spiritual and emotional journey of resilience and tenacity as she raises her son Neal and helps others believe in their own possibilities.

**Front of the Class: How Tourette Syndrome Made Me the Teacher I Never Had.**

**Brad Cohen.** As a child with Tourette syndrome, Brad Cohen was ridiculed, beaten, mocked, and shunned. Children, teachers, and even family members found it difficult to be around him. As a teen, he was viewed by many as purposefully misbehaving, even though he had little power over the twitches and noises he produced, especially under stress. But Brad Cohen's story is not one of self-pity. His unwavering determination and fiercely positive attitude conquered the difficulties he faced in life. His relationship with BBYO and Hillel provided opportunities to just be himself and to develop his talents on the road to the person he is today— a teacher, assistant principal, husband, father and author. "Front of the Class" is a Hallmark Hall of Fame Film.

**The Story of Beautiful Girl. Rachel Simon.** It is 1968. Linnie, a young white woman with a developmental disability, and Homan, an African American deaf man, are locked away in an

institution, the School for the Incurable and Feeble-minded, and have been left to languish, forgotten. Deeply in love, they escape, and find refuge in the farmhouse of Martha, a retired schoolteacher and widow. But the couple is not alone—Lynnie has just given birth to a baby girl. When the authorities catch up to them that same night, Homan escapes into the darkness, and Lynnie is caught. But before she is forced back into the institution, she whispers two words to Martha: "Hide her." And so begins the 40-year epic journey of Lynnie, Homan, Martha, and baby Julia—lives divided by seemingly insurmountable obstacles, yet drawn together by a secret pact and extraordinary love.

## **Children's Books**

### **The Mitten String By Jennifer Rosner, Illustrated by Kristina Swarner**

Ruthie Tober and her family are traveling home from selling wool and knitted mittens at the market when they meet Bayla and her baby, Aaron. Ruthie's family stops to help. Bayla is Deaf and has developed many ways to communicate with others. Inspired by how Bayla maintains a connection with Aaron, even when they're sleeping, Ruthie sees past Bayla's challenges to admire her ingenuity. Ruthie then knits a mother/baby mitten set for Bayla and Aaron, which demonstrates that Ruthie's understands Bayla's unique needs *A PJ Library selection and JDAIM 2016 children's book.*

**Cakes and Miracles by Barbara Diamond Goldin.** The book is about Hershel, a boy who is blind and dreams of making cookies for Purim.

## **All Israel is Responsible for One Another Commitment to Inclusion**

Good intentions alone without action are without value for it is the action which makes the intentions so profound.

*The Great Chassidic Master Yehudi Hakadosh*

Use this commitment form at board meetings, Torah study, and after every presentation on inclusion.

Ideas that will turn my good intentions into action are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

I commit to take these actions:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

I will invite the following people to join me:

How do I think this will impact the lives of people with disabilities in my own community or organization? How will this impact the organization?

Dated:

Thank you for joining us to ensure that people with disabilities and their families find warmth and welcoming waiting for them.



### **About Shelly Christensen, MA, FAAIDD**

Shelly Christensen literally wrote the book on inclusion of people with disabilities, the ***Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities***. Her award-winning work as Program Manager of the Minneapolis Jewish Community Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities at Jewish Family and Children’s Service of Minneapolis led her to co-found Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month with the Jewish Special Education Consortium. Shelly’s work as founder and Executive Director of Inclusion Innovations, where she provides training, organizational and community development, and strategic planning is the standard in the field of sacred community disability inclusion. Shelly holds a Master of Arts degree in Developmental Disabilities from the St. Mary’s University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism from the University of Minnesota.

Shelly is on the advisory board for the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) Inclusion Learning Center. She is the Inclusion Specialist for the Ruderman-Chabad Inclusion Initiative (RCII), and co-founder and faculty of the Jewish Leadership Institute on Disabilities and Inclusion. She speaks at numerous national and international conferences including American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Autism Society of America, Union for Reform Judaism, Jewish Federations of North America General Assembly, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, Summer Institute on Theology and Disability, and World Union for Progressive Judaism and is in demand to speak during Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month. She is immediate past president of the Religion and Spirituality Division of the AAIDD and was recently recognized as a Fellow (FAAIDD) for her contributions to the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities. Shelly’s articles on inclusion and parenting perspectives have appeared in journals and magazines, and she has published chapters in several books.

As the parent of a son who had several disability diagnoses throughout his school career (finally reaching the proper diagnosis of Asperger syndrome as a teen), Shelly learned to navigate the secular educational world out of the need to ensure Jacob’s education was based on his strengths and not his challenges. Their synagogue and religious school provided Jacob and family much appreciated respite from the secular school world because, as Shelly says, “Jacob was just Jacob there. He was always treated with respect, appreciation and understanding that he needed some supports in order to learn, to be a contributing member of his class and be seen as “Just Jacob.” Jacob is a graduate of the University of Minnesota with a degree in Sociology recently received his A+ certification and is employed at a technology firm.

Shelly and her husband Rick live in Minneapolis with their Shelties, Penina and Caleb.

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