

The JECEI Lenses

מסע/Journey (Reflection, Return, and Renewal)

Masa

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 *tshuvah*/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.

בְּרִית/Covenant (Belonging and Commitment)

B'rit

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.

צֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים/Divine Image (Dignity and Potential)

Tzelem Elohim

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.

קְדוּשָׁה/Holiness (Intentionality and Presence)

K'dusha

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. Whether its origins are internal or external, our rituals, behavior, and full presence in a moment, space, or community enhance our capacity to recognize and be part of this *k'dusha*.

התעוררות/Awakening (Amazement and Gratitude)

Hit'orerut

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 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."

דְרָשׁ/Interpretation (Inquiry, Dialogue, and Transmission)

D'rash

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 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. Our written *Torah* lays the foundation for inquiry and instruction as our eternal partners, teachers and companions. 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.

תְּקוּן עוֹלָם/Repair of the World (Responsibility)

Tikkun Olam

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, repair 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.

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