חנוך לנער, על-פי דרכו Proverbs 22:6

Teaching Children According to Their Way: A Study of Special Needs and Inclusion in the Reform Movement

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination. Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion
January 2016

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Acknowledgements

To the special needs community in the Reform Movement and everyone who continues to support them: Thank you for doing what you do. We still have a long way yet to go, but inch-by-inch and row-by-row, we are getting closer to creating a fully inclusive movement!

First and foremost, I would like to thank Rabbi Sam Joseph for guiding me through this process. Your unwavering support and encouragement has allowed me to be where I am today. I am honored that you believed in me and pushed me to continue asking the questions to which we still do not have answers.

Second, I would like to thank my family for their unending love and support over the last five years. I would not be where I am today without each and every one of you.

Third, to all of the students, campers and congregants with special needs who I have worked with: You are my constant inspiration. It is because of you that I will continue striving to make our movement inclusive.

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Digest

"For my house shall be a house of prayer for all people."[1] The Jewish people have long since recognized that every person is an individual. Although everyone has similar qualities, each person is unique even as we are all created *betzelem elohim* (in the image of God). While all people are created in the image of God, there are some people in the world who are different for one reason or another. Unfortunately, inclusion of people with special needs and disabilities has not always been at the forefront of the Reform Movement. This thesis seeks to join the journey toward complete inclusion in Reform congregations, day schools, and summer camps.

Over the course of four chapters, this thesis investigates what the history of inclusion in the Jewish world has been and what inclusion looks like today in the Reform movement. The Jewish textual tradition of identifying and including people with disabilities in the community started long before the term "inclusion" was coined, and sought to ensure that all people in the community were cared for, even when they appeared visibly different. In a more modern context, the research concerning inclusion that has been initiated and studied illustrates how years of hard work have led to a productive start of inclusionary tactics, but there is still yet more work to be done. Interviews with representatives from Reform congregations, day schools and summer camps sheds light on current approaches to inclusion and also highlights where there is still room for improvement. All of this research is then

[1] Isaiah 56:5 ESVS.
[2] Mishnah Avot 2:16.
[3] Isaiah 56:5.
[4] Erik W. Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub., 2007), pg. 2

placed in the specific context of inclusion in Reform supplementary programs, such as religious school and Hebrew school. What can educators and teachers do to create a more inclusive environment for people with special needs? What training do they need to have in order to understand how best to serve their students? It has emerged that the most important factor is staff training. As a result, sample professional development sessions have been included in the appendix to help gain an understanding of how staff can be trained to be more inclusive.

"It is not your responsibility to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it."[2] There is still much work to be done in the field to include people with special needs and disabilities in the Reform Movement. However, with a positive and open outlook, the future of inclusion looks quite promising.

[2] Mishnah Avot 2:16.

Introduction

"For my house shall be a house of prayer for all people."[3] The Jewish people have long since recognized that every person is an individual. Each person is unique, but everyone has similar qualities, as we are all created *betzelem elohim* (in the image of God). While we are all created in the image of God, there are some people in the world who are different for one reason or another. Perhaps, as is read in the Torah, these people contracted leprosy. Or perhaps they have a non-verbal learning disability that is not visible.

Today these differences are called "special needs," and they can especially challenge a person in their day-to-day activities. Whether it is because of better medical knowledge or the hyper-vigilance of their parents, more and more people are diagnosed with varying learning difficulties, physical disability, or emotional and behavioral difficulties every year. Public schools are legally bound to create accommodations for students in order to help them succeed and feel as though they are integrated into the community. This is not the case for religious institutions. This is one of the many reasons why inclusion of people with special needs has only recently begun gaining traction as an integral aspect of Jewish communal life. In an effort to create outlets for people with disabilities to engage with the mainstream community, Jewish organizations are only now beginning to learn how to create and implement accommodations for them. While improvements have been made, real and difficult challenges still arise. One of the greatest struggles is adequately preparing teachers and staff to interact with and include people with special needs.

[3] Isaiah 56:5.

Teachers and staff often do not have backgrounds in special education, so knowing how to include special needs students is especially challenging.

Inclusion in the most general sense is about ensuring that every person is involved in society, regardless of what might set him or her apart from the mainstream community. When they are not included, people with disabilities and other special needs miss out on important aspects of life that most others enjoy. Erik Carter, a Professor of Special Education at Vanderbilt University, observes: "Unfortunately, too many people with disabilities do not experience the same opportunities as others to grow spiritually, enjoy community, and experience relationships."[4] Thankfully, the need for inclusion is beginning to be understood by the Jewish community. The special needs community has long been underserved, and organizations have not always been sure of how best to include them. Only in the last decade or so has interest begun to rise in determining approaches for developing more nuanced inclusivity to draw in the special needs community. This has led to a swift rise in attempts to create more inclusive environments in Jewish organizations. While these are positive first steps, most places still have a long journey ahead of them before they will develop completely inclusive environments.

This thesis investigates how Jewish communities can promote inclusion in Reform synagogue supplementary educational programs, summer camp programs and Reform day schools. According to the Florida State University Center for Prevention & Early Intervention Policy, "Inclusion is the full acceptance of all

[4] Erik W. Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub., 2007), pg. 2.

students and leads to a sense of belonging within the classroom community."[5] This thesis studies both how the inclusion of people with disabilities was discussed was portrayed historically in the context of Jewish texts and studies of Jewish communities and how the modern Reform movement is dealing with this issue of inclusion.

Chapter One explores various aspects of inclusion by investigating a sampling of what Jewish texts say about special needs and inclusion. These texts are examples from the Bible, classic rabbinic works and modern commentaries. Disabilities have always existed within humanity. The investigation of commentaries on disabilities within Jewish texts is both interpretative and literal.

The topic then shifts in Chapter Two to analyzing pre-existing data on the subject of special needs and inclusion in Jewish organizations. This data stems from surveys and articles written on the topics of special needs and inclusion in Reform congregations, summer camps and day schools. The chapter also considers whether, in fact, this is a topic of conversation for academics in congregations, day schools and summer camps. If it is not, this thesis will address some of the potential reasons why this research has not been done in the past.

This discussion will be by followed Chapter Three, which is an analysis of what approaches currently are being utilized in the Reform Movement. This information is gleaned through interviews done with Reform congregations, day schools and summer camps. This analysis includes the innovations organizations

[5] "What Is Inclusion?," Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, section goes here, accessed January 13, 2015, http://www.cpeip.fsu.edu/resourcefiles/resourcefile_18.pdf.

utilize to help integrate children and young adults with special needs into their specific programs, but also includes information on how staff is trained to ensure inclusion of all participants. This research has led to the creation of sample programs and lessons for how to train religious school teachers on how to practice inclusion through the lens of Judaism.

Chapter Four will address the recommendations for how already existing programs can continue to improve their work with the disablity and special needs community. It focuses more specifically on congregational supplementary schools, but can also be applied to other classroom settings. The knowledge from Chapter Four was then applied to Appendix A, which contains sample lesson plans for staff training in congregational supplementary schools.

Chapter 1 – Jewish Textual Traditions of Inclusion

The concept of physical and intellectual differences within humanity is not something that is new to the Jewish people. From the earliest to present Jewish texts, written accounts of people's differences were included within the text. The most common conversations regarded people who looked or acted differently from the "typical population." The people who were the subjects of these conversations were often visibly different, whether that variance was in their physical appearance or in the way they were able to communicate with the rest of the community. Communities made up of people with disabilities or what is now understood as special needs were widely documented within Jewish texts. However, what was not documented was the way in which they lived their lives, nor their trials and tribulations. The authors were not concerned about the day-to-day activities of any one individual.[6] Rather, what forced documentation were questions relating to *halakhah* (Jewish law) as it pertained to people who were atypical and viewed as less than full members of their communities.

This chapter will provide an overview and exploration of how Jewish texts described people with special needs and how they chose to include them, or not include them, within the community. Within the texts themselves, references are often made to people with various illnesses. Judith Z. Abrams, in her book Judaism and Disability: Portrayals in Ancient Texts from the Tanach through the Bavli states, "These culturally determined attitudes toward illness, and we may extend this

[6] Judith Z. Abrams, *Judaism and Disability: Portrayals in Ancient Texts from the Tanach through the Bavli* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1998), pg. 15.

paradigm to add 'toward disabilities,' are manifest in all cultures; they can be readily seen in Jewish and non-Jewish sources."[7] There were references to illness or disabilities in texts of all cultures. Through the study of these texts the definition of illness was expanded to include those people with disabilities. Therefore, the expansion of the paradigm of illness has been more easily and more consistently applied to those with disabilities. Surprisingly, not all of the texts pertaining to people with disabilities were negative. Rather, there were a number of texts explored later in this chapter in which society was pushed, or even commanded, to care for and include everyone within the community, regardless of ability. These include excerpts from Genesis 1:27, Exodus 4:11 and the Babylonian Talmud, Shavuot 39a. Ora Horn Prouser, author of Esau's Blessing: How the Bible Embraces Those with Special Needs, discussed how people with disabilities were treated in the biblical age. She argued that, "Often, they function to allow the community at large to feel good about itself as it cares for the less fortunate in its midst."[8] The texts from the Pirkei Avot, the Ethics of Our Fathers, clearly emphasized this point as it explored the obligation that came from the covenant from God, as Tzvi Marx points out: "The essence of Torah is not what is essential, but the action."[9]

The aforementioned textual reference expresses the ideal. However, it was not even the case that unanimous acceptance was doled out to everyone in the community with special needs. Rather there were, and still are, many stigmas

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[7] Abrams, *Judaism and Disability: Portrayals in Ancient Texts from the Tanach Through the Bavli*, 105.
[8] Ora Horn. Prouser, *Esau's Blessing: How the Bible Embraces Those with Special Needs* (Teaneck, NJ: Ben Yehuda Press, 2011), pg. 2.
[9] Tzvi Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law* (London: Routledge, 2002), pg. 233.

surrounding people with disabilities. This was particularly true for those who had obvious differences, whether in their appearance or the way that they communicate with others. People with disabilities were often likened to the scapegoat from Leviticus 16:22 that was sent out to an isolated region of the land.[10] Within the older Jewish texts, the premise for writing about people with disabilities was often about how one interacted with the blind, deaf or deaf-mute. However, this was not always the case. In Judith Z. Abram's book Judaism and Disability: Portrayals in Ancient Texts from the Tanach through the Bavli, she included a discussion of how people with disabilities were differentiated from those who were typical within the community:

> "A sensible man is identifiable immediately due to his correct dress, gait and emotional demeanor. And the corresponding signs identify a scoundrel: he stops instead of standing straight, wears clothes of mourning instead of everyday clothes, covers his face instead of having an open disposition, and pretends to be deaf rather than open to communication."[11]

A person with a disability who was obviously different showed the demeanor that was the antithesis of the warm and open one of a sensible man. The so-called scoundrel's outward appearance made it clear that he was different. He was someone of whom others should be wary, given that he did not appear to fit in with the rest of the community.

This widespread negative view of people with disabilities came from the labels that were applied by society. There was often an aversion to people with disabilities because they were viewed at best as living on the periphery of society,

[10] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 6.
[11] Abrams, *Judaism and Disability: Portrayals in Ancient Texts from the Tanach through the Bavli*, 105.

and at worst as being a total outsider, if not subhuman. "The 'contamination' of the disabled," writes Tzvi Marx, "is seen as compromising their very humanness."[12] As a result, people with disabilities, or those who were close to people with disabilities, often turned to Judaism and Jewish texts for explanations for their suffering. They sought an understanding of why they had been ostracized from their own communities. Their faith in justice and reason was undermined when they were unable to uncover an explanation. [13]

A significant challenge that existed was that every person's lens through which they read the text was different, creating numerous methods of interpretation for each text. This can be applied to both biblical texts and more modern texts. This had the potential to work to either the benefit or the detriment of an individual and the interpretation they sought. The way in which one read the text drastically altered the message that was delivered on any given page. The bias of addressing a text with a specific interpretation in mind impacted the way in which the interpretation was rendered, even if the interpretation deviated from what the text actually said. This was even more true when people were reading texts through the lens of special needs and inclusion. There were many texts throughout the Jewish tradition that were understood as referring to those with disabilities. This was particularly evident when it referred to them by diagnosis – perhaps someone who was deaf or blind. However, there are also many texts that have been adopted by the special needs movement that originally may not have been intended for this use.

[12] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 4.
[13] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 65.

In some cases, the Jewish texts were extraordinarily clear that they were referencing people with disabilities. Mishnah Hagigah 1:1 stated

> "All are obligated to be seen [in the Temple Courtyard on the three Festivals], except for the deaf person, the mentally incompetent, the minor…the lame, the blind, the ill, the elderly and whoever cannot make the pilgrimage on his own legs. Who is [considered] a minor? Whoever is incapable of riding on his father's shoulders and going up from Jerusalem to the Temple Mount; this is the opinion of the School of Shammai. But the School of Hillel say; Whoever is incapable of holding his father's hand and going up from Jerusalem to the Temple Mount…"[14]

Here the Mishnah not only referred to disabilities in general, but differentiates between various diagnoses. Everyone with disabilities was placed in the category of being exempted from having to make the pilgrimage during the three Festival holidays. From this it is acknowledged that the writers knew and understood that not every disability was the same.

Although historically the Jewish community may not have recognized the severity of certain disabilities, they did comprehend that these disabilities had existed long before their time, and would continue to exist long after. These authors based their categorization of different disabilities on terms or phrases that were used in the biblical text. One example of this was Psalm 38:14-15, which pertains to the derivation of the words *heresh* and *ilem* and how these words were connected to people who were deaf or mute. This passage from the Talmud Yerushalmi Hagigah 1:1, as translated by Tzvi Marx in his book Disability in Jewish Law, states, "And whence is it deduced that one who can speak but not hear is termed *heresh* and one

[14] Mishnah Hagigah 1:1 as translated by eMishnah.com, http://www.emishnah.com/moed2/Hagigah/1.pdf.

who can hear but not speak is termed *ilem*? It is written: But I am as a *heresh*, I hear not, and I am as an *ilem*, that openeth not his mouth (Ps. 38:14-15)."[15] Here, the writers of this part of the Talmud acknowledged that not every person with a disability is the same; there are different terms that connote separate categories of disabilities. In this particular example, to be an *ilem* or a *heresh* are completely separate classifications of disabilities.

Definitions of disabilities continued to evolve until the modern era. One such example can be found in the writing of Rabbi Moses Maimonides, a medieval philosopher who defined who was typical in his discussion of who was permitted serve as a witness in a legal trial. He writes:

> "One who is mentally disabled is incompetent to serve as a witness by biblical law, because he is not subject to commandments. "Mentally disabled" refers not only to one who walks around naked, breaks things, and throws stones, but to anyone whose mind is confused, who is always agitated regarding some matters, although with regard to other maters he speaks lucidly and asks pertinent questions; nevertheless his evidence is inadmissible and he is included among the mentally disabled. In the case of an epileptic – during a fit he is ineligible; in the interval he is eligible, whether his paroxysms occur periodically or at irregular intervals, provided that he is not mentally disordered all the time…The inordinately foolish, who are unable to discriminate between contradictory matters and do not comprehend things as normal people do, also those who are impulsive, hasty in judgment, and act like the insane, are classed with the mentally deficient."[16]

Maimonides interpreted the laws of justice to help define who could serve as witnesses, and that definition depended upon a certain degree of mental and physical fitness. He understood that witnesses needed to be competent in order to

[15] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 115.
[16] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 111.

testify. Therefore, he created a differentiation between those who were and were not competent as a way of defining who could or could not be a witness. Maimonides used his medical training to interpret the text through the lens of disabilities and legal competency to determine who could or could not participate in the legal system.

Jewish writers also applied various interpretative lenses to understand the theology of disability within the text. Many of the Jewish sources, asserts Marx, "…manifest ambivalence on the question of the deeper significance of disability."[17] The theological significance of disabilities was not always evident in the text. One needs to want to find such documentation within the text, regardless of whether that evidence was divine reward or punishment. Take, for example, a midrash in which R. Berekyha commented on the fact that Isaac was still alive in Genesis 28:13 when God made the following statement "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac."[18] The midrash from *Tanhuma Toldot* 7 stated,

> "R. Berekyha argues that since Isaac's blindness keeps him confined to his home, his evil inclination is contained. Another comment on the same verse attributes Isaac's blindness to divine intervention, as punishment for tolerating Esau's wickedness and accepting his bribery, but also sees it as divine compassion intended to keep Isaac from suffering at the sight of Esau's corruption."[19]

In this one midrash, there are both positive and negative descriptions of disability. This passage illustrates how reading a text through different lenses can establish different interpretations of the same text, and multiple readings are evident

[17] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 60.
[18] Genesis 28:13 ESVS.
[19] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 60.

throughout various commentaries. Once a text has been written, it becomes available for interpretation through any and all lenses.

The possibility of so many different interpretations of these important texts carries the danger of over-reading and finding non-existent commentary. Ora Horn Prouser, a modern Jewish scholar, applies a special needs lens when reading and interpreting many biblical stories. This is particularly evident in her interpretation of the presence of disabilities in stories where most people would not read them that way, not even other scholars reading the same texts who are wanting to find mention and discussion of them. In Biblical, Talmudic, or other textual discussions of people with special needs, clearly there were people with disabilities as the text included the mention of someone who is blind, deaf, lame, etc. However, in using Prouser's technique, one can potentially see the presence of disabilities in almost any Jewish text, even when they are not actually present. Care must be taken when examining any text for mention of those who have disabilities.

Prouser's interpretation of the biblical character of Esau is one example of this technique. Esau, the son of Rebecca and Isaac, and brother to Jacob, always seems to have challenges throughout his life. Prouser believes that many of Esau's challenges stem from the possibility that he may have Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). Esau excels at hunting, a skill that requires hyper-focus as well as the ability to recognize movements around him. Many of the decisions that Esau makes are short-sighted, impulsive, and based on outside distractions: Esau sells his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew; he impulsively asks for a blessing from Jacob, yet does not receive the blessing he expected; and he impulsively agrees to work for

Laban for 14 years so that he may marry Rachel. Prouser believes that these decisions, along with the rest of the text describing Esau's life, provide enough evidence to show that he may have had ADHD. She states that Esau "…needs to be told directly what others seem able to infer,"[20] and that "…we are able to explain Esau's impulsive behavior, the ease with which he is distracted, and his desire to be active in the out-of-doors."[21] Prouser's interpretation illustrates how any number of understandings and ideologies can be applied to any text.

While Prouser's method of interpretation may not always be agreed with, there are some redeemable aspects. Once her theory of interpretation has been applied, a shift needed to be made to understand how and why one should include people with disabilities in the Jewish community. One of the fundamental principles within Judaism is recognizing that all people were created in the image of God. This recognition stems from Genesis 1:27 which reads, "So God created man in God's image, in the image of God, God created him, male and female God created them."[22] God created people; every human being has been God-created, from the beginning of time until now. God has played a role in the creation of every type of person, regardless of how they look, speak, think or otherwise act. This means that each person, regardless of his or her abilities or disabilities, counts in the world. Everyone is important in his or her own way. As *Noteworthy Practices in Jewish Day School Education* reminds us*:* "We are taught to embrace our differences,

[20] Prouser, *Esau's Blessing: How the Bible Embraces Those with Special Needs*, 13.
[21] Prouser, *Esau's Blessing: How the Bible Embraces Those with Special Needs*, 13.
[22] Genesis 1:27 ESVS.

recognizing that diversity contributes to the vitality of our Jewish community."[23] It is with this statement that the Jewish community is charged with the task of including everyone, regardless of the challenges one may have faced. If one believes that God played a role in creating every person, that also means that God played a role in creating people with disabilities. Like people who are more typical, people with disabilities have a role to play on Earth and should have a welcome place within the community.

God gave respect to all human beings. Therefore, the responsibility was upon the Jewish community to fulfill this order by finding ways to facilitate inclusion of all people within the community. "Creation in God's image grants dignity and endows the human being with special entitlements relative to the rest of the created order."[24] Throughout the ages, Jewish scholars have found ways to interpret Genesis 1:27 to demonstrate the unique qualities of each individual that people are still learning to accept today. Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5 teaches:

> "Therefore man was created alone to teach you that whoever destroys a single life from Israel, is considered by Scripture as though he destroyed an entire world; and whoever preserves a single life from Israel, is considered by Scripture as though he had preserved an entire world. Furthermore [he was created alone] for the sake of peace among men, that one might not say to his fellow: My father was greater than yours, and that the heretics might not say: There are many powers in heaven [and each created a man]."[25]

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[23] *Noteworthy Practices in Jewish Day School Education*, Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, June 2006, www.peje.org, p.4.
[24] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 28.
[25] Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5 as translated by eMishnah.com, http://emishnah.com/PDFs/Sanhedrin%204.pdf

This affirms the view that each life brought into the world is a precious soul, one that God intentionally created. As this mishnah states, people are brought into the world to create peace among mankind, not to facilitate jealously. This is a very well-intentioned statement, although it also alludes to some of the challenges that parents of people with disabilities faced in the past and continue to face today. A pregnancy and birth is supposed to be a special time, one in which a mother nurtures her future child, and the other parent helps to create and facilitate that nurturing and supportive environment once the child is born. However, for parents who discover, either during their pregnancy or when their child is born, that their child has delays or disabilities of some kind, this knowledge creates anger or disappointment and leads people to question their faith. This is especially true for families who have children with profound or terminal diagnoses. This mishnah, Sanhedrin 4:5 goes on to state:

> "Also, to teach the greatness of the Holy One, Blessed is He; when a man casts many coins from a single mold, they all resemble one another, but the Supreme King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed is He, fashioned each man in the mold of the first man, yet not one of them resembles one another."[26]

This text again alludes to God's role in the creation of every person. This is an interesting paradox because, in theory, every person is cut from the same mold and therefore every person should be exactly the same. Everyone should have the same abilities and the same challenges. Of course, this is not at all the case. Each person is uniquely different. No two people has the same exact DNA sequence, not even identical twins. Therefore, it could be reasoned that every person is created from

[26] Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5 as translated by eMishnah.com, http://emishnah.com/PDFs/Sanhedrin%204.pdf

the same general mold that allows for the flexibility to create specific and unique qualities for each individual.

Over time, Talmudic commentators continued to build on this idea that everyone is created in the image of God. Their texts understand that men and women each play a role in the creation of their child, but reckon that it is only with the aid of God that each child's soul can be fashioned. The Babylonian Talmud, in Niddah 31a discusses God's role in the creation of a child:

> "Our Rabbis taught: There are three partners in man, the Holy One, blessed be He, his father and his mother. His father supplies the semen of the white substance out of which are formed the child's bones, sinews, nails, the brain in his head and the white in his eye; his mother supplies the semen of the red substance out of which is formed his skin, flesh, hair, blood and the black of his eye; and the Holy One, blessed by He, gives him the spirit and the breath, beauty of features, eyesight, the power of hearing and the ability to speak and to walk, understanding and discernment. When his time to depart from the world approaches the Holy one, blessed be He, takes away his share and leaves the shares of his father and mother with them."[27]

Here again is the idea that without God's role in the creation of human beings, they would lack all the faculties that make them individuals. Using the rationale of this passage, the areas in which a child is born with a disability are generally the areas said to have been created by God, rather than the mother or father. This leaves one to wonder: What is God's purpose in choosing not to give individuals a specific ability? Does He use it as a way to make them more special and unique? Could it be that while some see disability as divine retribution, it is actually a divine reward,

[27] Babylonian Talmud, Niddah 31a, Soncino Translation http://halakhah.com/rst/kodoshim/52b%20-%20Niddoh%20-%2023b-48a.pdf.

helping to teach families—and in turn the whole community—how to be more welcoming and accepting of all individuals?

Genesis 1:27 is not the only place in the Bible where God takes responsibility for a role in the creation of human beings. It can be found in passages like Exodus 4:10-11 which state, "Moses said to the Lord, 'Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and tongue.' God said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?"[28] According to Abrams, this is "one of the most salient passages for understanding the Torah's theology of disabilities…"[29] Here God claims responsibility for the creation of all people, even those with disabilities. Based on the context of this conversation, one could infer that God takes pride in the fact that people are all unique and there are people with special needs in the world. People, and Jews in particular, are under a moral imperative to honor and respect all of God's creations. Humanity is driven to provide empathy where needed as a way of including and comforting all of those who have been deemed to be different in some significant way. The CCAR Responsa Committee supports this theory, stating, "In sum, our worth as a human being is based not on what we can do but on the fact that we are created in God's image. We should aim for the maximum inclusion of the disabled in the life of our communities."[30]

[28] Exodus 4:11 ESVS.
[29] Abrams, *Judaism and Disability: Portrayals in Ancient Texts from the Tanach Through the Bavli*, 112.
[30] CCAR Responsa Committee, "5752.5 - Disabled Persons," *CCAR Responsa*, 2015, section goes here, accessed August 22, 2015, https://ccarnet.org/responsa/tfn-no-5752-5-297-304/.

Jewish texts teach that "all of Israel is responsible for one another."[31] Therefore, the Jewish community has been tasked with providing for the basic rights and needs of an individual. They have also been charged with creating a safe and nurturing environment in which every person is able to thrive and succeed to the best of their abilities. This is not only a personal responsibility that falls on each person, but a larger moral obligation laid by God upon the people of Israel. Jewish textual evidence illustrates how the Jewish community has been tasked with ensuring the safety and security of all its citizens. Leviticus 19:14 states, "You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord,"[32] and Deuteronomy 27:18 follows suit by stating "'Cursed by anyone who misleads a blind man on the road.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'"[33] Over and over again, statements like these can be found throughout the Scripture. These declarations exemplify the concept that each individual is just as important as the next person. God expects all of His people to abide by this ideology.

Modern commentaries also highlight the importance of considering the dignity of people with disabilities. This discourse helps to answer the question of whether one can utilize a hearing aid on Shabbat. In theory, the answer may seem like it should be "No" because it violates one of the Shabbat prohibitions. However, it has been observed that not placing a stumbling block in front of the blind appears to supersede the laws of Shabbat:

> "There is no greater [issue] of human dignity than the

[31] Babylonian Talmud, Shevuot 39a, Soncino Translation, http://halakhah.com/rst/nezikin/37b%20-%20Shevuos%20-%2029a-49b.pdf.
[32] Leviticus 19:14 ESVS.
[33] Deuteronomy 27:18 ESVS

> prevention of the humiliation to one who is deaf of not being able to hear those addressing him. It is hard to describe the shame, embarrassment and discomfort caused him in his social intercourse with people and in the synagogue, when he is isolated, cannot attend to what is going on, and cannot respond to what is asked of him…In addition to his humiliation, there is also the great distress entailed in the loss of communal prayer, hearing the Torah read, responses to the Kaddish and Kedusha, etc. Therefore, it is better to permit the carrying of that which is only prohibited Rabbinically for the sake of this great human dignity, in permitting the deaf person to carry a hearing aid."[34]

For some more observant Jews, there are many things for which one was not allowed to violate Shabbat. The dignity of a person and their ability to be included within a community appears to present a circumstance under which the rules could be bent. This is only one example of inclusion within a community. However, it can be used as a precedent to expand the umbrella under which people should be included. Particularly in the Orthodox world, this understanding of Shabbat prohibitions can be expanded to include the use of motorized wheelchairs on holidays, providing alternative modes of participation in a worship experience, or allowing people, who might be involuntarily disruptive due to their disability, to stay in the room during a service, so they may feel the welcoming and inclusive nature of the community.

Jewish tradition also teaches that all people should be treated with respect and they should not be judged based on the way that they look or act. Pirkei Avot 4:3 stated "[Ben Azai] would say: Do not disparage anyone, and do not shun any thing. For you have no man who does not have [his] hour, and you have no thing

[34] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 243.

which does not have a place."[35] Rabbi Moses Maimonides further elaborates on this passage by stating, "All human beings, including those with disabilities, play a role in human affairs."[36] That is to say that all people, regardless of their abilities, have a significant role in the way that communities function. For some members of a community, this function may be in the role of caretaker, taking on responsibilities for those who need assistance. For others, it maybe that they wish to be fully included in ways they had not been previously due to their disability. Either way, these passages remind the larger Jewish community that the ideal is inclusion of all. That is the gold standard to which everyone should hold himself or herself.

Unfortunately, not all of the Jewish texts illustrate a positive desire to include the people with disabilities in the community. There are a number of examples of texts in which biblical figures are maimed or develop some sort of disability. For these figures, the development of a disability is seen as a curse brought on by an act that defied God, or as punishment for actions they have taken. Disabling injuries left them humiliated and excluded from the community. Marx contextualized this by explaining that, "In the Ammonite peace pact, the men of Jabesh-Gilead have their right eyes gouged as a sign of humiliation (I Sam 1:2). Similarly, Samson was blinded (Judges 16:21), as was Zedekiah (II Kings 25:7). Lameness and blindness are considered humiliating (II Sam 5:8)."[37] On the other side, there are also times when it was clear that biblical figures are abiding by God's will to embrace every person

[35] Mishnah Avot 4:3, Sefaria Community Translation, http://www.sefaria.org/Pirkei_Avot.4?lang=he-en&layout=heLeft&sidebarLang=all
[36] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 26.
[37] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 53.

and show empathy where needed. The most iconic example of this is Isaiah in his statement to the eunuchs. There Isaiah says,

> "For thus says the Lord: 'To the eunuchs who keep my
> Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold
> fast my covenant, I will give my house and within my walls
> a monument and a name better than sons and daughters;
> I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.
> And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister
> to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants,
> everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it,
> and holds fast to my covenant – these I will bring to my holy
> mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
> their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on
> my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all
> peoples."[38]

Isaiah shows the ultimate empathy for a group of people who have been consistently shunned as outcasts within society. This declaration has pushed communities around the world to make adaptations that are necessary to ensure that people of all walks of life are included in society. In the case of Isaiah's passionate plea to include people of all abilities, Maimonides once again shares his opinions, echoing his own personal theology of God and providing a call to action for inclusion of those with disabilities. Maimonides writes:

> "Each and every individual of those who come into the world,
> whose spirit moves him and whose knowledge gives him
> understanding to set himself apart in order to stand before
> the Lord, to serve Him, to worship Him, and to know Him,
> who walks upright as God has made him do…such an
> individual is consecrated to the Holy of Holies, and his
> portion and inheritance shall be in the Lord forever and ever."[39]

Once again, Maimonides leans on the ideology of *kol Yisrael arevim zeh lazeh*- All of Israel is responsible for one another. Maimonides reminds people that inclusion of

[38] Isaiah 56:4-7 ESVS
[39] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 35.

everyone will lead to a reward and benefit in the world to come. He uses this as the impetus to remind people that God created all beings. Everyone needs to be respectful of one another and show the dignity and respect that a person created by God deserves.

Commentators have used innovation in creating different reminders that no one person is perfect and yet everyone is responsible for helping all of God's beings. Leviticus 19:13-14 states, "You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord."[40] Amongst other scholars, Maimonides did not interpret the word "blind" to mean only people who could not see. Rather, he holds the view that everyone is blind in some capacity. That is to say: everyone has a blind spot or is in some way disabled. Tzvi Marx believes that, "It may be a dubious honor to be mainstreamed into the society of victims, but it is uplifting not to be perceived as alone on the periphery of society. This perspective ensures the dignity of the disabled without denying the special attention that their disabilities mandate."[41] In the past, those people who were viewed as being typical, even with their flaws, had greater support in finding ways to welcome those with more severe disabilities into the fold of their community. *Kol Yisrael arevim zeh lazeh*- all of Israel is responsible for one another, and as Rabbi Harold Kushner writes in his commentary to *Parashat*

[40] Leviticus 19:13-14 ESVS with Strong's.
[41] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 95.

Mishpatim in Etz Hayim, "The decency of a society is measured by how it cares for its least powerful members."[42]

Not only are the Jewish people commanded to care for all of their people, but they are also told to "teach every child according to their way."[43] Education is of utmost importance to Jewish ideology and values. This phrase speaks to the heart of the matter when it comes to educating students with special needs. Each student, regardless of their abilities, varies in the ways in which he or she is able to obtain and comprehend material. Educators need always to be cognizant of teaching their students in the way that is most accommodating to each person. Therefore, each student will be able to succeed to the best of their abilities. In the *V'ahavtah*, Jews are commanded to "teach their children diligently,"[44] an imperative that is to be recited twice daily as a reminder to each person. The text does not explicitly state that only children in a mainstream classroom should be educated. Nor does the text say that students should only receive an education if they are able to comprehend all of the presented material. Rather, it simply states that Jews should impress this education unto their children. This is not a new concept to scholars, but rather one that dates back to at least the medieval period. Maimonides explains:

> "Every Israelite is under an obligation to study Torah, whether he is poor or rich, in sound health or ailing, in the vigor of youth or very old and feeble…Among the great Sages of Israel, some were hewers of wood, some, drawers of water, while others were blind. Nevertheless, they devoted themselves by day and by night to the study of Torah. They are included among the transmitters of the tradition

[42] *Noteworthy Practices in Jewish Day School Education*, Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, June 2006, www.peje.org, p.4.
[43] Proverbs 22:6a ESVS.
[44] Deuteronomy 6:7 ESVS.

in the direct line of Moses."[45]

Guided by Maimonides's insistence that all people are entitled to an education, regardless of ability, one reasons that people are being excluded from educational opportunities simply because of their disabilities. Maimonides recognizes that there is potential for every child and every student to learn something in their lifetime. It is incumbent upon educators to provide the information and the skill sets in a way that is attainable for each of their students. If students are not given the chance to learn, they will never have the opportunity to succeed and exceed expectations. This responsibility does not fall solely on the teacher. According to Maimonides, it also falls on the student to admit when he or she does not understand the material. This information allows for teachers to adjust the way in which they are teaching their students.[46]

The Book of Exodus tells the story in which Moses spent forty days and forty nights at the top of Mount Sinai learning Torah from God, so he could transmit this material to the Israelites. The Jerusalem Talmud relates the words of Rabbi Yochanan, which said,

> "Each of the 40 days that Moses was on Mount Sinai, God taught him entire Torah. And each night, Moses forgot what he had learned. Finally, God gave it to him as a gift. If so, why did God not give the Torah to him as a gift on the first day? In order to encourage the teachers of those who learn in a non-traditional manner."[47]

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[45] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 142.
[46] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 142.
[47] Rachel Banks, comp., *Hineinu: An Inclusion Resource Guide for Congregations* (Washington, D.C.: Religious Action Center), pg. 20.

And thus it has been that people have been taught according to their way since the time of the Bible. God, who created people *b'tzalmo* – in God's image – understood that not everyone learned in the same way. Moses, as the ultimate teacher, was tasked with imparting this educational ideology to the Israelites so that they could take responsibility for educating each of their children, according to their own way.

Not only have Jews been tasked with taking responsibility for the entirety of the community and educating each child according to his or her way, but Jews have also been charged with including every person within the community, especially within the synagogue. In his impassioned speech to the eunuchs, Isaiah stated, "…my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."[48] The house Isaiah refers to is not merely a house of prayer for people who can understand the entire liturgy, or even a house of prayer for those who recite the liturgy by memory. Isaiah's house was to be a house of prayer for all people, regardless of social standing and regardless of physical or mental capabilities. This means that community leaders are tasked with determining how one might best be included within the community and what accommodations can or cannot be made according to *halakhah*.

One such discussion arises in the Talmud around the recitation of the Shema: "Hear, O Israel: Adonai is our God, Adonai is one."[49] Must one have actually heard the recitation of the Shema? Or, does it fulfill the mitzvah if one recites the Shema, but does not hear it? Rabbi Judah is quoted as saying that "…ideally one should hear it, but even if not, one has fulfilled the precept."[50] Rabbi Jose respectfully disagrees,

[48] Isaiah 56:7 ESVS.
[49] Deuteronomy 6:4 ESVS.
[50] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 169.

insisting that, "…without hearing, the precept is not fulfilled. On this strict reading, the hearing or speech disabled cannot fulfill this precept."[51] The decision of the Talmud, in the end, is to follow the more lenient ruling, rendering it acceptable for one to recite the Shema even if they cannot hear it.[52] There have also been rulings declaring sign language an acceptable way of communicating so that deaf or mute participants could be included in a minyan.[53] The Central Conference of American Rabbis Responsa to "Disabled Persons" asserts:

> "When we include the disabled in our minyanim,
> we must attempt to include them fully and facilitate
> their participation in the spiritual life of the community…
> As Reform Jews we should allow for a creative
> interpretation of the mitzvot that would help to
> incorporate disabled persons into the congregation
> in every respect."[54]

There has been a continued push for increasing inclusion within Jewish communities. Making accommodations for people on every level is the most universal way of creating an inclusive environment. Therefore, people with disabilities will have increased access to all of the Jewish texts and traditions. This includes innovative readings of the mitzvot that will allow all willing Jewish people to actively participate in the life of their community.

Other exceptions have been made within the Jewish text, illustrating how communities and congregations desire to be a true house of prayer for all people. One of the most debated questions surrounding accommodations is related to

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[51] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 169.
[52] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 169-170.
[53] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 171.
[54] CCAR Responsa Committee, "5752.5 - Disabled Persons."

reading from the Torah. Who is allowed to read the Torah, or bless the Torah? To what extent may accommodations be made so that someone may have access to the Torah? Does it fulfill one's mitzvah of hearing the reading of the Torah, if one reads the Torah but is not actually reading the words from the page? All of these questions have arisen in this great debate. In the Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 60B the debate is continued.

> "R. Judah b. Nahmani the public orator of R. Simeon b. Lakish discoursed as follows: It is written, *Write thou these words*, and it is written, *For according to the mouth of these words.* 'What are we to make of this? – It means: The words which are written thou art not at liberty to say by heart, and the words transmitted orally thou art not at liberty to recite from writing."[55]

Therefore, it has often been argued that if someone who is unable to read for any reason – for example, if that person is blind – "reads" from the Torah, the commandment of hearing the Torah read is not fulfilled. However, scholars and great sages have found ways to pioneer new interpretations. For example, there is a midrash in Tanhuma, Toldot 7 in which one who was blind was not able to read Torah, but they were still allowed to serve as a translator of the text. Tzvi Marx comments, "Apparently, public leadership by the disabled in the purely educational function of translator was not deemed offensive to the community's dignity; disqualification from reading the Torah, we may presume, was due to the inability to see the text."[56] Because translation is not the same as reading, it becomes a way for

[55] http://halakhah.com/rst/nashim/29b%20-%20Gittin%20-%2048b-90b.pdf.
[56] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 176.

someone who cannot read to participate in the community. While it is not fully inclusive, it is a step in the right direction.

Rabbis have continued to find different ways of interpreting the Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 60B, as included above. Rabbi Benjamin Zeev argues that because reading from the Torah was not Biblical in origin but Rabbinic, it is acceptable for one who is blind to be called up to the Torah and also read from it.[57] Reform Judaism goes even further by asserting that they will find a way for a blind person to read from the Torah, whether from a Braille Bible or from the Torah. The goal is overall inclusion and full participation in the congregation for everyone who wants it. [58]

Liberal Judaism takes a strong stance on inclusion and has created written statements affirming the need for full inclusion of all people within the community. In a resolution put forth by the Rabbinical Assembly (RA), it was decreed that access to a Conservative community should not be limited by disability. They also resolved that the RA, "…commits to creating and sustaining welcoming communities of meaningful inclusion, enabling and encouraging people with disabilities and their families to participate fully in Jewish life in a way that promotes a sense of personal belonging."[59] In its responsum on "Disabled Persons," the CCAR provided the rationale that "We should be sensitive to the fact that disabled persons, particularly the deaf, have traditionally been regarded in light of what they can not do, rather than considering positively the unique capabilities they have. We should encourage

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[57] Marx, *Disability in Jewish Law*, 176.
[58] CCAR Responsa Committee, "5752.5 - Disabled Persons."
[59] The Rabbinical Assembly, "Resolution in Support of Access to Lifelong Jewish Learning for Jews with Disabilities," *The Rabbinical Assembly*, 2014, section goes here, accessed August 22, 2015, http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/story/resolution-support-access-lifelong-jewish-learning-jews-disabilities?tp=1355.

the inclusion of all disabled persons in our congregations…"[60] These statements demonstrate how the movements of liberal Judaism have seen fit to make as many accommodations as possible, ensuring that all of their houses of prayer include everyone.

Clearly there have been a plethora of textual precedents for how communities have viewed and interacted with people with special needs. While the examples to be found in the ancient texts may not cover the myriad diagnoses that exist today, they certainly testify that Jews have always struggled with how best to ensure that disability will not prevent one from community and social participation.

What is clear from the textual analysis and exegesis is that the Jewish people have long sought a rationale for including people in the community. This was not always easy. Jews have long struggled with how to create accommodations for people and at the same time ensure that all are thoroughly fulfilling their mitzvot. The process of inclusion is still evolving today and will most likely continue for the entire existence of Jewry. With each individual comes a unique situation, giving rise to questions about participation and belonging. This leads people to turn to the text for support, creating a continuous cycle of inquiry and exegesis in the journey for Jewish inclusion.

[60] CCAR Responsa Committee, "5752.5 - Disabled Persons."

Sample Text Studies

Them: Humanity Created In The Image of God

"So God created man in God's image, in the image of God, God created him, male and female God created them" (Genesis 1:27).

1. What does it mean to you that people were created in God's image?
2. How do you reconcile a human being that is created in an image of a being that has not been seen before?
3. Why is it important for us to recognize that everyone is created in God's image?

"Moses said to the Lord, 'Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and tongue.' God said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?' (Exodus 4:10-11).

1. How does this passage help to build on the text from Genesis 1:27?
2. What does it mean that God took responsibility for creating all people, including those with special needs?
3. How do these two texts help us to understand and rationalize the fact that all of us are created different from one another, some with more abilities than others?

"Also, to teach the greatness of the Holy One, Blessed is He; when a man casts many coins from a single mold, they all resemble one another, but the supreme King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed is He, fashioned each man in the mold of the first man, yet not one of them resembles one another" (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5).

1. How does this text relate to our previous two texts?
2. Why do you think it is that casting a human is different than God casting a mold?
3. How do you think that these three texts can be used to teach others about the different ways in which we are all created?

Theme: Of All Of Israel Is Responsible For One Another

"You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:13-14).

1. Why are we commanded not to curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind?
2. How can this statement be understood within the context of our Jewish community?
3. Where are places that we see stumbling blocks placed in our community? What can we do to remove them?

"[Ben Azai] would say: Do not disparage anyone, and do not shun any thing. For you have no man who does not have [his] hour, and you have no thing which does not have a place" (Pirkei Avot 4:3).

"All of Israel is responsible for one another" (BT Shavuot 39a).

1. Why do you think Ben Azai said not to disparage anyone? How do we relate that to the Golden Rule (treat others the way you want to be treated) that children are often taught today?
2. What does it mean that all of Israel is responsible for one another?
3. How are these two statements related to each other?

"The decency of a society is measured by how it cares for its least powerful members" (Rabbi Harold Kushner, Etz Hayim).

1. Why is a society judged based on how it treats its least powerful members?
2. How do these texts inform the way that we treat and include people within our community?
3. What can we do within our community to take more responsibility for our members?

Theme: Teaching Everyone According To Their Way

"Teach your children diligently" (Deuteronomy 6:7).

"Teach every child according to their way" (Proverbs 22:6).

1. What does it mean to teach our children diligently?
2. How do we both teach our children diligently and according to their way?
3. What is the significance of having such an early text that talks about the importance of differentiation in education?

"Each of the 40 days that Moses was on Mount Sinai, God taught him [the?] entire Torah. And each night, Moses forgot what he had learned. Finally, God gave it to him as a gift. If so, why did God not give the Torah to him as a gift on the first day? In order to encourage the teachers of those who learn in a non-traditional manner" (JT).

1. Why do you think God chose Moses to be the one to transmit this message to the Israelites?
2. How is this text significant to the special needs education community?
3. How can we apply these texts to teaching others about teaching and interacting with people with various abilities?

"Every Israelite is under an obligation to study Torah, whether he is poor or rich, in sound health or ailing, in the vigor of youth or very old and feeble…Among the great Sages of Israel, some were hewers of wood, some, drawers of water, while others were blind. Nevertheless, they devoted themselves by day and by night to the study of Torah. They are included among the transmitters of the tradition in the direct line of Moses" [source?].

1. Why do you think every Israelite is obligated to study Torah?
2. Why do you think it is that people who were blind were included with people who were hewers of wood and drawers of water?
3. How can we utilize these texts to help inform the way that we disseminate information to people in our community?

Theme: Making A House of Prayer Accessible For All People

"'And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast to my covenant – these I will bring to my holy mountain, and will make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.' The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, 'I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered'" (Isaiah 56:6-8).

1. What does Isaiah mean when he says "for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples"?
2. Who are the outcasts of Israel in this passage? Why is it important to gather them all together?
3. Is your place of worship a house of prayer for all people? What modifications or accommodations have been made to make it such?

"Hear, O Israel: Adonai is our God, Adonai is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

1. What does it mean to "hear" O, Israel?
2. Have you ever said the Shema in your head, without reciting it out loud? Does it feel different to you to do one or the other?
3. Why do you think this prayer is included among these texts?

"R. Judah holds that ideally one should hear it, but even if not, one has fulfilled the precept. R. Jose insists that without hearing, the precept is not fulfilled. On this strict reading, the hearing or speech disabled cannot fulfill this precept. In the end, The Talmud, adducing several traditions to the effect that even *ab initio*, one does not have to hear the Shema, follows R. Judah, thereby including the disabled. Regarding unclear diction, it is R. Judah who is strict, disqualifying an imperfect rendering, while R. Jose is lenient, accepting such renderings. Here too the law follows the lenient view, allowing for the inclusion of those with speech impediments" (Paraphrased from BT Berakhot 15a by Tzvi Marx).

1. Why do you think the Talmud chooses to follow the ruling of R. Judah?
2. How does the Shema and Talmud passage teach us to make a house of prayer more accessible?
3. What can we do to teach others how to make communities more accessible to all people?

Chapter 2 – Past Research On Special Needs and Inclusion

Every child is special in his or her own right. Each child has varied abilities, strengths and weaknesses that are built upon as they spend time in various environments including congregational supplementary schools, Jewish day schools and Jewish overnight summer camps. Even though each child is unique, there are some children with special needs that require additional support in order to have successful experiences in varied Jewish settings. While these children might require specific accommodations in order to help them be successful, all children can benefit from accommodations in learning settings. This chapter focuses on what research has been done on inclusion within congregational, day school and overnight camp settings.

Parents have difficult decisions to make when choosing a school for their children with disabilities; they are forced to weigh the "perceived trade-off between providing Jewish education and getting the best possible secular education that addresses special needs."[61] Families and children often need to make a shift in their thinking and perspectives on certain situations. There is also a major paradigm shift for leaders and administrators within school and camp settings. In order to create an environment that is inclusive of all students, regardless of their abilities, organizations need to make an effort to embrace models that work for all participants and be willing to move their thinking away from traditional paradigms of education. Furthermore, using pedagogical tools that include and accommodate

[61] Sandra Miller-Jacobs and Annette Koren, "Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Day Schools: Parent Experiences," *Coalition For The Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE)*, 2003, pg. 5, accessed October 17, 2015, http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=1909.

students with a wide range of abilities can benefit all students. If implemented properly, asserts Sandy Miller-Jacobs, who is Professor Emerita of Special Education at Fitchburg State University, using an adaptive model for teaching in the classroom "…highlights the idea that all children can benefit from the special accommodations and instructional strategies used for those with special learning needs."[62] Including children of multiple abilities in the classroom can be part of offering an education that is both Jewish *and* high-caliber.

Unfortunately, many organizations are not at the point where they are proactively creating accommodations within classrooms and cabins. Rather, parents and special educators are forced to continually advocate on behalf of their children and students to ensure that they receive the most effective accommodations in the least restrictive environment. There are many different avenues to explore when determining what will be best for the student involved. With the "Brown v. Board of Education" Supreme Court[63] decision in 1954, parents of children with special needs began to question whether having their children in classrooms separate from the general population of students was providing an equal education. A discussion began about the potential for mainstreaming students, which is different from practicing inclusion. The mainstreaming practice "assumes the child starts in a special education setting and is moved into the mainstream (i.e., general classroom) as much as possible."[64] Alternatively, in an inclusive classroom, the child is educated

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[62] Sandy Miller-Jacobs, "Special Education in the Jewish Community," in *The Ultimate Jewish Teacher's Handbook* (Denver, CO: A.R.E. Pub., 2003), pg. 123.
[63] This was the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court case of 1954 in which a decision was rendered having segregated White and African-American schools was not legal. The famous saying "separate but equal is not equal" comes from this decision.
[64] Miller-Jacobs, "Special Education in the Jewish Community," pg. 124.

from the start within the general classroom environment, and special educators and supports are put in place to assist them in the mainstream classroom.

Parents who desire greater inclusion in educational settings for their children with disabilities and special needs, have enjoyed the benefit of some legislative pressure in recent decades. The first legislation regarding students with disabilities was passed beginning in 1975, with the "Education for All Handicapped Children Act." The most current iteration of this bill is the "Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act" (IDEIA) of 2004. Sandra Miller-Jacobs explains that "The purpose of this law [IDEIA] has always been to ensure that all children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education that meets their learning needs while providing and guaranteeing parental rights."[65] These are necessary and welcome steps to take toward including everyone in educational settings, but they do not go far enough. Unfortunately, it is not possible to enforce the act everywhere: while IDEIA applies to all students who attend public schools, each state determines which parts of this law, if any, apply to private, non-public institutions such as Jewish day schools. Furthermore, the laws of IDEIA do not apply to supplementary religious school programs or summer camps.

One of the greatest problems in accommodating people with special needs within congregations, day schools and summer camps is that non-visible disabilities are often overlooked. It is much easier for places to make accommodations for people with physical disabilities, such as widening doorframes, placing *mezuzot* at wheelchair height, and having large print *siddurim*. For those children who have

[65] Miller-Jacobs, "Special Education in the Jewish Community," pg. 123.

"invisible" disabilities such as ADHD, Autism and other learning challenges, accommodations are not often readily made unless parents or the children themselves advocate for them. This is often the biggest hurdle for parents, but they will push for it when they have clear goals for their children's education. In one study a researcher stated, "Parents indicate that regardless of the type or severity of disability, they want their children to receive a Jewish education in their own community, whether that involves a congregation or a day school."[66] Unsurprisingly, Jewish parents would prefer their children to all receive the same education regardless of their capabilities.

Meeting the goal of providing a Jewish education to children of all abilities presents something of a dilemma to parents and institutions. On the one hand, parents want all of their children to be able to attend one institution, rather than splitting them up for the sake of finding better programming elsewhere. Attending one institution would also allow students with special needs to have social experiences in a Jewish setting and would provide everyone exposure to each other and positive interactions between typical and atypical students. On the other hand, there are some students for whom a mainstream classroom is not the best environment for them. The students may be more comfortable in a smaller or self-contained class experience. While full inclusion for everyone in the Jewish community is the ideal, answers to the question of how to achieve it will not come easily.

[66] Miller-Jacobs, "Special Education in the Jewish Community," pg. 125.

As indicated in the previous chapter, Jewish texts support inclusion of people with disabilities to the fullest extent possible, and it remains true within congregational communities. Whether the disability is visible or invisible, it is the community's responsibility to help the individual enjoy the same engaging learning and prayerful experiences as others. Shifting peoples' views about inclusion of individuals with disabilities is hard work, and it is not only the responsibility of organizations. It is also the shared responsibility of each person or family who has an individual with special needs, as Sandra Miller-Jacobs points out. When considering enrolling their child in a congregational preschool or religious school, parents "…must be willing to share information about their child's learning needs. They must feel comfortable that the shared information will not result in their child being labeled, resulting in non-acceptance to the program or in being counseled to leave."[67] It may be that parents are not aware of their children's special needs. If they are, congregations need to create an environment in which parents feel comfortable sharing their child's confidential learning information with the religious school faculty.

There are congregational communities in which these paradigm shifts have begun to occur, and studies that provide illustrations of the successes and challenges of this shift in thinking. In an article entitled "Special Education in the Jewish Community," Sandy Miller-Jacobs discusses shifts taking place in the Boston Jewish community. There, "major changes have resulted in attitudes and understanding of special needs as these professionals provide individual help and

[67] Miller-Jacobs, "Special Education in the Jewish Community," pg. 126.

coaching for regular classroom teachers."[68] In her research, Miller-Jacobs found that parents need to be willing to divulge their children's learning needs, but they are only willing to do so when they trust the congregational staff to understand the information presented and implement it within the classroom setting. Parents often do not share this information with congregations because there is a common belief that Individualized Education Plans (IEP) are only applicable in public school and not in supplementary education.

Besides perceiving a lack of IEPs in Hebrew or religious school, parents often have concerns that labeling the child "special needs" will hinder their acceptance and ability to learn within the congregation's classrooms. These worries are not groundless, as a study of parents' experiences with day schools' inclusion of children with special needs found. According to one of the parent's interviewed:

> "My daughter attends…Sunday school…with an aide who is actually quite excellent, but as a Hebrew school…there is nobody on the staff on a supervisory or a teaching level that knows anything bout inclusionary teaching, about having multiple teachers in a classroom, having different paced learning. My child is certainly on the extreme, but I'll often sit in the class and see another 17 or 18 kids (who have very different abilities), but the teachers is doing one thing. There is no accommodation to any child in the classroom."[69]

While this is only one representation of the various experiences that parents have had with their children in congregational supplementary schools, it is not uncommon. It seems a step in the right direction that the school practiced mainstreaming in their classrooms instead of segregation, but as this parent's

[68] Miller-Jacobs, "Special Education in the Jewish Community," pg. 126.
[69] Miller-Jacobs and Koren, "Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Day Schools: Parent Experiences," pg. 4.

account shows, day schools and their teachers are not yet doing everything they can to include children with disabilities and special needs in their lessons.

These studies continue to illustrate that the teachers and faculty in supplementary programs may be very eager to deliver important content, but they are not always educated in the most effective ways to do this for those students with varied disabilities and needs. A lack of teaching and other staff trained in inclusionary practices is one reason that synagogues might counsel a family to hire a tutor, rather than keeping their child in the classroom in a congregational supplementary school. When this occurs, families can still be involved in less structured activities such as all congregational Purim carnivals or larger family education programs. However, with regards to formal religious and Hebrew education, parents are usually counseled to remove their child from the classroom setting if the child is not capable of participating in a mainstream environment. This can prove challenging for both the parents and children who are counseled to find an alternative to supplementary religious education. Especially if a child with special needs is fully included in their classes at their elementary, middle or high school, studies have found that Jewish parents want that child to be included in classes in religious and Hebrew school as well. The children in these situations do not always understand why they cannot be in religious school with their peers, especially when they often are in daily school with them.[70] When synagogues don't practice inclusive education, they risk losing affiliation with these families; they don't realize they are

[70] Miller-Jacobs, "Special Education in the Jewish Community," pg. 126.

creating situations in which these families do not feel fully welcomed within the congregation's community.

Although many studies show a dire need for better educated teachers and staff in Jewish supplementary education programs, the picture is not all dark. According to Jacobs' study titled "Special Education in the Jewish Community," things do seem to be slowly improving: there are now various alternatives that individual congregations and families, are creating in response to the failure to include young members with disabilities or special needs in religious school classrooms. Some congregations devise self-contained classes within the religious school. These classes are for children of varied abilities, and are particularly meant for those who have not been able to progress at the rate of their peers. The classes usually have a smaller student-to-teacher ratio and can provide appropriately differentiated education for each student's needs.[71] In some areas, change is happening even on a regional level, and can include "…self-contained classes, pull-out programs, or tutors and/or consultants to the synagogue schools."[72] There have also been noted instances where parents create their own organizations and educational programs in situations where they do not believe that their children's needs are being met; examples include Kulanu in New York and the Sudbury Valley Jewish Special Education Initiative in Massachusetts.[73] These types of organizations provide appropriate educational opportunities to meet the variety of special needs encountered in Jewish education.

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[71] Miller-Jacobs, "Special Education in the Jewish Community," pg. 127.
[72] Miller-Jacobs, "Special Education in the Jewish Community," pg. 127.
[73] Miller-Jacobs, "Special Education in the Jewish Community," pg. 127.

These organizations also disseminate lots of helpful information. Various guides have been written about improving accessibility within the walls of the congregation, and there are two helpful suggestions that repeat throughout the available written material. The first of these are the physical accommodations that synagogues can make. One of the guides created by the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) is titled "Tips for Creating a More Inclusive Congregation: Some Examples of Things we can do to Make our Synagogues, Schools and Organizations more accessible and Open to those with Special Needs." In it, suggestions for accommodations to the physical property include, but are not limited to,

> "place signage around the building that calls attention to handicap accessible entrances…Place mezuzot at wheelchair height at appropriate locations…Place kippot and prayer books at a level that can be reached by everyone…and mention all forms of assistance for those with special needs in the Shabbat program handed out with the prayer book."[74]

The second suggestion relates the improvements that can be made to be more inclusive by the congregational leadership, and the congregation as a whole. The first step in the URJ's guide is for the leadership of the congregation to learn more about what disabilities exist within their specific community. From there, "hold a discussion and training session with clergy, synagogue staff, board and committee members, religious school staff, and youth workers about welcoming people with disabilities."[75] Also recommended for the leadership is to review any congregational

[74] "Tips For Creating A More Inclusive Congregation: Some Examples Of Things We Can Do To Make Our Synagogues, Schools And Organizations More Accessible And Open To Those With Special Needs," accessed August 28, 2015, http://urj.org//life/community/disabilities//?syspage=article&item_id=3499.
[75] "Tips For Creating A More Inclusive Congregation: Some Examples Of Things We Can Do To Make Our Synagogues, Schools And Organizations More Accessible And Open To Those With Special Needs."

policies towards those with special needs and to create a specific Special Needs or Disability Awareness Committee.[76] This committee is one that can be tasked with ensuring that each individual with a disability is fully included in the congregation; committee members can also be charged with writing a statement of inclusion for the congregation if one does not already exist. Additionally, the committee also can assist in writing an inclusion policy for the religious school.

In order to provide the best education for each child in the religious school, the URJ's guide for inclusion encourages placing a "special needs" section in the registration material for religious school. Using the information provided by the parents, the religious school director can then work with each teacher to "…infuse the curriculum with multi-sensory teaching strategies to encourage success by all students."[77] If congregations have a budget set aside for inclusion, it is also recommended to hire an inclusion specialist or special needs coordinator. This person can work with teachers to meet the individual needs of students and to coordinate any and all accommodations to be made throughout the religious school. An inclusion specialist can also help teachers to understand what their students' specific special needs are and how they can modify the curriculum to fit the needs of each student.

These are only a few of the ways, according to studies and guides, that congregations can create modifications to accommodate the variety of special needs that they might encounter in the synagogue setting. This researcher did not find any

[76] "Tips For Creating A More Inclusive Congregation: Some Examples Of Things We Can Do To Make Our Synagogues, Schools And Organizations More Accessible And Open To Those With Special Needs."
[77] "Tips For Creating A More Inclusive Congregation: Some Examples Of Things We Can Do To Make Our Synagogues, Schools And Organizations More Accessible And Open To Those With Special Needs."

studies dedicated solely to the study of special needs and inclusion within the congregational setting. However, one can predict that in the coming years, as these programs become better known, studies will be funded. The promise of this is in the partnership between the URJ and the Ruderman Family Foundation, which has created The Disabilities Inclusion Learning Center. The goal of this partnership is "the full participation in the spiritual, educational and social aspects of synagogue life for people living with disabilities and for their families."[78] The Center's website includes: self-submitted examples of successful programs; a section on how to make the congregation more inclusive; sections for youth; educator resources; worship resources; videos; and additional articles and resources.

There have been two major studies launched to understand the inclusion of students with special needs in Jewish day schools. These studies have been performed in conjunction with the Bureau of Jewish Education of Greater Boston. According to these studies, the first most important question to ask when studying Jewish special education is: "How many children with special needs are Jewish and attend our schools (preschool, congregational schools, and day schools)?" The second question is: "How many children with special needs are Jewish and not attending our schools?"[79] The researchers of these studies also focused on one of the main questions posed by various constituents of the community, who wondered,

> "…whether Jewish schools are morally, even though not legally, obligated to provide an education for students with disabilities. Special educators question how far day schools can stretch to meet the needs of more diverse populations.

[78] "Partnership Between The URJ And The Ruderman Family Foundation," Union For Reform Judaism, accessed September 17, 2015, http://urj.org/life/community/disabilities/.
[79] Miller-Jacobs, "Special Education in the Jewish Community," pg. 127.

> Parents worry about how to provide the best secular and Jewish education for their children. Day school personnel, along with parents, express concerns about how to offer a Jewish education without harming the child's self-esteem."[80]

Most of these studies involved interviewing school faculty such as administrators and special educators, as well as parents and even a few students. The schools included in the studies have students with a range of disabilities and special needs which include, but are not limited to, "cognitive difficulties, language and communication problems (reading, writing, listening, speaking), social and emotional difficulties, physical disabilities and sensory abilities."[81] The parents interviewed in at least one of the studies shared a wide variety of experiences. Some of these families had been counseled out or had chosen to leave the day school; some still had their children enrolled in Jewish day schools with modifications; and some had never considered Jewish day schools for their children.[82]

Sometimes the problem is not that a synagogue or school doesn't offer services for students with special needs, but that they don't communicate the services they have. There is not a standard of practice for how Jewish day schools should work with students with special needs. Rather, each day school makes their own decisions about what is best for the student and what is best for the school as a whole. Unfortunately, day schools do not always communicate the services and accommodations that they are willing to provide, as they do not want to become

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[80] Miller-Jacobs and Koren, "Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Day Schools: Parent Experiences," pg. 1.
[81] *Noteworthy Practices in Jewish Day School Education*, pg. 6.
[82] Miller-Jacobs and Koren, "Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Day Schools: Parent Experiences," pg. 2.

labeled as the school for children with special needs.[83] Therefore, one of the problems faced by families with students who have special needs is that Jewish day schools do not always do outreach to the special needs community. While the reason why they do not do this has not been established, it can be posited that

> "…perhaps [they are] concerned about the costs of providing schooling or about disenfranchising parents who fear their child's education will be diluted by the addition of children with special needs. Day schools hide behind their difficult dual curriculum."[84]

The schools might not want to become known as special needs schools, but most are willing to make accommodations to a certain extent for any of their students. Day schools are beginning to recognize that regardless of their outreach, they have a growing number of students with diagnoses already in the classroom. What is now important is identifying these students and determining how to accommodate these already enrolled students. According to the study titled "Noteworthy Practices in Jewish Day School Education," families are looking for schools that are willing and able to successfully educate all of their students and that are willing to implement differentiated education in the classroom setting. It has been found that parents of children with disabilities or special needs find it most important that the school has a fully inclusive program; this is even more important than the strength of their Jewish Studies and Hebrew curriculum.[85]

Accommodating students with special needs can be done in number of different ways, many of which include differentiated education. According to

[83] Miller-Jacobs, "Special Education in the Jewish Community," pg. 126.
[84] Miller-Jacobs, "Special Education in the Jewish Community," pg. 125.
[85] Miller-Jacobs, "Special Education in the Jewish Community," pg. 127.

Noteworthy Practices in Jewish Day School Education, schools that are fully inclusive "…offer services directly in the classroom, often using a co-teaching model, providing consultation/coaching for the classroom teacher and/or using one-to-one aides to work directly with students."[86] Within the schools that practice inclusion, some also provide pull-out services. However, many schools will not divulge the availability of these services to families unless the student requires them. Some schools have created self-contained classrooms. For the students who are enrolled in these programs, they may have opportunities to interact with their mainstream peers during lunch, gym, art, music, etc. as well as special all-school programs. There are also schools that go further in creating a special education school in their school, or a school within a school. This is often done for students who are delayed, particularly with their Hebrew language acquisition.[87]

Currently, an emphasis on differentiated education within day school education is developing. Following such an adaptive teaching model allows teachers to create lesson plans that fit the learning styles of all of their students, rather than utilizing methods of education suitable only for the most typical students. For example, teachers might use different techniques to teach the same lesson. This enables students with various strengths to glean the same information from the lesson. It allows students to choose the way they best learn the information, if they are offered three or four different activities in the classroom. In a lesson that is built on the principles of differentiated education, teachers might provide a text, use a visual representation of the topic, have the class create a song and dance

[86] *Noteworthy Practices in Jewish Day School Education*, 6.
[87] *Noteworthy Practices in Jewish Day School Education*, 7.

surrounding the themes of the lesson, and discuss their own experiences and feelings towards the lesson topic. This does not necessarily work for every lesson planned, but it allows students to feel that they have the opportunity to learn through their strengths, rather than struggle due to their disabilities.

While Jewish day schools are not legally bound to provide the services listed in IDEIA 2004, more and more schools are hiring support staff to provide them to their students. Studies have found that schools are hiring not only behavioral specialists or social workers, but also speech and language therapists, subject specialists, and occupational and physical therapists.[88] The "Special Education in the Jewish Community" study found that many schools are now moving towards using the Response To Intervention (RTI) approach to work with students with special needs. RTI is a multi-level approach to working with students with special needs. A diagnosis or IEP is not needed in order to initiate the RTI. This approach, recommended by IDEIA 2004,

> "…suggests implementing effective research-based interventions with periodic measurements of the children's progress leading to early intervention when a child initially shows academic problems. [RTI uses] a continual cycle of intervention, measurement of the student's response, and analysis of the data to determine the next level of intervention…"[89]

RTI allows day schools to begin the intervention process prior to any official evaluations or diagnoses.

As more day schools adopt this RTI as a way to work with their students with special needs, a problem has arisen. Because the RTI approach does not require the

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[88] *Noteworthy Practices in Jewish Day School Education*, 7.
[89] Miller-Jacobs, "Special Education in the Jewish Community," pg. 124.

diagnosis of a disability, schools end up serving many more students with special needs than they have on record with diagnoses. This can create a heavy service burden and potentially taxing stress for the teachers who work with these children. Furthermore, by not requiring a diagnosis or some other record of need before providing disability-related services, the number of students with special needs may grow, but only unofficially. Schools then have an inaccurate count of the number of students with special needs that the school is serving, so the school may not allocate adequate resources or staff to provide the services. In order to provide adequate and appropriate services and education to children with disabilities and special needs, religious and Hebrew schools need to develop more effective protocols for identifying the students who truly need intervention.

Failing to better track of students who most need extra services to receive their religious education not only strains the resources of the school providing the education, but also leaves the school unaware of the breadth and depth of potential diagnoses. As a result, they might not know what kinds of training their staff and teachers will need to deliver an inclusive education. Interestingly, throughout all of the studies under discussion, very few comments were made about the professional development provided for all of these teachers who are working with students with special needs. This leads one to wonder whether professional development in these areas is even provided, or whether teachers must rely solely on their previous education and experience to teach everyone. More research needs to be done to determine how to best equip Jewish religious school teachers with what the

knowledge and resources they need to provide an inclusive education for their students.

In the "Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Day Schools: Parent Experiences," researchers discuss a number of topics with the participants. Parents shared strong feelings about choosing a Jewish day school because they wanted their children to have a strong Jewish education, and not particularly because of the smaller size of the day schools.[90] There are unfortunately circumstances in which families need to be counseled out of the day school. In these situations, the schools feel that they can no longer provide the appropriate supports and assistance for a particular child.

As a result of many of these cases, day schools have taken a closer look at what kinds of action they can take to reduce the number of students who are counseled out, and they have attempted to create schools within schools to support these children. One of the longest and most well known programs in the Reform movement was The Amit Program in Atlanta, GA, which closed in June of 2013. Housed in the Davis Academy, The Amit Program sought to provide a Jewish day school education for children with more severe disabilities. "The Amit Community School program focuses on four areas: *Support Services, Modified Self-Contained Classrooms (Gar'inim), Teacher Education and Disability Awareness.*"[91] The Gar'inim program was a kindergarten through eighth grade school for students with

[90] Miller-Jacobs and Koren, "Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Day Schools: Parent Experiences," pg. 2.
[91] Linda Zimmerman, "The Amit Community School Program: A School Within A School," in *V'Khol Banayikh: Jewish Education for All - A Jewish Special Needs Resource Guide*, ed. Sara Rubinow Simon, Linda Forrest, and Ellen Fishman (Los Angeles, CA.: Tora Aura Productions, 2008), pg. 159.

developmental disabilities. Gar'inim "…was created to provide as much inclusion as possible in a typical private Jewish day school program while also addressing the individual learning styles and needs of children with severe learning problems and other associated sensory difficulties."[92] Students in the Gar'inim program were not enrolled at the Davis Academy, but were able to participate in all non-academic programming in the school. Unfortunately, this program closed in June of 2013. While it is not clear to this writer the reasons for this, one believes that it may have been due to a lack of financial support for the program. Since the closure of this program, there has be no other noted program like this in any Reform day school.

Families who have been counseled out of a Jewish day school shared their hope to help change the day school system so that future students can be accommodated in the Jewish day school setting.[93] Parents have the difficult situation of acknowledging, prior to the start of the application process, that their child will not be accepted by the day school because of his or her disabilities. One parent stated, "We knew we were rejected before we even started and didn't even bother to let them slap us around."[94] This is the unfortunate reality of Jewish day schools. The schools are not set up to accommodate each child with special needs, as much as they might like to be. Parents often feel pulled in two different directions. On the one hand, they want their child to be included in the Jewish community of the day school and to receive the Jewish education. On the other hand, they don't know whether

[92] Zimmerman, "The Amit Community School Program: A School Within a School," pg. 162.
[93] Miller-Jacobs and Koren, "Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Day Schools: Parent Experiences," pg. 2.
[94] Miller-Jacobs and Koren, "Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Day Schools: Parent Experiences," pg. 3.

their child is receiving the best education possible when they remain within the day school, even when they do receive accommodations.[95]

If families are counseled out of a school, it is can be very agonizing and traumatic for them because the rejection can be isolating, which is the opposite of community. Parents are often left with a bitter taste in their mouth once they have had the negative experience of being asked to leave a Jewish community. One parent explained,

> "Here we are talking about Derekh Eretz…and they come back and say, 'This is not our problem. This is your problem. Your child has special needs; you go deal with it. Go put him in public school.' How can they do this to a parent? I must have cried for a year because of this. I've never felt so much pain in my life."[96]

Unfortunately, in this study of "Inclusion of Children with Special Needs I Day Schools: Parent Experiences", the majority of parent experiences that were reported were negative. It is unclear if their experiences were negative because of the focus of the questions asked, because the negative experiences were the only ones that the parents relayed, or because there simply were no positive experiences mentioned in this study. Hopefully as time moves forward, Jewish day schools will be able to better accommodate a range of special needs, or at least address these needs in such a way that families will remain connected with their Jewish communities.

The issue of special needs within Jewish summer camps has only recently become a topic of discussion. While there have always been children attending

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[95] Miller-Jacobs and Koren, "Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Day Schools: Parent Experiences," pg. 3.
[96] Miller-Jacobs and Koren, "Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Day Schools: Parent Experiences," pg. 3.

camps with special needs, very little research has been done on this topic. This is because camps are not as structured as day schools or supplementary religious schools, and because they are optional programs. Within the last decade, there has been a greater shift towards recognizing the need to understand how children with special needs and disabilities fit into the paradigm of Jewish overnight camping. The first and only study of this kind was facilitated in 2013 through the Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC). The stated goal of this survey was to

> "…gain an understanding of the nonprofit Jewish overnight camp environments in which children with special needs are currently being served well, where the most significant gaps in service lie, and how we might move the field forward."[97]

This survey includes camps from various denominations and movements of Judaism, as well as those that do not affiliate with a denomination or movement. This survey is not all encompassing. For instance, only the more "traditional" disabilities and special needs such as "Down syndrome, blindness, Autism/Asperger's, challenging behaviors, hearing impairments, ADD/ADHD, seizures, intellectual or developmental disabilities and physical impairments"[98] were included.

There is overwhelming support that children with special needs should have the opportunity to attend Jewish summer camps. This study determined that over 75% of camps are serving at least a few campers with disabilities and special needs,

[97] *Key Findings- Jewish Camp for Children with Disabilities and Special Needs*, report (Laszlo Strategies, 2013), pg. 3.
[98] *Jewish Camp For Children With Disabilities and Special Needs*, report (Laszlo Strategies, 2013), pg. #8.

and over 33% offer dedicated special programs for campers with special needs.[99] The power and magic of camp is universally recognized by staff, participants and families. It is an opportunity to provide important social interaction for people of all ability levels in a uniquely Jewish environment. One camp director interviewed for the FJC study on "Jewish Camping for Children with Disabilities and Special Needs" wrote:

> "I believe in the power of camp. We have seen our kids grow and change in ways that would have never happened outside of camp. We have kids who have never spent a night away from their home. We had a child who had slept with his mother until age 10. That (Camp) is a huge step for the family. We have kids who have learned to swim, made a friend, and climbed the ropes."[100]

The magic of camp is that children can come having never spent any time away from their families and can grow to have very successful experiences. This is due, in large part, to the staff who work with these campers day in and day out, as well as the staff administration who works tirelessly to create a positive culture around overnight camping.

Camps know and recognize the need and the potential for expanding opportunities for these campers with special needs. However, camp directors and camp boards can be apprehensive about making their camps more accessible to campers with special needs because the challenges seem so daunting. According to the FJC's study, the biggest barriers to greater inclusion are "…lack of training and knowledge followed by funding."[101] One camp director stated that, "We're always

[99] Key Findings- Jewish Camp for Children with Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 8-9.
[100] *Jewish Camp For Children With Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 41.*
[101] Key Findings- Jewish Camp for Children with Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 14.

running 1 dollar short and a man down. We didn't have the resources. We really need a partner to fund a position."[102] These difficulties were echoed by many of the directors interviewed for this study and confirmed in reports by the parents of campers with special needs. These days, sending a neuro-typical child to summer camp is not a cheap expenditure for families. For those with children with special needs, it is often even more expensive because the families may have to provide a one-on-one aide or other supports to ensure the necessary accommodations for their child. They can't depend on financial aid, either.; the study found that "parents [of special needs campers] do feel scholarships are an issue, but camps aren't giving more of them to these families than others at this point."[103] This adds yet another challenge for families who want to send their children with special needs to an overnight camp.

A great challenge for camps is that staff and faculty don't have the necessary training to work effectively with many of the disabilities that the campers may have. Unfortunately, camps have had to choose not to accept some of these campers; without adequate training for their staff and the necessary equipment, camps cannot accommodate campers with more severe disabilities. As one camp director states, the issue is one of the quality of the camping experience for everyone: "We are not like public school. We don't take just everyone. There needs to be a fit for safety and success. We have some control there."[104] Camp directors want all campers who attend their camp to have successful camping experiences. For those

[102] *Jewish Camp For Children With Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 42.*
[103] *Jewish Camp For Children With Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 13.*
[104] *Jewish Camp For Children With Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 42.*

potential campers with more severe disabilities or special needs, many camp directors know that there are not the appropriate supports in place at the camp. Therefore, the potential does not exist for that particular camper to have a successful camping experience. One camp director stated, "If they fit our mold then they can be successful, but that mold isn't grand enough."[105] Rather than creating an experience of failure for the potential camper, the directors counsel their families that they cannot be accepted as campers in their programs if the camper cannot enjoy the camp experience without a lot of extra support and/or equipment.

Regardless of challenges that come with creating modifications and accommodations for campers with disabilities and special needs, there is overwhelming support from the Jewish community for the opportunity for every Jewish child to have an experience at a Jewish camp. One of the biggest reasons for this is that there is recognition that for many of the campers with special needs, "camp and their homes are the address for a lot of their Jewish content."[106] If these campers did not have the opportunity to attend camp, they may not have many Jewish experiences outside of the home. While experiencing Judaism in the home is incredibly meaningful, having Jewish communal experiences is equally as important. While there are opportunities for children with disabilities to attend day schools, they are not especially plentiful for students wit more severe disabilities; therefore, these congregants with special needs are much more likely to attend public schools. They are also less likely to attend a typical religious school. One parent who sends their child to a Jewish overnight camp stated:

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[105] *Jewish Camp For Children With Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 42.*
[106] *Jewish Camp For Children With Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 14.*

> "These children often have problems with inclusion at school. School is very challenging for them and they rarely feel as if they are a "success" or winner. Camp is an opportunity for children with special needs to focus on their strengths, feel good about what they can do well and to learn how to relate to and live with their peers. It is also an opportunity for them to learn to cooperate and give, they should not always be the recipient of "charity". They must also learn how to give back to their camp "community" and get along with their peers."[107]

The unique environment that is created at Jewish overnight camps has the potential to allow campers with special needs to thrive in ways that they have never experienced before. They are able to put into practice all of the skills that they are learning throughout the school year. This is particularly important because they are interacting not only with their teachers, but with a group of peers for an extended period of time.

This direct parent quote illustrates how important it is for camp staff to create a supportive environment, because it has a direct impact on the quality of the camping experience for campers with disabilities and special needs. Camp may offer one of the few opportunities that campers with special needs have to really excel, especially for those in a fully inclusive camp environment. Certainly, not all camps are yet at this point. However, with the proper supports in place, more and more camps can create these opportunities.

The FJC study also found that while camps are serving more campers with special needs than they thought, this information is little advertised to the disability and special needs communities. This particular study found that of the 170 camps that were able to participate in the survey, Jewish overnight camps are serving

[107] *Jewish Camp For Children With Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 101.*

approximately 2340-2590 campers with special needs; the majority of camps were serving an average of fewer than 20 campers with special needs.[108] Of the campers who are already attending these camps, it is recognized that their camps are "getting GREAT marks on infusing Jewish values/learning."[109] This was a key finding that was presented after all of the data was analyzed.

Two of the aspects of Jewish summer camping for people with disabilities and special needs that the FJC study explored are what types of experience and training parents want the camp to provide their children with disabilities and special needs, and what the camp thinks they are able to provide. Parents are sending their kids, both typical and those with special needs, to Jewish camp for experiences that include fostering a "Jewish identity, social connections and a connection to Israel."[110] Some of the most important things parents want their children to learn at camp are "techniques to help with social skills and peer friend building,"[111] whereas inclusion specialists and the general camp staff surveyed prioritize safety over working on social . Both inclusion specialists and parents alike want a camp where the staff "gets" their camper's special needs and is able to accommodate them to the best of their abilities. Interestingly, when it comes to considering summer camps, parents aren't as concerned that all of their children go to the same camps, which is the opposite finding from the research about day schools. As one parent expressed in the survey, the most important thing for camps to keep in mind as they improve their services for children with special needs is that

[108] Key Findings- Jewish Camp for Children with Disabilities and Special Needs, pgs. 10-12.
[109] *Jewish Camp For Children With Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 12.*
[110] Key Findings- Jewish Camp for Children with Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 36.
[111] Key Findings- Jewish Camp for Children with Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 21.

"All people with disabilities are individuals…"[112] and that "All children just want to be accepted for who they are and included."[113]

One of the main areas of concern for both camp staff and parents sending their children to camp is the staff training that is necessary to work with campers with disabilities and special needs. This study about children with special needs at summer camps found that above all else, this kind of specialized staff training is what camps are generally lacking. It found that "nearly 80% of camps serve children with disabilities and special needs, but only 26% have a manual or handbook"[114] on how to work with the various disabilities and special needs that they are serving. Of the directors, inclusion staff, and parents of campers with disabilities interviewed, 70% stated that "the resource that would be most helpful to serve children with disabilities/special needs at camp"[115] would be training for staff, followed by 50% who answered "access to expert advice and best practices."[116] Staff training includes not only instruction on how to work with campers with various disabilities, but access to advice from experts and print resources such as "a manual on getting other kids in the cabin to understand the issues the specific child has."[117] Some camps are implementing techniques for including campers with special needs, and they are finding that *all* campers are benefiting from these accommodations, not just the ones with disabilities. The accommodation includes ensuring that all campers have an opportunity to share their feelings about living and interacting with people with

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[112] *Jewish Camp For Children With Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 101.*
[113] *Jewish Camp For Children With Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 101.*
[114] Key Findings- Jewish Camp for Children with Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 27.
[115] *Jewish Camp For Children With Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 55.*
[116] *Jewish Camp For Children With Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 55.*
[117] *Jewish Camp For Children With Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 56.*

special needs, both positive and negative, and ask questions about the campers who are different in some way. The predominant approach is to make the campers with special needs a "part of the culture – as natural as swimming and Shabbat."[118] Both camp staff and parents want their children to have a successful experience at camp, and appropriate staff training is one of just many accommodations that can be made to ensure that these campers are included to the fullest extent.

As Jewish communities become more aware of the people among them living with these disabilities and special needs , congregations, day schools and summer camps are thinking about the larger implications for inclusion. This means that

> "In order to adequately address the issue of educating students with a variety of learning needs, school administrators, teachers, parents, and community leaders need to work together to develop a strategic plan and models for implementation."[119]

This applies not only to day schools, but to congregations and summer camps as well. People need to speak about disabilities openly and honestly, and discussing how best to include people with disabilities and special needs need to be on the agendas of all Jewish organizations that serve them.

The field of special needs accommodation and inclusion is fairly new to the Jewish community, which continues to grow and learn based on its previous experiences. Hopefully, more and more Jewish organizations will embrace inclusion of all people with special needs. When they do, there are some useful tools to help them assess their options. In "Special Education in the Jewish Community," Miller-

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[118] *Jewish Camp For Children With Disabilities and Special Needs, pg. 67.*
[119] Miller-Jacobs and Koren, "Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Day Schools: Parent Experiences," pg. 5.

Jacobs(?) provides questions that organizations can used to think about how best to create a fully inclusive community:

> "Will the use of intake forms enable the open and honest sharing of information about a child's special learning needs? What methods of teaching Hebrew as a second language, especially for students with language processing learning disabilities, are the most successful? What are the instructional strategies that work at all levels (preschool through high school) and for different types of and severity of special needs for teaching Hebrew and Judaics? What are noteworthy practices for school, family education, camp, Shabbat services, youth activities, Israel trips? What are the implications, challenges and benefits of inclusion for families of children with special needs and other members of the synagogue and school community? How do we measure the acceptance of disabilities within the school and synagogue community?"[120]

These five questions are just a few of the many questions that Jewish organizations are asking themselves when it comes to furthering their inclusive nature. It is also important for congregations, day schools and camps to begin advertising what types of services they can provide, so that individual families can make educated decisions about which communities are going to be the best fit for them. Organizations need to provide more staff training and professional development on issues of inclusion. Presently, there is far too little training that occurs in Jewish institutions. Therefore, professional development needs to be prioritized and include topics such as general information about disabilities and special needs, as well as specific topics pertaining to the people which the particular communities serve. This is perhaps one of the most important aspects of creating an inclusive environment and it should be an on going effort, rather than a onetime event.

[120] Miller-Jacobs, "Special Education in the Jewish Community," pg. 129.

While the studies discussed in this chapter have provided important data and information about inclusion within congregational schools, day schools and summer camps, there is still much more to be done. Research in the field of special needs inclusion is only just beginning, and many more studies are necessary to understand where are the gaps in service how to continue development of best practices for inclusion. The Jewish community needs to participate in this effort to learn how its own organizations—which have their own needs and practices— can be the most successful and inclusive version of themselves. More time and exploration will allow the Jewish community gain a better understanding of possibilities and implications for inclusion, and how to ensure that any person, regardless of ability, can be included in their community.

Chapter 3 – Current Approaches To Working With People With Special Needs In Reform Settings

In recent years, the Reform movement has come to realize the importance of working with and including people with disabilities and special needs. Understanding the growing need for this kind of work, Reform Jewish congregations, day schools and over-night summer camps have set out to improve the standards for inclusion within their communities. These efforts are represented in a number of different ways and differ from organization to organization. While no two organizations are exactly the same, there are some overarching themes present in their efforts, both regarding the challenges and successes surrounding inclusion. These themes include, but are not limited to: the desire of those families with loved ones who have special needs to feel included in the community; the associated costs of inclusion; and the ability to ensure everyone is treated like an individual. These themes, and the information in the rest of this chapter, were derived from interviews with leaders in the organizations as well as from information supplied by the Union for Reform Judaism's (URJ) Disabilities Inclusion Learning Center. A total of fourteen interviews were completed: five with URJ congregations, four with Pardes Jewish day schools, and five with URJ summer camps. While this sampling is not representative of the entire movement, it paints an early picture of the avenues URJ organizations are exploring to include those in the special needs community.

Inclusion in URJ Congregations

The topic of inclusion has become increasingly relevant to the URJ in the last few years, so much that the URJ recently created the Disabilities Inclusion Learning

Center. This is an online platform for professional and lay leaders, providing resources to learn more about developing the necessary skills to provide people with disabilities access to communities within the Reform movement.

> "On this site participants will have access to webinars, videos, and written resources developed by experts in disabilities inclusion, including leading educators, clergy, people with disabilities and their families. There will be opportunities to interact with our presenters and to consult with other congregations and URJ staff members. "[121]

The Learning Center provides resources on topics including but not limited to general inclusion, mental health, religious school, adults in communal life, and worship. The study sessions and resources that are included come from leaders at exemplary congregations recognized by the Disabilities Inclusion Learning Center as having "…excelled in one or more areas of inclusion. Each congregation has agreed to serve as a mentor to other congregational professionals in specific areas of inclusion."[122]

The exemplar congregations have applied for and been accepted for this role, based on one or more areas in which they have been very successful at implementing strategies for increased inclusion. The role they play in mentoring other congregations and leaders helps to continue to chain of success, helping other congregations find opportunities to develop their own advances in the field of

[121] "About," Disabilities Inclusion Learning Center, September 14, 2014, accessed November 22, 2015, http://disabilitiesinclusion.org/about/.
[122] "Exemplar Congregations," Disabilities Inclusion Learning Center, accessed November 22, 2015, http://disabilitiesinclusion.org/exemplar-congregations/.

inclusion.[123] Congregations are assigned categories according to the areas in which they excel. This partnership is just the beginning of what many hope will be a lifelong goal of achieving excellence in inclusion in all URJ institutions.

For many congregations, their work on inclusion came about because someone—sometimes lay leaders and other times by clergy—saw a need for it in the congregation. Unsurprisingly, the great majority of people who see a need for increased inclusion awareness are those directly related to someone with a disability. These are most often parents who want to find more opportunities for their children with special needs to be a part of the congregational Jewish community. The result of this need has been the creation of inclusion committees. These committees generally are comprised of professional and lay leaders from the community, as well as other interested parties who want to participate in bringing this change to their congregation. According to Baltimore Hebrew Congregation's exemplar congregational information:

> "Leadership has to be a part of the policy making for inclusion. The committee needs to include individuals with disabilities and family members, as well as those who have expertise in developing accessible programming. The committee has reviewed other congregational programs and has acted on congregants' requests for accommodations for individuals with special needs."[124]

These dedicated people at Baltimore Hebrew Congregation and countless other congregations around the country have heeded the call to become more inclusive.

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[123] "Introduction to the Disabilities Inclusion Learning Center," Disabilities Inclusion Learning Center, November 20, 2014, accessed November 22, 2015, http://disabilitiesinclusion.org/session/introduction-to-the-disabilities-inclusion-learning-center/.

[124] "Exemplar Congregation - Baltimore Hebrew Congregation," Disabilities Inclusion Learning Center, October 25, 2015, accessed November 12, 2015, http://disabilitiesinclusion.org/exemplar-congregations/baltimore-hebrew-congregation/.

Inclusion sometimes takes the form of making changes to a building's physical structure, altering the way that religious school is run, or can be present by bringing in outside organizations to work with the congregation as a first step toward becoming more inclusive.

Inclusions committees are, at their core, focused on the inclusion of people with disabilities. Therefore, most congregations want to ensure that people with disabilities are included on the committee. Parents of people with special needs, particularly children and adolescents, primarily represent this community on the inclusion committee. In some instances, the chair of the committee has a disability[125] and in other instances people from the special needs community do not respond to the call to be on the committee, and so the committee does not have representation from that community.

One of the recurring challenges regarding inclusion is finding funding for these projects and initiatives. Interestingly, while many of the congregations interviewed mentioned money as a challenge for providing inclusion programs, the exemplar congregations from the URJ's Disabilities Learning Center did not. Several of these exemplar congregations have been able to find funding internally, either from discretionary funds or from various operating budgets. They have also been about to apply for and receive grants. Additionally, private donors have helped to significantly lower the cost of these advances. Congregations that have been working for a long time to improve the physical accessibility of their buildings have

[125] "Exemplar Congregation - Congregation Sha'aray Shalom," Disabilities Inclusion Learning Center, October 29, 2015, accessed November 12, 2015, http://disabilitiesinclusion.org/exemplar-congregations/congregation-shaaray-shalom/.

often built these costs into the capital campaigns and fundraising that they have done for the redesign of their buildings.[126]

Some of the most obvious places crying out for inclusion are congregational supplementary schools, both religious and Hebrew schools. While inclusionary efforts are generally required across the board in congregations, educational spaces tend to be where people are most acutely aware of the need for improved inclusion practices. This first begins with the congregation recognizing, in writing, the necessity for inclusion within their schools. Congregation Rodeph Sholom of New York shares in their vision statement:

> "We are a diverse, inclusive and welcoming community, with members at many different stages of their Jewish journeys…CRS has long had a strong commitment to those with special needs, providing special needs worship services and educational opportunities, accessible buildings, and other accommodations. We are proud of our ability to provide all families and children the opportunity to worship and learn together in an accessible, interactive, and sensitive environment. Our vision involves not just inclusion, but active inclusion; not just diversity, but embracing diversity; not just welcoming, but engaging everyone in the Jewish community as unique and worthy individuals."[127]

There are also congregations with a written inclusion policy specifically for the religious school, and it is most often found in the parent handbook. Temple Shaaray Tefila of New York has a religious school inclusion policy:

> "Temple Shaaray Tefila's religious school is dedicated to meeting the needs of each one of our students, including those children with learning challenges. In our tradition,

[126] "Exemplar Congregation - Temple Isaiah," Disabilities Inclusion Learning Center, October 29, 2014, accessed November 13, 2015, http://disabilitiesinclusion.org/exemplar-congregations/temple-isaiah/.
[127] "Our Vision," Congregation Rodeph Sholom, accessed October 31, 2015, https://rodephsholom.org/about-us/our-vision/.

> Moses experienced difficulties with speech and language production. Isaac had visual challenges, Jacob had emotional issues regarding his family. We welcome all students to learn in our religious school and will work to provide a nurturing place for them here at Shaaray Tefila. Parents are urged to work closely with the school staff to make the learning experience a positive one for all involved."[128]

These inclusion policies are the first step in indicating to families that congregations welcome having students with various special need levels participate in their learning communities. Communities can effectively reach families looking to find a new congregation by posting information in easy to find locations on their website or in promotional handouts, and in a very direct way state that the congregation is an inclusive community. While written inclusion policies are not yet common for congregational supplementary schools, they are gaining popularity as families look for congregations prioritizing inclusion, particularly in education.

As religious schools work to become more inclusive, they must determine what types of students with disabilities they best can serve. On the flip side, they must also determine whether, for any reason, there are any students with disabilities who they cannot serve. What has been discovered during the process of interviewing congregations is that their religious schools generally follow one of two structural models: either they have completely integrated classes, or they have a separate special needs program that runs parallel to the mainstream school. Congregations that have completely integrated classes have been much less able to integrate their students with special needs. In the classroom settings, most students have minor cognitive, learning, or emotional issues. Very few students have more

[128] Connie Heymann, "Interview With Temple Shaaray Tefila," telephone interview by author, November 2, 2015.

severe physical disabilities such as paralysis. These classes may include students with ADD/ADHD, dyslexia, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and other diagnosed learning disabilities. Generally speaking, the students enrolled in these programs are able to function in a mainstream setting with minimal additional support, and do not require one-on-one attention.

Schools with a parallel track of separate special needs programming are able to accommodate more severe disabilities, although even these programs are limited in the types of special need students that they are able to accommodate. Parallel tracks are separate, self-contained classes run specifically for students with special needs. In these classes, there are often smaller teacher to student ratios. The teaching techniques may differ, and the pace of the class may be slower than in the mainstream classes. These programs tend to be fluid so they can be responsive to differing needs, and are dependent on the congregation and upon the needs of the participants. Congregation Shir Ha-Ma'alot of Irvine, California has created a program called Kesher, which is, "…designed to individualize the learning experience for any child who needs it. In some cases, this is individual Hebrew tutoring, or more advanced materials, or even just a quiet place to sit out an over-stimulating event."[129] Rodeph Sholom in New York created the Steinman Program to allow students with more needs to engage in Jewish learning opportunities. These are for students who during the day might find themselves in specialty schools, but

[129] "Exemplar Congregation - Congregation Shir Ha-Ma'alot," Disabilities Inclusion Learning Center, November 12, 2014, accessed November 15, 2015, http://disabilitiesinclusion.org/exemplar-congregations/congregation-shir-ha-maalot/.

have the potential to be mainstreamed.[130] That is, these students have more educational needs, but they are not so severe that they cannot function in a small classroom environment. In schools with these parallel educational tracks, special education instructors who understand the methodology for working with students with special needs, generally run the programs. Programs like Kesher and the Steinman program tend to be fluid in terms of their enrollment, allowing students to move either to the mainstream classes or from the mainstream classes throughout the year as deemed necessary by the parents and educators.

There is a need for the classes in more congregations than where they currently exist. The decision for whether or not to run these types of classes often depends on whether one of the buildings has adequate space and whether the congregation has the funding. The monetary resources required for these types of classrooms can be quite costly, especially if there is more than one class in a congregation. Expenditures can include: a teacher's salary; extra training for the teacher and other staff who may be present in the classroom; special tools to help with the student's learning; and any other materials necessary for a self-contained class. If a congregation is not able to find funding, which usually comes from a private donor invested in this cause, most often they cannot run a self-contained classroom.

For schools unable to create their own parallel track, there may be opportunities to work with local special needs organizations. For example, Temple Beth-El of Northbrook, IL has chosen to partner with Keseht, a local organization

[130] "Interview with Congregation Rodeph Sholom," telephone interview by author, November 12, 2015.

that has a school that works exclusively with people with disabilities and special needs. They have brought in the Keshet staff for professional development for the Temple Beth-El staff and students:

> "And, as of next school year, we will be sharing a Sunday school classroom with Keshet. It will be housed in TBE's building, but will utilize a Keshet teacher, TBE madrichim, and any students in the community, member or not, in grades 3-5 who may benefit from this class."[131]

By forming a creative partnership with another organization in the community already equipped to serve this need, congregations can expand the their options integrating people with disabilities in their religious and educational programming.

Yet another option is for congregations to run family education programs. In an educational environment, sometimes children respond better if they are in the presence of their parents. A class augmented with this sort of parental support can be structured to meet all of the requirements for children wishing to become b'nai mitzvah and still allow them to be successful in religious school.[132] Family education programs are not only beneficial for the child with special needs, but for the entire family. They create learning environments in which every person in the family has an opportunity to shine and show off their strengths in an educational setting. This can be particularly important for the siblings of children with special needs; providing family education allows time for the family to focus on all of the children together.

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[131] "Exemplar Congregation - Temple Beth-El," Disabilities Inclusion Learning Center, September 21, 2015, accessed November 16, 2015, http://disabilitiesinclusion.org/exemplar-congregations/temple-beth-el-northbrook-il/.

[132] Connie Heymann

Alternatively, synagogues are now beginning to hire inclusion coordinators or other classroom management staff. These people generally have a degree in social work or special education and experience working with religious school aged children. Inclusion coordinators work in conjunction with educators, teachers, and students to ensure that the children receive the best education possible. The inclusion coordinator helps the students and teachers, providing necessary support in all areas of supplementary education and helping the teachers to find whatever tools necessary to educate their students.

There are many ways that a coordinator may go about providing such support. At Temple Beth Shalom of Needham, MA, they have hired a Learning Specialist. This person floats through the classrooms to observe students and teachers and then discusses students' individual plans or classroom action plans. If an intervention with a student is necessary, the learning specialist usually works with the student on strategies to increase their success in the classroom. Additionally, the Learning Specialist is in contact with parents, working with them to coordinate their child's successful education in religious school.[133] In the future, if more students have diagnoses affecting their learning, a greater number of synagogues will likely choose to employ an inclusion coordinator. Someone on the educational staff should ensure that there is always a person employed by the congregation who knows how to work with special needs students and knows how to create various strategies that can help them be successful during their tenure at the religious school.

[133] "Interview with Temple Beth Shalom," telephone interview by author, November 16, 2015.

As religious schools continue to work and adapt their programs to include students with special needs, they learn about best practices for inclusion. Generally, one of the most important best practices is not to make assumptions about any child or their family. Each child and their needs is different, and no two children are the same, even when they share an identical diagnosis . It is important to elicit an much information as possible from the parents. This not only allows them to feel heard, but also ensures that the school is receiving the best information to help that child be successful. By asking parents and their children what support they need to be successful, congregations will show that their true willingness to work with each individual.[134]

For congregations associated preschools, a best practice is to work with preschool teachers to help students transition to the religious school's kindergarten. This is important for every child, but particularly for those with special needs. Transitions can be difficult and scary, and any way people can ease a child's transition should be included in their education plan. Temple Beth Ami of Rockville, MD, hired a developmental support coordinator who not only works with the preschool staff, but also runs trainings for the religious school teachers and madrichim. This has allowed her to provide training that may apply to specific students who will enroll in upcoming religious school classes. The coordinator also works closely with the educator of the religious school, providing information about

[134] Rabbi Ben Spratt.

strategies that were developed in preschools that can be carried over to the religious school.[135]

Some congregations have developed the best practice of not focusing on students' retention of information but on placing an emphasis on the formation of the individual. That is to say, teachers concentrate on teaching the lessons and values students need to learn to be active participants in the Jewish religion and culture. In taking the focus away from the acquisition of knowledge, disabilities that are more prominent when trying to gain this knowledge may not be as evident.[136] This may allow students to be more successful in the religious school. Since there is a lack of focus on academics, students who struggle with learning-based disabilities may be able to perform on an equal level with their peers. That is not to say that nothing that is covered within the religious school is academic. Rather, there is a de-emphasis placed on achievement and proof of knowledge acquisition.

Many congregations use one-on-one tutoring to work with Hebrew students. Depending on the congregation, tutoring may be available to all students,[137] or it may only be open to students with disabilities or special needs.[138] Since the tutoring is one-on-one each, a student will have an individualized learning plan tailored to his or her needs. Tutors can adjust the speed and style of education based on what works best for each student. Instead of pulling a child out of the classroom to work on Hebrew, which makes students with learning and cognitive disabilities feel

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[135] Paula Sayag, "Interview with Temple Beth Ami," telephone interview by author, November 16, 2016.
[136] Rabbi Josh Beraha, "Interview with Temple Micah," telephone interview by author, November 5, 2015.
[137] Rabbi Josh Beraha.
[138] Connie Heymann.

singled out, a tutoring system provides the child a more private and individualized educational space to work on their learning. Therefore, they are not isolated or picked on for needing to learn in a different style.

Congregations creating accommodations not only for students in religious school, but also for those people wishing to become bar or bat mitzvah. Again, the accommodations look different at each congregation. For most, the bar or bat mitzvah is customized to meet the needs of the child, whether that means reading the Torah portion in English, changing the time or length of the service, or significantly altering how they participate in the service.[139] These days, it is fairly common to see congregations making accommodations for b'nai mitzvah students regardless of whether they have special needs or not. However, congregations are more open to implementing greater accommodations for students with a known disability. A sampling of interviews with exemplar congregations reveals that congregations are quite willing to make accommodations for students wanting to become bar or bat mitzvah, and that there are very few barriers to achieving this for any willing adolescent. Congregants are happy to meet students and families where they are, so they can celebrate this joyous milestone together.

Some congregations such as Rodeph Sholom have taken this a step further by creating an entire program for people with more severe special needs who want to become bar or bat mitzvah. This program is for students who are unable to be in a mainstream classroom or a self-contained classroom. The Shirenu B'nai Mitzvah Program began about five years ago as a "commitment to a multi-year journey with

[139] "Exemplar Congregation - Temple Isaiah."

families, regardless of what their need may be."[140] The entry point for this program is fourth grade and includes weekly sessions with a special needs educator, as well as bi-weekly meetings with a member of the clergy. Together, everyone develops an individualized learning plan meant to enhance the Jewish growth and journey of that child.[141]

There are many ways students with special needs can be accommodated within a religious school setting, although these initiatives are not without their challenges. However, it can be easy to make excuses for why a congregation cannot incorporate these accommodations and programs into their religious schools. Whether the lack is because of the cost, staffing, or connection to the families, if there is a need and a vision for creating these programs, then there is certainly a way to do it.[142] Success does not happen over night; it occurs by taking small steps that eventually turn in to giant leaps.

Steps need to be taken in order to begin initiating inclusion in religious school. First, the educator or other senior staff should reach out to families known to have at least one child with a disability. At the same time, the senior staff should also search the community for "hidden" congregants, those with disabilities who are not yet known to the community. From there, relationships must be built so that these families and their children feel comfortable attending the religious school and know that their needs will be met to the best of the school's ability. The educator and the family should meet to determine what accommodations are necessary for

[140] Rabbi Ben Spratt.
[141] Rabbi Ben Spratt.
[142] Rabbi Ben Spratt.

the child(ren) to succeed in religious and Hebrew school. The senior staff should find resources within the congregation to help provide the necessary accommodations; they can come from professionals who work with special needs clients or professionals who have expertise in a field that would benefit a particular student. Last, but certainly not least, educators need to provide training to all of the staff who work in the religious school; this includes teachers, *madrichim*, and any other individual who will directly interact with students with disabilities or special needs. Inclusion training should begin before the current school year and be ongoing, and it should share specific tools to use in the classroom setting.

The challenges to providing a fully inclusive environment in a congregational supplementary school are unfortunately numerous, not least the costs associated with implementation: classrooms need to be made accessible to people with disabilities, tools for accommodations purchased, and extra staff hired. In particular, space is generally hard to come by when running a supplementary school and it simply may not be available to allow for separate, extra classes for students with special needs. Furthermore, if a congregation wants to create a separate classroom for students with more severe disabilities, there will be of course the added costs of teachers, aides and the use of space that the congregation may or may not have. Providing adequate staff training is also a challenge. In order for inclusion to be effective, the training must be ongoing to create awareness and sensitivity. If educators do not have a vision for inclusion in their schools, or if the teachers are resistant to learning about inclusion, the necessary change will not occur.

One of the most common struggles for congregational religious schools is accommodating a wide variety of special needs. Schools must turn students away because they does lack the proper staff or the necessary training. Generally speaking, schools want to provide a Jewish education for any student who wishes it. However, the right balance is required in order successfully do so. It could potentially be harmful to children with disabilities or special needs and their families if they began in religious school and then had to be counseled out because the school did not have the proper training to assist the child in their studies. Then, in the classroom teachers need to create an engaging educational environment. Some families may wish to have their child involved in mainstream education, and others may wish for their child to be in a separate class.

An additional struggle is the monetary requirement for funding special needs programming. Depending on the resources available and the type of programming that a congregation wishes to run, there is a range of costs involved, ranging from hiring an American Sign Language interpreter to finding the funds for separate special needs classes complete with multiple teachers and aids. If a congregation has space available, then that in itself provides no barrier to special needs programming. However, if a congregation wants to make it fully accessible and inclusionary, then expensive renovations to buildings may be necessary. Finding funding for these sorts of capital expenditures is not impossible, but preparing an ask for the right people or applying for the right grants requires planning and effort. However, inclusion programs don't always cost a lot of money. Congregants who are professionals that work with people with special needs may be willing to donate

time and resources to help the congregation become a more inclusive environment.[143]

Creating a sense of a community within a religious school with self-contained classrooms can be very challenging. One of the reasons parents send their children to religious school is for them to gain a sense of a community with their Jewish peers. However, when students are in a special needs classroom, this is less likely to happen. Students who are not or cannot be integrated into the rest of the student body may struggle to develop that sense of community. There are often times like snack time or *t'filot* when the students can all be together. However, if a student becomess easily overwhelmed in large groups or with loud noises, they may not even be able to participate.

Educators often struggle with parents who are reticent about sharing their children's diagnostic information with the school. Parents may be hesitant because in the past, confidential information was mishandled or previous educators did not know how to properly interpret and utilize it. Whatever the reason, many parents have become reluctant to share this type of information with religious schools. However, with the hiring of inclusion coordinators, families are now more willing to share this information with the school. Coordinators can read and properly interpret IEPs[144], 504 plans[145], and any other material accompanying a child's diagnosis, which makes families more comfortable sharing this information.

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[143] Rabbi Ben Spratt.

[144] An IEP is a Individualized Education Plan that qualifies students to receive special education services. The IEP includes details on the services that a student qualifies for, how the school will provide them and how progress will be measured.

[145] A 504 Plan is an academic tool to help children who have extra needs but do not qualify for an IEP. Students who have 504 plans tend to have diagnoses that limit a major life activity, such as a broken leg or a food allergy. Students with 504 plans do not receive special education services.

Additionally, when families know that there is staff solely dedicated to ensuring their child succeeds and that the proper supports are in place, they become more willing to share sensitive diagnostic information.[146]

Guaranteeing success of students in religious school begins with ensuring that teachers and *madrichim* are properly trained. Staff training specific to working with students with special needs typically takes place at one or two different times. One is beginning of the year general staff training, and the other is specific training for teachers on how to work with particular students who will be in their class. However, many congregations do not do any sort of staff training about working with students with special needs. In congregations with an inclusion coordinator, the coordinator or someone from the inclusion committee might come to do some of the staff training. This training often is very general and might pertain to what language to use with students, or focusing on the individual rather than on the diagnosis.[147] The training may also focus on different theories of education and different ways to engage students in the lessons at hand. For example, Temple Micah in Washington, D.C. teaches the responsive classroom technique, "…a way of teaching that emphasizes social, emotional, and academic growth in a strong and safe school community."[148] In other congregations, staff training topics might include, but are not limited to, differentiated instruction, inclusion as whole, or different learning styles. Educators or inclusion specialists may then meet with

[146] Sara Wittenberg.
[147] Rabbi Ben Spratt.
[148] https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/principles-and-practices-responsive-classroom

teachers individually to walk them through strategies that are known to be successful with particular students in their class.

Congregations acknowledge that while they are often doing great work, there is always more to be done such as growing the number of special needs classrooms that exist at the school or ensuring that all classrooms are accessible to all students. They may also develop more specific inclusion goals such as teaching about inclusion to the students or finding funding for new initiatives geared toward educating students with disabilities.

Inclusion in Reform Jewish Day Schools

Reform Jewish day schools, schools that belong to the PARDES network, are also working hard to do what they can to include students with special needs. The techniques and standards in place at day schools are different from public schools because of the nature of the school: it is full time rather than supplementary. Most supplementary schools do not give tests or have standards that students have to meet before moving up to the next grade. While they do not have to abide by all of the state laws, day schools are still required to have standards for students achievement and progress. While day schools are not legally bound by legislation like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), they have different standards from Religious schools for accommodating students with disabilities.

While many of the congregations are creating inclusion policies, the day schools interviewed for this research did not have any. This is in part because these schools are not special needs schools, but private Jewish day schools. However, it may also be because a written inclusion policy may attract more families with

special needs to the school, which the schools may not want or be unable to accommodate.

There is one school, the PARDES School in Phoenix, AZ, that currently crafting an inclusion policy. The suggestion came from a board member with the support of the head of school, because the number of students with learning challenges has drastically grown at the school. In the coming year, the school will write an inclusion policy dictating how they work with these students and what kinds and how many they are able to accommodate with the currently available resources.[149]

Most students with disabilities at the Reform Network of PARDES schools have mild learning or language disabilities, and only a few are students with Autism Spectrum Disorder or very minor cognitive disabilities. From the outset, schools know how many of what types of students they can accommodate. Students at these schools must be able handle general studies curricula, but also Jewish studies and Hebrew curricula. Many schools, such as the Davis Academy in Atlanta, GA, have an admissions process for anyone who is interested in attending the school. During the admissions process, administrators determine if a student will be able to handle the curriculum at their school.[150] In general, if there is a child with disabilities severe enough that they cannot succeed in a mainstream classroom, then they are not accepted at the school.

[149] "Interview with Pardes Jewish Day School," telephone interview by author, November 2, 2015.
[150] Michele Shear, "Interview with The Davis Academy," telephone interview by author, November 20, 2015.

If students are accepted into the Davis Academy and it is later discovered they have some sort of disability, there are various processes for accommodating that student with the available resources. For most of the schools, in order to put both accommodations and modifications in place, a student must have had some sort of formal assessment with a diagnosis. Following an official diagnosis, a number of different steps can be taken. For students who only need minimal support, teachers may work with resource teachers or administrators to develop effective classroom accommodations.

For students with greater needs, schools are creating their own unique programs that are not merely school within a school, but there are currently no such programs like this extant in any of the PARDES network of schools. In the past, there was the Amit Program at the Davis Academy, which was a separate entity housed within the Davis Academy. Students there were educated in separate classrooms, but joined the larger school at all school events and holiday celebrations. Unfortunately, the program is no longer in existence; it has been replaced by resource centers to help students.

The Davis Academy now has the Davis Learning Center, which was created after the dissolution of the Amit Program, and is predominantly for students with language-based learning disabilities. Students with a diagnosis may be required to enter this program as a condition of enrollment, or students can opt in if teachers and families deem it necessary. While there is an extra cost to the families on top of tuition, they can also receive financial aid to help cover the cost of the program. Students enrolled in the Davis Learning Center are pulled from their classes during a

two-hour Language Arts block to work with a special education teacher, rather than the homeroom or Language Arts teacher. Davis Learning Center students also attend a homework hour twice a week where teachers can help them stay on top of all of their schoolwork. The special education teachers also serve as the student's case manager so they can work with all aspects of the student's curriculum.[151]

The Leo Baeck Day School in Canada recently created a program called Bonim. Program teachers work one-on-one with individual students who are one or more grade levels below where they should be in either literacy and/or math for half an hour a day, four days a week. The program director is the liaison between the parents, the school, and the student services person. The director is also in contact with the teachers to determine how best to complement classroom learning. Students with disabilities or special needs break out from their mainstream classes to participate in the Bonim program, but they continue attending mainstream classes in the subjects in which they are already behind. They are generally pulled out during either their French or Hebrew time.[152]

Some schools do not have specific learning centers, but they find other ways to accommodate students. For example, the PARDES School provides full time aides for a few students, particularly those with Autism Spectrum Disorder. These students are intellectually able to handle the class material, but need some additional support with staying on task and processing the material. [153]

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[151] Michele Shear.
[152] Bev Gitter, "Interview With Leo Baeck Day School," telephone interview by author, November 4, 2015.
[153] Jill Kessler.

Within the classrooms of these PARDES schools, teachers can make many accommodations for students, regardless of whether they have a diagnosis. However, the schools many not make modifications unless the child has a diagnosis and an IEP or 504 Plan. "Accommodations" are changes to how the student learns the material, whereas "modifications" are changes to the material the student learns. The accommodations teachers make vary from class to class, and they can be anything from preferential seating to providing multi-sensory instruction. What principals and teachers are observing is that the accommodations made for children with special needs end up benefiting most of the students in the classroom. This is particularly evident when proficient teachers suc.cessfully differentiate their lesson plans and engage all types of learners in the lesson.

Some of these accommodations have even become best practices observed by administration and staff within the schools. Most of the best practices observed by the interviewees (who all worked within their school administrations) had to do with living out the Jewish values taught at the different schools. When they are interacting with students with special needs, the other students embody those values.[154] One such example of this comes from the PARDES School. There is a 7th grade student with autism who could not have a birthday party because he was unable to communicate or relate well enough with his peers. However, his class wanted to do something to celebrate his birthday. Unbeknownst to the teachers or administration, the class coordinated buying this student presents, decorating his desk, and providing a birthday cake. In a beautiful moment of connection, this

[154] Jill Kessler.

student was able to convey his excitement and joy to his classmates. "When you can give your students real world experience of what it means to show *kavod*, and that it means to take care of others, there is nothing better than that!"[155]

Schools have also found it to be a best practice to have open discussions about what it means to include all students. At the Stephen S. Wise School in Los Angeles, CA, every school year is assigned a theme. The current year's theme is "*ha'acher hu ani*- The other is me." Students therefore spend time engaged in conversations about ensuring a place for everyone in the school and about abroad acceptance of all students. While this theme does not specifically pertain to students with special needs, it does reinforce the idea of inclusion within the community, especially of those people who are somehow different. [156]

While schools have made great strides in incorporating new ways to accommodate students with various learning disabilities, the schools still face many challenges regarding including and working with students with disabilities. One difficulty is finding the right time to provide extra support to a student who is struggling in one or more subject areas. In larger schools where multiple students may need support in the same subjects but at different times, it can be a problem coordinating their schedules with the available tutors. Additionally, the support person must not only work with students, but also find the time to meet with their teacher to ensure the best and most effective supports are in place.[157]

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[155] Jill Kessler.
[156] Tami Weiser, "Interview with Wise School," telephone interview by author, November 6, 2015.
[157] Bev Gitter.

Again, a challenge that is not unique to day schools is finding the funding to provide all of these extra supports to students. While schools would like to create more in-depth resource centers, or provide one-on-one aids and other resources so that students with other types of disabilities may attend the schools.,[158] Jewish day schools that are not financially strong already may falter under the additional financial burden.

Importantly, one of the greatest regrets for Reform Jewish day schools is having to turn away students with special needs or disabilities because they are not equipped to accommodate them. None of these schools have special education credentials, although some of their teachers may. In these situations, there are many disabilities that the schools cannot accommodate, no matter how much the parents and administration might want that student to attend. Unfortunately, the schools my deny families who are seeking a Jewish education. When schools discover that a student's disabilities are more severe than the school can handle, they may have to counsel that child out of the school; this usually happens by second or third grade.[159] Counseling a person out of the program only happens after extensive work with the teachers, students and families. For some students, there is no way to create an environment in which they could be successful at that particular school.

All of the Reform Jewish day schools provide professional development for staff and teachers working with students with special needs and disabilities. Training happens in a number of different ways. For some schools, teachers travel to workshops and conferences focusing on these topics. Teachers might rotate going to

[158] Jill Kessler.
[159] Tami Weiser.

these conferences, as everyone generally has at least one student with some challenges in their class.[160] Schools might also provide in-service professional development sessions focusing on various aspects of working with children with disabilities. This training is particularly important for the teachers because they generallyare not licensed in special education. Schools cannot assume that teachers know how to implement accommodations properly in their classrooms, so they need to take the time to ensure that teachers learn the right techniques to accommodate student's needs.[161]

Just as schools train their teachers to educate future generations of Reform Jews, so too do they look to the future of working with students with disabilities. For schools like the PARDES School that do not yet have a resource room, one of the goals is to create this type of space at the school. This would open up many doors to helping even more students struggling to achieve success there.[162]

For other schools like the Stephen S. Wise School, the dream is to open up a school within a school for students with more severe needs. There is a recognized need for this type of school within the Los Angeles community, as there is no Jewish school for students with more severe disabilities in the greater metropolitan area. The goal is a school housed on the campus of the current school so that students can integrate with the typical students for holidays and other school events.[163]

[160] Tami Weiser.
[161] Jill Kessler.
[162] Jill Kessler.
[163] Tami Weiser.

Inclusion in URJ Summer Camps

Perhaps the most unique Jewish educational environment for children and adolescents are the Reform Jewish overnight summer camps. An artificial environment, filled with Jewish educational opportunities and free from most technology, allows campers and staff to have an experience solely with their Jewish peers 24/7 for anywhere from a few days to eight weeks. Here, campers leave their families for a few days to a few months to go live with other individuals the same age, creating an intentional Jewish community. Camps do their best to train young college age adults as counselors to children that they may not have ever met. As the groups are always together, interactions are magnified due to the close constant contact; in the life of camp, a day can be like a month and a month like a day. Consequently, when there are campers with special needs and disabilities, their behaviors are often also magnified because of the camp environment's intensity.

Most of the URJ camps that were interviewed did not have a specific written inclusion policy. The one exception to this was Camp Harlam. In a document entitled "An Open & Safe Space" Camp Harlam writes,

> "The Camp Harlam community is established and reinforced as a sacred *Kehillah* (community). In keeping with the camp's long-established tenets to be a true and holy Reform Jewish community, our camp and its leaders have recommitted themselves to making sure that our camp is a true reflection of Today's families: we are all individuals of different sizes, different shapes, with different feelings and of different beliefs. But for all that are part of this special place, we are dedicated to making Camp Harlam an environment for them that will be open, understanding, accepting and where bias and prejudice will not be tolerated."[164]

[164] *An Open & Safe Environment* (Bala Cynwyd, PA: URJ Camp Harlam, 2015).

They further elaborate on this on their "Camper Care and Inclusion at Camp Harlam Page" where it states that, "In keeping with the mission and core values of our camp, and to further our commitment to an open & safe community, Camp Harlam seeks to provide a meaningful Jewish Camp experience to children that are part of the Jewish community, regardless of need."[165]

The URJ camps serve a wide array of campers with special needs and disabilities. None of the camps are designated special needs camps, but they are camps that may have campers with special needs. They are able to serve different populations of campers, depending on the camp and its location. A camp's location often determines whether it can be made ADA accessible and if there are particular groups of campers the camp cannot accommodate. All of the camps are able to accommodate campers with ADD/ADHD, depression, and severe anxiety, as well as campers with Autism Spectrum Disorder. They are also generally able to accommodate campers with special dietary needs or mental health disorders, provided they are in a "good place" when they arrive at camp. Some camps like Crane Lake Camp,[166] which is located on the side of a mountain, are not able to accommodate campers with physical disabilities because of the surrounding terrain. However, other camps such as Henry S. Jacobs Camp[167] and Eisner Camp[168] are able

[165] "Camper Care & Inclusion," URJ Camp Harlam, accessed November 12, 2015, http://harlam.urjcamps.org/about/camper_care_and_inclusion/.
[166] Debby Shriber, MSW, "Interview with URJ Crane Lake Camp," telephone interview by author, November 18, 2015.
[167] Becci Jacobs, "Interview With URJ Henry S. Jaobs Camp," telephone interview by author, November 11, 2015.
[168] Louis Bordman, "Interview With URJ Eisner Camp," telephone interview by author, November 13, 2015.

to accommodate campers with physical disabilities because their buildings have been built to accommodate these needs.

It is interesting to note that as some of the specialty camps[169] begin to grow, programs such as 6 Points Sports Academy have not encountered the same number of campers with special needs as other more general camps have. The camp director posited that this is because athletes self-select, and people with more severe disabilities may be unable to participate in these athletic programs.[170] However, this particular camp is only in its infancy, and in the coming years, as the camp continues to grow, an increasing number of campers with special needs may choose to attend the camp.

Some camps have the resources to make a variety of accommodations to fit the needs of different campers. In some situations, campers known to need extra attention might be paired with one-on-one aids or shadows throughout the session. At Jacobs Camp, counselors are frequently hired for the summer specifically to be shadows for a camper with special needs. When this happens, a number of conversations take place with the counselor, the family, and the camper, so that the camp can determine the best pairings to facilitate a successful summer for that camper.[171] There are camps that do not offer one-on-one shadows, mostly because they do not have the extra space to accommodate additional staff. However, in those camps, the unit heads and assistant unit heads provide extra support for cabins or

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[169] The Foundation for Jewish Camp has now funded a number of camps through their specialty camp incubator programs. Camps have three years to plan and open a specialty camp. These camps have included URJ Six Points Sports, Eden Village Camp and Camp Zeke.
[170] Alan Friedman, "Interview with URJ 6 Points Sports Academy," telephone interview by author, November 10, 2015.
[171] Becci Jacobs.

particular campers as needed.[172] Campers who work with therapists at home to help with behavioral, mental health or other needs can often able to continue those sessions while at camp. It is not uncommon to have at least one camper who takes time out of their day to speak with their therapist. The continued contact helps to the campers stay on track for a successful summer.[173] Camps understand that if there are systems in place at the child's home that allow them to be successful there, then it does not make sense for the systems to be removed for the summer.

There are other accommodations that might be made for a particular camper, but actually benefit the entire cabin or unit. One example is creating visual schedules for each of the cabins in the camp. Campers who need a schedule are empowered by knowing their daily schedule, but the schedule acts as a helpful reminder for everyone in the cabin about what activity they have next, or where they will be throughout the day.[174]

At Camp Harlam this past summer, one of the accommodations implemented across camp was a "chill zone." This was a roving area where self-identified campers could take a break from activities if they were having a hard time or were over-stimulated. This "chill zone" included a bean-less "beanbag" chair, water, snacks, coloring pages, fidget toys, and space to relax and talk to an inclusion coordinator or just sit in silence.[175]

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[172] Lori Zlotoff, MSW, "Interview with URJ Camp Harlam," telephone interview by author, November 5, 2015.
[173] Debby Shriber.
[174] Debby Shriber.
[175] Lori Zlotoff.

According to interviews and research, it is becoming common practice for URJ camps to hire an inclusion coordinator, someone with a background in either social work or special education. For some camps, this person works only during the summer months, but for others the position is year-round. Some camps have incorporated this position into an already existing role, such as an assistant director position. The idea of an inclusion coordinator is to "…make sure that every camper is happy, healthy, safe an successful while they are at camp."[176] Depending on the camp's size and funding, there may be just the inclusion coordinator, or there may be an entire camper care team.

One of the benefits of a dedicated inclusion coordinator or team is that parents are more comfortable sharing more information with the camps about their child's particular needs. Parents recognize that these specialists understand the content of the forms they bring and also the confidentiality necessary. Additionally, inclusion coordinators generally maintain contact with parents throughout the year once they have registered their child for camp. Therefore, the coordinators are able to not only build a relationship with the family but also gain good insight into the camper's requirements to be successful at camp.[177] Inclusion coordinators generally share only what information is really necessary with counselors or unit heads about any given camper. Just like at religious schools, some parents harbor the unfortunate belief that if their child is in a new environment, they will not display the same behaviors that they have at home. This ultimately does the camper a great disservice, because the camp staff is left scrambling to find strategies that works for

[176] Becci Jacobs.
[177] Debby Shriber.

that particular camper. This may also negatively impact the experience of the camper, who may perceive that his or her staff are not equipped with the proper tools to help them achieve success at camp.

During the summer, the inclusion specialist or camper care team is in charge of working with the campers with special needs identified prior to camp as well as those not discovered until they arrived at camp. Staff might talk through different situations with counselors in order to give them tools to work with their campers. If necessary, they will also talk with campers to determine what they need in order to enjoy their time at camp.

Inclusion at overnight Jewish camps is clearly not just something that is a concern movement wide, but one with which Jewish organizations overall are concerned. The Foundation for Jewish Camp, an organization that "…aspires to elevate the field of Jewish camp, conferring proper recognition and granting appropriate support to expand its impact across our community, so that camp can e a critical element of every Jewish young person's education,"[178] has partnered with the Ruderman Family Foundation in order to create the FJC Ruderman Inclusion Initiative. This initiative was created based on the a 2012-2013 study that was released (and discussed in Chapter 2). The initiative seeks to:

> "…enable selected camps to hire and train new inclusion coordinators in order to increase the number of children with disabilities participating in their camps and provide intensive in-person training and mentorship from the FJC …Training will be focused on universal design, developing strategies to manage camper behaviors and creating

[178] "Mission & Vision | FJC," Foundation For Jewish Camp, accessed November 30, 2015, http://www.jewishcamp.org/mission-vision.

cooperative learning for all dampers."[179]

While this initiative is not movement-specific, one of the camps within the URJ did receive this grant. Camp Harlam now has an inclusion coordinator who is part-time during the year and full-time during the summer. The inclusion coordinator leads the camper care team made up of social workers, special education teachers, psychologists, and other professional adults who can bring an area of expertise around mental health and the well-being of children to camp .[180] In addition, the role of the inclusion coordinator is to evaluate and analyze camper applications, reach out to families throughout the year, and support those campers during the summer.[181] The grant funding this position lasts three years, with the funding decreasing every year. The goal is that by the end of the third year, camps are able to completely fund this position independent of the JFC grant. In return, the inclusion coordinators send data on the campers that they had identified as needing support throughout the summer. This data will help the FJC understand what is necessary to create a meaningful increase in the number of campers with disabilities attending the camp.[182]

The addition of inclusion coordinators has allowed URJ camps to begin developing best practices that include their campers fullest extent possible during their time at camp. One of the most important best practices is year-round communication instead of only during the summer. Ongoing interactions with families is key to a meaningful camp experience for their child. Although it is not

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[179] "FJC Ruderman Inclusion Initiative | FJC," Foundation For Jewish Camp, accessed November 30, 2015, http://www.jewishcamp.org/fjc-ruderman-inclusion-initiative.
[180] Lori Zlotoff.
[181] Lori Zlotoff.
[182] Lori Zlotoff.

always the case, frequent communication has helped to assuage many families' fears and misconceptions about the types of accommodations available for their child when at camp. It also helps campers understand how they will fit into the camp environment. Making a parent feel like their child is already well-known to the camp staff prior to the summer is key in making sure a camper has a successful summer.[183]

Another best practice has become utilizing family members at camp to help include a child. For example, if there is a child is known to have had challenges in the past, the camp may have an older sibling or cousin speak with the cabin about the camper's challenges and share how they can be in community with that camper. When an older camper initiates the conversation, they can use language the other campers will understand while acting as a role model for how older campers work with this younger camper , setting the precedent for how that cabin should behave.[184]

During the summer campers may get overwhelmed. Creating spaces and practices like the "chill zone" and "take five" provide a safe space for campers when they need to take time away from their regularly scheduled activities. The practice of "take five" allows a camper to take time to cool-down, without having staff in their face trying to assess the situation.[185] This is important for not only the campers but also for the staff. Staff learn the value of sitting with the silence and allowing people to process a situation before jumping in to conversation.

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[183] Becci Jacobs.
[184] Lori Zlotoff.
[185] Debby Shriber.

Interestingly, camps generally have been the only place where inclusion is overtly discussed with campers, perhaps because of the intense nature of camp or the overarching goals of camp. Whatever the reason, many camps are beginning to run inclusion programs for their campers, in the hopes of allowing the campers to take ownership of the experiences that they are creating with fellow campers with special needs. At Camp Jacobs, a successful program about labeling and inclusion ran during staff week.[186] It was then modified and run for the campers in seventh grade and above. They were able to talk with one another about what inclusion mean to them and understand what it means to be an inclusive community.

Inclusion is at work when a child with a disability is able to take ownership of the conversation; they can explain to their peers why they have particular behaviors and what help they might need from their cabin or unit mates.[187] The nature of a conversation changes when the person with a disability can talk and explain their perspective, rather than having them absent from the conversation while the rest of the cabin discuss that person's disability.

Unfortunately, as previously noted, with the successes of inclusion at camp also come challenges. A common theme among the camp directors, assistant directors and inclusion coordinators was having to draw a line with regards to who can successfully participate in camp, or not. Some campers' disabilties or needs may be too severe a need the camp may be ubable to accommodated them even with a one-on-one shadow. Some camps have rules about which behaviors they will not

[186] Becci Jacobs.
[187] Becci Jacobs.

allow, such as running away or hitting themselves or others.[188] When a camper runs away, it often creates a scenario in which a cabin full of campers is left unattended or in the care of a counselor who is not their own. For hitters, the line is drawn at physical violence towards themselves or another camper. These behaviors create an unsafe environment for all people, which goes against the mission of the camp. Camps try to prevent these situations by understanding the campers before they come to camp. The worst thing is having to send a camper home during a session, which not only makes the camper and their family feel like a failure, but also the camp staff who were not able to accommodate this child.[189]

An unexpected challenge relating to working with special needs campers is learning how this one child's behavior affects the other campers. When there is a really difficult child in the cabin, that child will receive a great deal of attention and therefore is likely to return the next summer because they and their family enjoyed the amount of attention that that child received. However, the other campers who were not challenging are much less likely to return because their need for attention may have been overlooked due to the greater amount of attention required by the other camper.[190] Therefore the goal is to determine before the summer how to best support the campers with challenges so that they do not monopolize the staff's attention and negatively impact others.

Unfortunately, finding funding to provide more supports for campers with special needs is always difficult. Many camps would like to expand their camp to

[188] Debby Shriber.
[189] Louis Bordman.
[190] Louis Bordman.

serve campers with additional challenges and needs, such as those with physical disabilities. However, many of the camps are not built to accommodate these campers.[191] A large amount of money would be necessary to modify all of the buildings at camp for handicapped access. While camps may be able building access into the plans of new buildings that they are building, the cost of renovating the old ones is often prohibitive.[192] Finding funding for renovations can be impossible at a time when every organization is seeking money for new projects to increase their inclusivity.

A unique challenge to camps is accommodating campers with special needs as they get older and become the age of potential staff members. At some camps, this can particularly be problematic if the older age groups have a more fluid schedule. Campers, for whom a schedule is important, such as campers with Autism Spectrum Disorder, can really struggle in these older age groups. In these situations, the camp may not counsel these campers out, but the campers will generally phase themselves out because they are unable to tolerate the more fluid environment. Therefore, it also does not create a need to understand how positions on staff could be created for people with special needs.[193]

At these URJ camps, there are generally two different types of staff training provided. The first is general staff training, which occurs during the leadership week, as well as during the general staff week. This training often falls to the inclusion coordinators. Some camps are choosing to send their inclusion

[191] Lori Zlotoff.
[192] Lori Zlotoff.
[193] Becci Jacobs.

coordinators to receive extra training, either through the FJC grant or other opportunities. This allows the coordinators to bring back outside ideas and programs to implement during staff training. Specific staff training programs depend on who the inclusion coordinator is and what they deem most important for the upcoming summer. For example, last summer at Jacobs camp, the inclusion coordinator ran programs on seeing the child as a whole individual and not just as their diagnosis.[194]

Some camps are doing this type of general training during staff week, but they admit that they need to continue improving their efforts. Instead of doing a broad discussion on inclusion, they might focus on specific tools that the counselors can implement such as a visual calendar, or how to work with a camper with severe anxiety.[195] However, one trouble is that all of these programs are viewed as theoretical until they become practical; the staff may not really understand the training until they are in a situation requiring them to use their newly formed skills to work with a particular camper.[196]

Camp Harlam has taken this general staff training one step further. They have created a program called R.U.A.C.H.- Raising Understanding and Awareness of Campers at Harlam. This new initiative is comprised of a group of self-identified counselors who want more specific training and clinical supervision to work with campers with special needs. These staff members receive an 8-hour mental health and first aid training session through a nationally recognized program. In the case of

[194] Becci Jacobs.
[195] Debby Shriber.
[196] Debby Shriber.

one group who received training through the initiative, it worked out that there was approximately one trained counselor per bunk, and they were able to provide additional support to those campers who required extra attention.[197]

Eisner Camp and Crane Lake Camp chose to bring in an outside organization specializing in working with campers with special needs and disabilities to provide their inclusion training during the staff week. Staff participated in a variety of programs where they learned about general inclusion, as well as specific tools to work with designated populations of campers.[198] The main focus was not on the behaviors but the inclusion of those campers. The approach emphasizes thinking about working well with all children, and these techniques can be applied to typical campers or campers with special needs.[199]

Staff training specific to each unit or cabin happens at every camp. Commonly, the inclusion coordinator and the medical staff at camp will meet with the unit as well as individual cabins to discuss campers with special needs that they will be working with over the summer. It has become a best practice that the entire medical file is not shared with the cabin counselors, as it can be overwhelming to read and comprehend complex medical information. In some cases, even the diagnosis of the child will not be revealed. This can be beneficial to the camper because their staff is then not caught up by assumptions they may be making about how their campers will act. Everyone discusses strategies for working with that

[197] Lori Zlotoff.
[198] Louis Bordman.
[199] Louis Bordman.

child and what supports they can implement so that the campers have a successful and meaningful experience at camp.[200]

While URJ camps are doing wonderful things already in the field of inclusion, they still have a long way to go. Many have goals for the next few years. For camps lacking an inclusion coordinator, the goal is to hire a person in that capacity for at least the summer if not year-round. This would assign responsibilities for interactions with campers and families and help with placing more support for that camper during the summer. It would also provide a person in camp who could work with staff when scenarios arise that they were unprepared for.[201]

Camp administrative staff hears the voices of the staff members who say that they want and need more training on inclusion and working with campers with special needs. As the special needs population grows at camps, staff members desire more in-depth training to provide them with tools for working with different campers over the course of the summer. Camps are intent on improving and expanding the inclusion training that they already provide to help counselors more effectively work with their campers.[202]

Camps would also like to continue their inclusion programming for the campers. Planning for this type of programming is in the beginning stages at some camps, and the goal is to expand it in the coming year for campers of all ages. For some, this programming is specific to the middle school age, when bullying is

[200] Alan Friedman, Becci Jacobs.
[201] Alan Friedman.
[202] Debby Shriber.

rampant and campers could really benefit from inclusion programs.[203] Other camps project that all units will plan and implement at least one inclusion program per session that is not just for a specific cabin but the entire unit.[204]

Camps are on the right track to becoming more inclusive of a larger number of campers, but each camp also continues to improve their programming so that they can better serve this population. By training staff to better accommodate campers, they are allowing for an entirely new generation campers who in the past would have been exclusded from this classic Jewish experience.

Overall, congregations, day schools and overnight summer camps becoming more inclusive of the special needs and disabilities community. They are undertaking innovative programs to help their particular populations be as engaged as possible so they can serve the greatest number of participants possible. While there are still obstacles prohibiting these organizations from being fully inclusive, continued help and support from advocates in the field, as well as from the lay and professional leadership teams, will help organizations continue growing and expanding how they work with people with special needs and disabilities. These organizations are all working towards full inclusion, and with hard work, dedication, and the proper funding, they will be able to achieve these goals.

[203] Becci Jacobs.
[204] Lori Zlotoff.

Chapter 4 – Applying Inclusion To Congregational Classrooms

"Inclusion begins with presence."[205] At its core, inclusion is about how people interact with one another and ensuring that all people are able to participate in community life, regardless of ability level. Inclusion is particularly important within the synagogue, because as Isaiah 56:7 states "…my house shall be a house of prayer for all people."[206] The first step to ensuring a congregation is a house of prayer including every single person is for synagogue leaders to ask themselves who is missing at their events. More often than not, one of the populations absent is people with disabilities, or families in which there is a person with a disability. Acknowledging that a congregation can do more to be a welcoming presence to those in its community is an important first step toward inclusion.

Once congregations recognize they can do more to welcome people with special needs and disabilities, they can get to work formulating and implementing an inclusion policy. This means, among other things, renovating buildings, restrooms, and elevators to comply with ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Standards. However, only focusing on people with physical disabilities limits inclusion of other groups of people in the congregation. "Although an accessible building is essential, it is through interactions and relationships with others that welcome is truly communicated."[207] Warm hospitality can be displayed with a cheerful "*Shabbat Shalom*" or a kind inquiry into how they have been since last one

[205] Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub., 2007), pg. 28.
[206] Isaiah 56:7 ESVS.
[207] Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub., 2007), pg. 29.

saw them. But what makes a congregation truly welcoming and inclusive is cultivating a community wherein members reach out to one another, regardless of ability, and really get to know one another. "A welcoming congregation strives to weave people with and without disabilities into a common community."[208]

Unfortunately, people with disabilities frequently have different experiences than people who would be considered to be typical, or without special needs or disabilities. There are barriers, both seen and unseen, that exists within a congregation prohibiting individuals with disabilities and/or their families from experiencing the warmth and welcome of a congregation. These obstacles can even be so insurmountable that they push people away from the synagogue.

For people without disabilities, the most obvious barriers are architectural barriers, those obstacles that prevent people from being able to navigate or even visit the building. "Efforts toward improving physical accessibility must extend beyond the worship space to all aspects of shared congregational life."[209] Congregations must not improve the building's architecture, but they must also address attitudinal barriers within the community. Such impediments are often the most challenging, unseen by the majority of the community but noticed immediately the special needs community. Resistant attitudes are less noticeable barriers that can ultimately push an individual or family to seek out another worship experience. The treatment they experience may even drive them so far as to give up on being a part of an intentional Jewish community.

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[208] Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub., 2007), pg. 29.
[209] Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub., 2007), pg. 9.

> "People with disabilities and their families sometimes encounter words and actions – most likely well-intentioned – that they perceive to be demeaning, condescending, or paternalistic. People with disabilities often are attributed exceptional faith, described only as inspirational or a divine blessing, offered excessive attention or praise, extended charity in place of justice, or viewed primarily as the objects of ministry. Such responses fail to affirm the individuality, fights, needs, and contributions that every person has to offer and receive from the community of believers."[210]

Even well-intentioned people can be unintentionally patronizing towards someone who is different and not a member of the "in" group. These behaviors can be uncomfortable and difficult to address, but doing it will allow the congregation to be much more welcoming and hospitable to all who enter.

Not do individuals and families in the special needs community face barriers when they walk into the door of a synagogue, but congregations also confront their own internal obstacles when they earnestly attempt to include everyone in congregational life. The problems begin at the highest levels of congregational leadership and trickles down to the congregants. Conversations between the congregational leadership, including clergy and lay leaders, often lay bare uncertainty about how to integrate people with disabilities and address their special needs. Uncertainty leads to indecision, which leads to a lack of action. As Dr. Erik W. Carder writes in *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities*:

> "Faith and cognitive ability are equated in the minds of many Americans (Gaventa, 2005). When considering people with intellectual disabilities, people often wonder, 'Is faith really important to them?' or 'Can they really understand?' or 'Would they really get anything out of participating?' To assume that spirituality is irrelevant to a person simply on

[210] Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub., 2007), pg. 11.

> the basis of a label of intellectual disability or autism is among the deepest forms of prejudice. Someone's ability to thoroughly grasp complex theological doctrines or to express his or her beliefs in the same way as everyone else neither negates nor diminishes his or her faith."[211]

Inclusion begins with education and understanding. Acknowledging that people of all ability levels are able to have spiritual experiences allows congregations to begin exploring how best to accommodate them in worship and religious experiences. Individuals and families in the special needs community often find it next to impossible to find a congregation that accepts them with open arms; congregations do not always know how best to provide loving hospitality to or modify programs for all those wanting to join and participate in the community.

These inadvertent barriers are the unfortunate result of assumptions made without practical knowledge and understanding. Programs intended to be inclusive are designed without consulting someone from the special needs community, so they are assumed to be inclusive because, for example, they are in an easily accessible location. However, the planners do not often take into consideration the way that a program is publicized or how the program might prove too challenging for people with cognitive or physical disabilities. By engaging people from the special needs community with the lay leadership and program planners, communities can make appropriate changes to ensure everyone can fully participate. Small changes to long-running programs are a great first step in advancing inclusion in a community: this can include stating that a program has an open door policy for all who wish to participate, and creating variations in the

[211] Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub., 2007), pg. 12.

program so that people with different ability levels have different options for participating in a program.

Changing liturgical practices and worship experiences to make them more accessible is one of the most challenging tasks of inclusion for a congregation.For example, one factor may be the accessibility of the *bima*. Many congregations still have *bimot* that are much higher than floor level and do not have a ramp for people with physical disabilities to come up to light *Shabbat* candles, open the ark, or participate in leading part of the service. Congregations not financially able to build a ramp can create a space in front of the ark where people can participate in the service.

Another aspect is the printed liturgy itself. Large print *siddurim* or *siddurim* with Braille writing are often necessary for people with visual impairments. If congregations do have these accommodations, they should advertise their availability. Congregations should also train ushers to know where the special *siddurim* are located. People with hearing impairments may be able to follow along in the *siddur* but may have difficulty hearing the service leaders, even when they use a microphone, or they may not be able to hear at all. Communities can help by providing assistive listening devices for people needing help hearing the service. Additionally, sign-language interpreters can do a lot to make people with hearing impairments feel welcome in the community, and enable them to follow along and participate in the service. Even if no current community members require an interpreter, providing one at services and congregational programs will make a visual statement the congregation's inclusion policy. Synagogues may have built in

the cost of an ASL interpreter to their budget when they had someone who necessitated this service and have now continued to include it in their worship services even if there is no one with this need. Certainly barriers to equality still exist and will continue to exist, but by taking simple steps to alleviate these barriers, people within the special needs community will have a greater likelihood of finding a religious community that fits their needs.

Inclusion task forces and committees are yet another important way to facilitate a more inclusive congregational environment. Such a group should be comprised of a sampling of the community including, but not limited to clergy, educators, lay leaders, congregants with professional experience working with individuals with disabilities, and, most importantly, individuals with disabilities. This committee should not be one that assumes what people with disabilities need, but rather one that works with this part of the community to ensure the congregation truly becomes more inclusive.

Rabbi Harold Kushner teaches:

> "What is it that religion…can offer to people who are lonely, disabled, or not? Religion offers to redeem us from loneliness, by teaching us to see our neighbors as ourselves, to be away of their humanity, their fears and feelings. Religion offers community to our lonely human souls. The house of worship represents one place where the barriers fall and we all stand equal before God."[212]

Synagogues are one of the first places Jewish people have coherent religious memories. Generally speaking, people seek to find a place that is warm and

[212] Janet Miller. Rife and Ginny Thornburgh, *From Barriers to Bridges: A Community Action Guide For Congregations And People With Disabilities* (Washington, DC: National Organization on Disability, 1996), pg. 5.

welcoming to all, regardless of ability level. Congregations, and Judaism as a whole, has a responsibility to preach and teach equality. Each individual may practice Judaism in his or her own way; every person has the ability to acquire a sense of spirituality when they are welcomed into a Jewish community.

There is a Chasidic story that tells of a time when the Ba'al Shem Tov led a Shabbat service. A little boy always attended services at this congregation, but did not know any Hebrew. Although he did not know the language, he was so moved by the communal prayer experience that he began to pray. He said, "Adonai, I do not know the words that everyone is reciting. Please take these letters of the Alef-Bet and combine them to make the right words and prayers, that you may feel my gratitude for this experience." As the Ba'al Shem Tov heard what the boy had said, he said, "It is because of these profound, simple words that all of our prayers will be heard tonight."[213] Today's congregations can and should be doing exactly what the Ba'al Shem Tov did. They should be encouraging people, typical or not, to access prayers in the way that they find most fulfilling. For one person, it might be reciting the Alef-Bet, and for another, it might be drawing a picture or simply listening to the musical accompaniment to services.

As mentioned previously, inclusion is about much more than simply having an accessible building or extra trained staff. It is about creating an environment where the individual is always welcomed into the community and is not shunned or excluded because of their disability. This starts with learning how to speak to, and about, people with disabilities. Frequently referred to as "People First Language,"

[213] Chasidic Story, Source Unknown.

this way of speaking places the person before the disability. "For example, use the phrase *people with disabilities* rather than *disabled people*; *children with autism*, rather than *autistic,* and *adults with intellectual disabilities*, rather than *the mentally retarded*."[214] People must also be cognizant of the language used to describe a person's differences. Words like "disability" should be used in lieu of "handicap" and words such as "cripple," "idiot," and "retarded" should be avoided at all costs. People First Language also applies to situations where a person is referring to someone else who does not have a disability. The term "normal" should not be used to describe people without disabilities, as it implies that people with disabilities are not capable of leading a normal life. Rather, "the terms 'typical' or 'a child without a disability' are kinder and more accurate. Don't overdo such concepts as 'Well, we all have a disability of some kind.'"[215] This detracts from the fact that there is something different about that particular person. Instead, make a positive statement such as "We all are special in our own ways" or "Each of us has unique qualities that made us who we are." When conversing with a person with a disability, it is important to speak directly to that person, instead of to their parent, interpreter, or aid. If a person's speech is hard to understand, do not pretend to understand what they say. Rather, ask them politely to repeat themselves. If it is really challenging to understand them, one can always request that they write their comment out on

[214] Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub., 2007), pg. 63.
[215] Jim Pierson, *Exceptional Teaching: A Comprehensive Guide For Including Students With Disabilities* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Pub., 2002), pg. 51.

paper, or share it with someone who is more accustomed to their speech patterns.[216]

Along with People First Language, it is also important for congregations to educate congregants about how best to engage with someone who has a disability. Congregations can do this by addressing each person's own fears and prejudices when it comes to interacting with someone who might appear to be different. One of the most important ways to do that is to "Work to control reactions of personal discomfort when someone behaves in an unexpected way or looks somewhat different. Try to see the wholeness of spirit underneath and overcome the tendency to turn away or ignore the person with the disability."[217] People notice even slight negative reactions, and it can create an unwelcoming environment. When interacting with someone who clearly has a disability, a typical first response could be to assume they need help. Instead, congregants should be taught to ask the person if they need any assistance and ask how one best can support them. The person with a disability knows best what they need. Learning to be inclusive is not just congregant-specific; the clergy within the congregation also should learn it. Rabbis and cantors need to think about ways to make worship experiences and learning opportunities more accessible to everyone in the community. One way to do this is to create interactive worship experiences where everyone is invited to participate in the service somehow, whether by singing, playing an instrument or

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[216] Pierson, *Exceptional Teaching: A Comprehensive Guide For Including Students With Disabilities*, pg. 52.

[217] "Welcoming People With Disabilities Into Our House of Worship," ed. That All May Worship National Organization on Disability, in *V'Khol Banayikh: Jewish Education For All - A Jewish Special Needs Resource Guide*, ed. Sara Rubinow Simon, Linda Forrest, and Ellen Fishman (Los Angeles, CA.: Tora Aura Productions, 2008), pg. 89.

sharing a piece of writing. Another is to clearly state an open door policy that all people, regardless of their disabilities, are always welcome to attend worship services.

A good way to evaluate a community's inclusion practices is to try planning and implementing a program within the congregation. When an event is publicized, ask: Is the language used inclusive language? If not, think about including phrases like "'*Please call ahead if you and/or your child need special accommodations.'* These few words indicate to families whose children have special needs that they are welcome and the organizers want to meet the individuals' needs."[218] If individuals or families ask for special accommodations, provide them to the best ability of the program facilitator, so that all people who would like to participate in this event are aware that it is a fully inclusive event. Additionally, during event planning, ask whether all invitees will have any barriers to participating in the event. If the answer is yes, seek out help and resources to learn how best to modify the event so that everyone can take part in some way. Check to make sure that everyone understands instructions by providing both oral and written versions during the the program. If someone is coming with an aide, provide detailed instructions to the aid so that they can best facilitate the program for the person with whom they are working. It is also important to consider the ages and abilities of all known participants. Sometimes the best programs are simple ones where each person can play a small role in achieving a much larger goal.

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[218] Janice P. Alper and Linda Zimmerman, "Welcoming All Families," in *V'Khol Banayikh: Jewish Education For All - A Jewish Special Needs Resource Guide*, ed. Sara Rubinow Simon, Linda Forrest, and Ellen Fishman (Los Angeles, CA.: Tora Aura Productions, 2008), pg. 95.

One last way congregations can become more inclusive is to create a written inclusion policy, and/or to weave inclusion into the mission and vision statements. Temple Beth Ami of Rockville, MD has added inclusion into the introduction on the front page of their website. It reads,

> "Welcome to Temple Beth Ami! As a sacred community we strive to give all our members the keys to a rich, meaningful Jewish life. Our community welcomes all who are interested in learning about and participating in Jewish life. We are proud of our rich diversity and our accessibility to everyone. Here you can experience enriching worship services, participate in meaningful learning opportunities, enjoy memorable social and cultural events, and build cherished lifelong personal relationships. Together we share in happy and sad times, providing caring support to one another. Our clergy and staff make every effort to listen and respond so we can better meet the needs of all our membership. This is your Temple. We all welcome the opportunity to help you feel at home and connected to your congregational family."[219]

This makes a statement to the broader community that the congregation is open to anyone who wants to participate, regardless of their limitations. Such a public statement is often overlooked while so many other improvements are being put into place. However, the importance of a statement like this cannot be overstated. When families and individuals with special needs are looking for a congregation, they may look for a written policy stating that they will be welcomed from the outset. Congregation Rodeph Sholom of New York not only mention inclusion in its vision statement, but it has also incorporated it very clearly into the religious school's mission statement. Part of the vision statement reads,

> "We are a diverse, inclusive and welcoming community, with members at many different stages of their Jewish journeys…CRS has long had a strong commitment to those

[219] "Homepage," Temple Beth Ami, accessed December 15, 2015, http://www.bethami.org/.

> with special needs, providing special needs worship services and educational opportunities, accessible buildings, and other accommodations. We are proud of our ability to provide all families and children with the opportunity worship and learn together in an accessible, interactive, and sensitive environment. Our vision involves not just inclusion, but active inclusion; not just diversity, but embracing diversity; not just welcoming, but engaging everyone in the Jewish community as unique and worthy individuals."[220]

A section of the mission statement of Congregation Rodeph Sholom includes the following language:

> "…We educate and shape the next generation of Jews in an inclusive, engaging environment in which students of all abilities develop a strong Jewish identity through an understanding of Biblical texts (the Tanakh), Hebrew language, and Jewish history and culture. Our students learn to do ethical and ritual mitzvot and repair the world (tikkun olam) through participation in age-appropriate experiences with the goal of developing a lifelong connection with our congregation and the broader Jewish community. We nurture faith through prayer, music and creative expression. We encourage our children to form their own relationship with God, Torah and the people of Israel."[221]

While words in the text might imply that these families are welcome, creating a clear and direct public statement saves them from having to search through the language of the materials and having to interpret it. This is especially true for people who have trouble inferring the implications of a text. A black and white statement leaves no room for confusion about whether the congregation is an inclusive community.

The words "inclusion" and "accessibility" are often used interchangeably.. If congregations are more accessible, then they will be more inclusionary. Indeed, this

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[220] "Our Vision," Congregation Rodeph Sholom, accessed November 20, 2015, https://rodephsholom.org/about-us/our-vision/.
[221] "Parent Manual Philosophy & Goals," Congregation Rodeph Sholom, accessed November 22, 2015, https://rodephsholom.org/education/religious-school/parent-manual/.

is one way that that a congregation can make very visible changes that provides more opportunities for differently-abled people to access the synagogue building. Some of these changes, such as making the *bima* compliant with ADA regulations, or ensuring that there are appropriate ramps to enter the building, may seem cost prohibitive for congregations, at least in the short term. However, even if bigger architectural changes cannot be implemented, there are smaller, more cost-effective ways one can make a congregation more accessible and inclusive. If the synagogue does not already have them, signs can be placed around the building that indicate where there are handicapped-accessible bathrooms, ramps, and doorways. *Mezuzot* can also be moved to a height that is accessible both to people who are in wheelchairs and those who walk through the door. *Kippot* and *siddurim* can be placed at a level where everyone in the community can reach them.[222]

All of these accommodations can be translated into language that is related specifically to a synagogue's religious school and Hebrew school. If a synagogue is writing an inclusion policy for the congregation, then so too should the educator work with other leaders in the community to develop an inclusion policy for the supplementary school. A congregation's educator can work with the clergy and lay leadership to develop more inclusive programs. too. Improving inclusive practices may require hiring an inclusion coordinator and training teachers, staff, and students about how to best work with and teach students with varied needs. Additionally, it is recommended to, "Include a short section on 'Special Needs' in your school registration packet inquiring about a student's academic challenges or

[222] "Tips For Creating A More Inclusive Congregation: Some Examples Of Things We Can Do To Make Our Synagogues, Schools And Organizations More Accessible And Open To Those With Special Needs."

difficulties, their specific diagnostic label, and modifications/accommodations that can be made to aid the student. Assuring parents/guardians that this information will be kept confidential and used for the student's benefit"[223] will make it more likely that parents and guardians will share this informatio. Parents commonly withhold information about their child's special needs so as to have one area in their child's life where a label is not applied. Educators should work alongside parents to convey how beneficial sharing a child's information can be, especially in an educational setting. Sharing critical information about a child can only help create an environment in which the child has the best chance of success in the religious school and Hebrew school settings.

Regardless of whether parents share such critical information about their child, it is the job of the educator and the education staff find ways they can provide an inclusive environment for their students. But even when there are some children for whom inclusion is not the best option, the educator should work with the family to create alternative educational opportunities for that child so they can have a religious and Hebrew education. For children for whom inclusion is possible, the strategic planning begins with curriculum and program design, then moves to teachers and madrichim figuring out how best to work with individual students given their various needs. Redesigning a curriculum or a particular program is not something that can happen over night. As such, the congregation should start by considering the needs of each child, one child at a time, and then think about the

[223] Tips For Creating A More Inclusive Congregation: Some Examples Of Things We Can Do To Make Our Synagogues, Schools And Organizations More Accessible And Open To Those With Special Needs."

needs of the over program. This re-envisioning process often begins with a planning group:

> "Many congregations find it helpful to gather a planning group to begin assessing needs and next steps for including children with disabilities into their programming…This team should include at least one person who is very familiar with program offerings and activities for children and youth in the congregation…In addition, consider inviting members of the congregation who have experience working with children or adults with disabilities (e.g., special educators, therapists, health care workers), parents of children involved in the program, and a member of the congregation's leadership."[224]

This group provide a plethora of ideas and perspectives about how best to include all students in the school. One issue that quickly becomes apparent is that there is no one easy solution that works for all students, so the work is quite complex. Educators are advised to think about specific strategies that will work with particular individuals because nothing will work for all of the students in the class. When developing the planning group, it is best to draw on all of the resources that the congregation has to offer. That is to say, there may be people in the congregation with a special skill set or expertise that might be helpful with the inclusion project. Reaching out to them will not only be a benefit to the planning group, but will also newly engage these congregants in the community.

When developing or choosing a curriculum, the educator and the planning group (if applicable) should consider what they know about the children who will enrolled in the school for the next year. While they cannot know the needs of all

[224] Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub., 2007), pg. 92.

students, particularly the new ones, thinking about who is currently in the school will help the planning group shape the strongest and most productive curriculum:

> "By considering the needs of all children from the very outset, teachers and helpers will encounter less difficulty adapting lessons throughout the year. Select curricular materials that engage children in multiple ways and provide teachers numerous ideas for delivering lessons. Every time you design a lesson with children with disabilities in mind, it is likely to improve learning and engagement for every child."[225]

While the resources that to be found may not be directed specifically at students with disabilities, curricula and programmatic resources that provide a range of ideas for each lesson will allow teachers and *madrichim* to more easily adapt them to their particular class situation. One of the most important questions to ask is how a particular child best learns. For children in middle school and above, this is a conversation best had directly with them. While they may not know the terminology of Gardner's multiple intelligences or various learning styles, students may still be able to describe whether they learn better when teachers write something down on the board, when they add a movement to a lesson. or when hearing something presented. This is a good question to ask parents when they are enrolling their younger children in the school. "It is a good question to ask of any child, but particularly children with disabilities who may appear to learn differently."[226] Accommodations made for children with disabilities also generally benefit typical

[225] Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub., 2007), pg. 93.
[226] Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub., 2007), pg. 97.

children, even though they may not require the accommodation in order to learn the material.

When designing curricula, programs and lessons for students with special needs, it is important to keep in mind what challenges each student has. There are many symptoms or behaviors that students with special needs might display. To make things more complex, typical students may also display some of these characteristics and they may not be related at all to a diagnosis. Some characteristics of students with learning disabilities are:

> "attention deficits, hyperactivity, memory deficits, perceptual deficits, cognitive deficits, motor and coordination difficulties (fine and gross skills are often poor), general orientation (may have trouble distinguishing between left and right), emotional liability (may cry when laughing is more appropriate), may be immature for his age…"[227]

This may translate to the classroom in a number of different ways. No two students are exactly the same and therefore, no two students will display the exact same symptoms, even if they have the same diagnosis. What is important to stress to teachers is knowing how best to work with the student and what s/he needs in order to be successful in the classroom. This begins by creating a welcoming environment in the classroom, although it can mean something different to every student. For some, it may mean always writing the daily schedule on the board. For others, it may mean not being required to sit at a conventional table. And for yet others this may mean a classroom with minimal classroom noise.

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[227] Pierson, *Exceptional Teaching: A Comprehensive Guide For Including Students With Disabilities*, pg. 15.

One approach to creating the best classroom environment for all students is the using differentiated education. This style of education initially began as a way of providing more challenging material to gifted students. However, people soon realized that this teaching method was applicable to all students, regardless of need:

> "Based on this philosophy, a teacher recognizes and appreciates children's varied strengths and weaknesses and provides lessons that take them into account. In this manner the teacher is respectful of the children's abilities and provides learning activities that fully engage the children in the learning process."[228]

There are four main characteristics of differentiated education: 1. Teaching is driven by the concepts and principles of the subject; 2. Ongoing assessment is used throughout the curriculum; 3. Grouping of students is always flexible; and 4. The lessons are teacher-guided but not teacher-driven.

The teacher planning the lesson should plan it around a "what" question. What will the students know at the completion of this lesson? What is the takeaway that each student should have? Teachers should then think about the "how" of the lesson. How will the students learn the content? "The process of the lesson is the core of the lesson – the activities children do to help them learn the content."[229] This question is also the core of where differentiation takes place. In creating a lesson, teachers can determine multiple ways for a student to glean the same information. These creative ideas and outlets will give students different options learning the content of their class. In assessing the student's learning, there should always be

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[228] Sandy Miller-Jacobs, "Creating Inclusive Classrooms With Differentiated Instruction," in *V'Khol Banayikh: Jewish Education For All - A Jewish Special Needs Resource Guide*, ed. Sara Rubinow Simon, Linda Forrest, and Ellen Fishman (Los Angeles, CA.: Tora Aura Productions, 2008), pg. 213.
[229] Miller-Jacobs, "Creating Inclusive Classrooms With Differentiated Instruction," pg. 214.

some sort of product with tangible proof that the student can answer the "what" question. Again, here is a key opportunity for differentiation. While not every assessment needs to be a written or oral test, teachers can and should use creative license in developing them. There should be multiple ways for students to verify their knowledge of the lesson material. Differentiation can be difficult, particularly in religious and Hebrew schools, because it is not uncommon for the teachers lack a background in education. Teachers are often very passionate and knowledgeable individuals when it comes to the topics they are teaching, but they are not necessarily conversant in different methods teaching those topics. Therefore, educators and other trained individuals can work with these teachers to cultivate new knowledge and skillsets more conducive to inclusion.

Differentiated education can also foster inclusion within the classroom. "By offering learning activities that are geared to different learning styles and academic levels, the differentiated classroom offers students with special needs the opportunity to actively engage in learning and to succeed in mastering the content."[230] Students can take control of their own learning in a new ways not previously apparent or available.

Another method of creating an inclusive environment in the classroom is using cooperative learning, which is based on working with a *chevruta*, or partner. Each partner shares responsibility for the other's learning. In this way, the education is almost completely student led, as opposed to teacher led. Therefore, the students are learning in a way that is conducive to them. "Cooperative learning

[230] Miller-Jacobs, "Creating Inclusive Classrooms With Differentiated Instruction," pg. 216.

lessons, when properly constructed, create a learning community where the responsibilities for learning fall as much on the student as on the teacher, where the competition is not present and students support each other in the pursuit of learning."[231] The students decide how they obtain the information, but it is the teacher's responsibility to see that in the end everyone has all of the information they need. The most effective cooperative learning takes place in small groups of about four students. Each student has their own role: reader, recorder, reporter, and encourager/cheerleader. Each student chooses the role that best fits their learning styles, creating a sense of ownership of these roles, which is particularly motivating for students not used to excelling in the classroom.

Teachers must be aware of their students' learning styles, and how they relate to the five senses and and how those styles affect their perceptions of the world. Some students are only able to see the forest as a whole thing, while other students are able to see the forest's individual trees. "Teaching to learning styles is a philosophy and an approach to education in which all students' strengths are valued and supported."[232] While this may not solve all classroom problems, teaching to the strengths of the students is certainly one way to increase student success within the classroom.

None of the aforementioned techniques will succeed without continued training and professional development for the teaching staff. There are a variety of

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[231] Ellen Fishman, "Cooperative Learning And The 21st-Century Classroom," in *V'Khol Banayikh: Jewish Education For All - A Jewish Special Needs Resource Guide*, ed. Sara Rubinow Simon, Linda Forrest, and Ellen Fishman (Los Angeles, CA.: Tora Aura Productions, 2008), pg. 220.
[232] Flora Kupferman, "Learning Styles - An Overview," in *V'Khol Banayikh: Jewish Education For All - A Jewish Special Needs Resource Guide*, ed. Sara Rubinow Simon, Linda Forrest, and Ellen Fishman (Los Angeles, CA.: Tora Aura Productions, 2008), pg. 192.

ways that this information during teacher training and professional development can be disseminated. Discussing training topics before the beginning of the school year allows teachers ample time to adjust lesson plans. Ongoing professional development sessions throughout the year will reinforce what material from the initial in-service. By practicing what is preached, teachers will have a tangible frame of reference for incorporating different approaches in their own lessons and activities. Along with teachers, synagogue supplementary schools often include *madrichim* (high school students) as aids in the classroom. There also should be separate, age-appropriate, in-services for the *madrichim*, learn best practices for working with and including students with special needs. These training sessions can be led by the synagogue's educator, by other professionals in the community, or even an expert in education.

Teachers considering what adaptations or modifications to make in their classroom should keep in mind how modifications can benefit all students, not just the ones with disabilities. For example, if a teacher wants to modify how directions are disseminated, they can try announcing them, writing them on the board and creating a tactile or kinesthetic way of delivering the instructions. While this may not work for all activities, the more that are differentiated, the better..

Above all else, teachers must have compassion for their students. Students may bring into the classroom outside issues that alter how they behave in class. Compassion, encouragement and understanding help to support these students and lets them know that regardless of whatever else is going on in their lives, they will be supported within the walls of the synagogue.

While there are unfortunately still many barriers that exist for people with disabilities within the walls of the synagogue, many places are working year-round to rid themselves of these inhibitors. Congregations have gone to great lengths to ensure that the voices of people with special needs are heard and their suggestions heeded. We can find out more about them by delving into the Exemplar Congregations category in the Disabilities Inclusion Learning Center. These congregations are making strides in one or more categories of inclusion. With these congregations setting such a good example, more congregations will become interested in improving inclusion in their communities.

As more and more congregations begin to experiment with various approaches to inclusion, they begin embracing people who have been on the outskirts for so long, setting an example for the next generation of Reform Jews. The children grow up in inclusive synagogues are the children who will be the next generation of advocates for inclusion in their own communities. The more positive experiences that this next generation have in their formative years, the more likely Reform Judaism is to see continued growth in special needs inclusion.

Conclusion

The work of special needs inclusion in the Jewish community has only just begun. Spurred by the advocacy of families of people with special needs, Reform Judaism has begun to fully embrace the need for inclusion, highlighting the ways in which congregations and other URJ affiliated organizations are taking steps to promote inclusion to the fullest extent possible. Certainly, there is no one solution that fits all organizations, nor is there a light switch that can be flipped to create automatic inclusion in all institutions. Rather, person-by-person, group-by-group, organization-by-organization, change is slowly occurring, leading to more welcoming environments across the country. To date, this change has been measured, and sometimes it has been found to be ineffective or inadequate. Unfortunately, changes have sometimes been made without consulting people with disabilities or professionals in the field, and these changes are not received positively by the special needs community. In these cases, what becomes apparent is not an organization's effort to be inclusive, but its naïveté about the complex nature of inclusion. However, with more and more studies being funded each year, Reform Jewish organizations at last are beginning to grasp the magnitude of the work necessary to create a fully inclusive environment.

Change begins with conversations that often stem from a need that is not being met. For example, people with special needs may not be able to physically access all of the building, or there may be programs that are not accommodating to their disability. Whatever it may be, the only way for Jewish organizations to change

is to listen to the people with these special needs. Erik Carter, in his book Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities stated:

> "Talk with people with disabilities and their families about personal experiences within your congregation and the perceptions that other members seem to hold. Ask for their input on how greater awareness of disabilities might be pursued and explore avenues through which their own needs might be communicated more effectively to others."[233]

When organizations stop making assumptions about what people may or may not need, and listen to the actual needs and concerns of their constituents, real inclusion begins to occur.

The Reform Movement is continually trying to improve the extent to which inclusion exists in its congregations, day schools and summer camps. In taking these first steps, they have sought support on a national level from organizations such as the Ruderman Family Foundation and the Foundation for Jewish Camp. These organizations have provided precious funds and resources to help create an understanding of what inclusion is and how it can best be practiced in a Reform setting. As a direct result, the Disabilities Inclusion Learning Center was established. Formed in cooperation with the URJ and the Ruderman Family Foundation, the Disabilities Inclusion Learning Center brings together professional and lay leaders in the Reform movement to teach and learn about inclusion. This online platform

[233] Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, & Congregations* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub., 2007), pg. 63.

provides myriad earning opportunities for professional and lay leaders who are looking to improve inclusion within their organizations. With the help of the Foundation for Jewish Camp's funding and research, inclusion coordinators are now being placed at many of the URJ's camps to help both staff and campers accommodate to camp and have a successful camping experience. These programs are only in their infancy, but have a large potential for successful growth in the future.

There are also external organizations that, while not dedicated specifically to inclusion, provide vital information and helpful articles to the mainstream population. *eJewish Philanthropy* is one such platform with its mission to "…serve as a global bulletin board showcasing grassroots Jewish activists and community builders, new generations of idealists and trend setters who are embracing the challenges of our future."[234] Through this website, people are able to submit articles and disseminate information on special needs and inclusion amongst many other topics. In a given week, it is not uncommon to find at least one article relating to special needs or inclusion within Jewish institutions. Although these are not all related specifically to Reform Judaism, the larger concepts can be considered and used in a Reform environment.

Just recently, an article was published titled "Training For B'nai Mitzvah Tutors: Essential For Inclusion." It highlights Jewish Learning Venture, a Philadelphia based non-denominational organization that "…inspires and empowers

[234] "Overview," EJewish Philanthropy Your Jewish Philanthropy Resource, accessed January 7, 2016, http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/about/overview/.

people to make Jewish life, learning and community relevant and meaningful."[235] As a part of their community-building initiatives, they have started a program called Whole Community Inclusion. This program "…engages people with special needs and their families and supports their ability to access a range of Jewish educational experiences from early childhood through the transition to adulthood."[236] Inclusive activities for people of all ages are provided, as well as support groups for parents, educators and Jewish leaders to share best practices. Additionally, they have created a program specifically for B'nai Mitzvah tutors. With the recognition that these tutors rarely, if ever, receive training on how to work with diverse learners, this seminar helps B'nai Mitzvah tutors learn how to more effectively work with students who may have learning challenges, and it teaches the tutors best practices so they can improve their students' B'nai Mitzvah tutoring experience. Initial feedback from the tutors indicates an increase in confidence about their ability to provide effective tutoring services to students with a range of disabilities and needs. Participant evaluations include the following comments:

> "This training will help me approach students who may have special needs in a way that can help make Bar/Bat mitzvah successful for them and meaning for their family… I will be better able to be an advocate for kids who need modifications…This training will make me more effective with a wider range of students and families…I will be able to increase the use of technology as an aid in my teaching."[237]

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[235] "About Us," Jewish Learning Venture, accessed January 7, 2016, http://jewishlearningventure.org/about-us/.

[236] "Whole Community Inclusion," Jewish Learning Venture, accessed January 7, 2016, http://jewishlearningventure.org/buildingcommunity/wci/.

[237] "Training For B'nai Mitzvah Tutors: Essential for Inclusion," EJewish Philanthropy Your Jewish Philanthropy Resource, accessed January 8, 2016, http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/training-for-bnai-mitzvah-tutors-essential-for-

Through this training session, tutors are now able to understand how their students might learn best and what approaches to education might be best beneficial for each student. This will not only empower the tutor to successful teach the student, but will aid the student in achieving success on the day of their bar/bat mitzvah.

There are also Jewish special needs organizations that have a specific focus on education, such as Matan. Located in New York, Matan is an organization that provides an open and welcome forum to discuss ideas surrounding special education in Judaism. The Matan mission statement says, "Matan advocates for Jewish students with special needs, empowers their families, and educates Jewish leaders, teachers and communities so that all Jewish children have access to a rich and meaningful Jewish education."[238] Matan has created self-contained classes and inclusive classes, all of which are based in synagogue supplementary educational programs. They also provide extensive training for educators and religious school staff on how to create the most inclusive programs possible. Additionally, Matan has created products such as a Differentiated Lesson Planner (which provides blank lessons and aids for the creation of differentiated lesson plans) and a Congregational School Break Box that provides manipulatives and other tools that are often helpful to children with special needs, just a few of the tools that help promote inclusion in all religious school environments.[239]

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inclusion/?utm_source=Friday%2BJan%2B8th&utm_campaign=Fri%2BJan%2B8&utm_medium=email.

[238] "Mission Statement," Matan, December 27, 2012, accessed January 8, 2016, http://www.matankids.org/mission-statement/.

[239] "Matan Store," Matan, accessed January 8, 2016, http://www.matankids.org/shop/.

With the advent of niche groups such as Matan and Learning Venture, we begin to ask ourselves, where do we go from here? What are the next steps to helping the Reform Movement become as inclusive as possible? What are the limits that people are willing to push in order to create inclusive programs and environments for all people?

The next step begins with being open to the possibility of change. This openness is what has led so many in the past to achieve the highest standards for inclusion. The rest of the community needs to begin following in those footsteps. We need to push aside our fears of failure and the unknown and work harder to make inclusion a top priority, particularly in Reform day schools, camps and congregations. This includes continuing to work with special needs advocates from the community to gain a greater understanding of what needs continue to be unmet.

Perhaps more important than anything else, we must continue advocating to provide effective training for professional and lay leaders. This training should be taken seriously, not given five minutes at the end of a teacher meeting. Such training will power an inclusive revolution in organizations across the movement. Effective training leads to a successful inclusive classroom, and an inclusive classroom leads to effective teaching. An effective, inclusive classroom leads to a generation of students in Reform Jewish communities who do not have to struggle to learn about their own religious traditions and culture or feel the pain of isolation from their community. Even those with disabilities or special needs can be part of things. “For

my house shall be a house of prayer for all people."[240] Indeed, any house of prayer, any Reform Jewish house, shall one day be a house for all people.

[240] Isaiah 56:5 ESVS.

Appendix A

Sample Staff Training & Professional Development Programs*

* The times of these programs can be adapted to fit the needs of the congregation.

What Are Disabilities/Special Needs?

00:00-00:05- Introduction
00:05-00:15- Set Induction (labels on walls)
00:15-00:30- Small Group Discussion
00:30-00:45- Wrap-Up

00:00-00:05- Introduction

During this introduction, the group facilitator will introduce the topic of this staff training session. This introduction should include the goals of the session (which is to familiarize participants with the concept of disabilities/special needs and to define some of its characteristics). The group facilitator should also introduce the notion of this training being a safe, non-judgmental space by explaining that people should feel comfortable asking questions, because the goal is to create a successful education system at the congregation.

00:05-00:15- Set Induction (labels on walls)

Prior to the session start, the group facilitator will take six pieces of large post-it paper and write one of the following terms on each paper: Autism, ADD/ADHD, Cerebral Palsy, Dyslexia, Hearing Impairment, and Anxiety. The papers should be hung up on the wall throughout the room. During this set induction, the participants will each take a marker. They should have time to quietly go to each piece of paper and write whatever they know about the word that is on that specific piece of paper. It could be a symptom, something more diagnostic, or an approach to working with a student with that diagnosis, just to name a few examples. When the participants have finished writing on each of the papers, they will then walk around the room and observe what everyone else has written on the papers.

00:15-00:30- Small Group Discussion

The group facilitator will break the large group up into smaller ones. It is recommended that the groups are not more than six people, although the leader can determine how best to divide the participants. Each group will be given the following set of questions:

1) What did you see up on the walls that you expected?
2) What was something surprising that you saw?
3) Did you relate to one of the words more than the others?
4) Do you have any personal teaching experiences with any of these diagnoses?

After participants discuss these questions, they should then refer to the source sheet, which contains brief information about each of the six special needs listed on the walls (see attached source sheet).

00:30-00:45- Wrap-Up
During the wrap-up, the group facilitator can discuss the session's conclusions, or ask questions to the group. During this time, the group leader will discuss the idea that knowledge of diagnoses can be important, but knowing the diagnosis of a particular student is not required in order to ensure they are included in the class or program. Teachers should be not be focusing on the particular diagnosis of the child, but instead the majority of their effort will be spent on planning lessons that engage and accommodate all of the different types of learners.

Materials:
Large Post-Its
Markers

Source Sheet
Autism
ADD/ADHD
Cerebral Palsy
Dyslexia
Hearing Impairment
Anxiety

Developing Differentiated Lesson Plans

00:00-00:05- Introduction
00:05-00:10- Review of Old Lesson Plan
00:10-00:20- Defining Differentiated Education
00:20-00:40- Small Groups Write Differentiated Lesson Plans
00:40-00:45- Wrap-Up

00:00-00:05- Introduction
Prior to this program, the group facilitator should either ask the teachers to bring a lesson plan of theirs that they consider to be very successful, or bring copies of sample lesson plans. During the introduction to this program, the group facilitator should introduce and define what is meant by differentiated education. If participants are not familiar with this style of lesson plan, they can read and discuss the following: "Based on this philosophy [of differentiated education], a teacher recognizes and appreciates children's varied strengths and weaknesses and provides lessons that take them into account. In this manner, the teacher is respectful of the children's abilities and provides learning activities that fully engage the children in the learning process."[241]

00:05-00:10- Review of Old Lesson Plan
During this time, the teachers should use the Matan Kids Differentiated Instruction Self-Assessment to evaluate the lesson plans they brought. The assessment sheet is provided below. Each teacher will assess their lesson plan individually. If they did not bring one of their own lesson plans, they can use a sample lesson provided to them by the group facilitator.

00:10-00:20- Discussion of What Differentiated Education Is
The larger group of participants will break into smaller groups of no more than six people. Ideally, teachers will work with other educators teaching the same age group or similar grade levels. During this time, they will discuss their understanding of differentiated education according to the following definition:

"Another approach, differentiated instruction, enables teachers to tailor the classroom to meet the learning needs of all students, respecting students' capabilities and appropriately challenging them. Originally developed for gifted students, it is currently used by teachers to educate children in their class who possess a wide variety of learning styles, needs, and capabilities. Teachers differentiate the content being taught, enabling all students to access information, the process of learning activities in which the students engage, and the products that enable students to show their mastery of learning. Differentiation is based on the student's learning profile, readiness, and interests. Teachers provide tiered assignments and offer flexible grouping and choices."[242]

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[241] Miller-Jacobs, "Creating Inclusive Classrooms With Differentiated Instruction," pg. 213.
[242] Miller-Jacobs, "Special Education in the Jewish Community," pg. 128-9.

After they read this paragraph, the groups should discuss the following questions:

1) Have you had experience with differentiated education as a student? If so, please elaborate on the experience.
2) Have you had experience with differentiated education as a teacher? If so, please elaborate on the experience.
3) Based on the paragraph above, what do you think differentiated education looks like?
4) Reflecting both on your assessment and the paragraph, how might you adapt your lesson plan to make it differentiated?
5) How might you include differentiated education in your future lesson plans?

00:20-00:40- Small Groups to Write Differentiated Lesson Plans

Following the small group discussion on differentiated instruction, participants will now co-write a differentiated lesson plan. The group facilitator should provide sample lessons illustrating the use of differentiated instruction. If the facilitator cannot find any, there are some at http://www.matankids.org. The groups should work together to write this lesson plan. The goal is that by the end of this activity, the teachers will each have a lesson that they can run in their classrooms to help bring differentiated instruction into their learning environment.

00:40-00:45- Wrap-Up

During the wrap-up, the group facilitator will remind the education staff that differentiated education is something that can be beneficial to all students, regardless of ability level. Participants will be challenged to include aspects of differentiated education into their lessons for the rest of the year. Later, the group facilitator or religious school educator will follow-up with the teachers to see how successfully they were able to implement differentiated instruction in their classrooms.

Matan Kids Differentiated Instruction Self-Assessment[243]

Does my instructional approach:

1. Use assessment strategies at the beginning of the instructional cycle to determine what students already know and understand?

❑Yes ❑Not yet

2. Use varied instructional approaches including discussion, demonstration, guided reading and discovery activities?

❑Yes ❑Not yet

3. Emphasize critical and creative thinking and the application of learning?

❑Yes ❑Not yet

4. Use varied instructional groupings, including whole class, small groups, partners and individuals?

❑Yes ❑Not yet

5. Provide opportunities for students to choose activities based on their interests and preferences?

❑Yes ❑Not yet

6. Provide opportunities for guided and independent practice of new skills and concepts?

❑Yes ❑Not yet

7. Incorporate ongoing assessment strategies to check student learning and understanding throughout instructional sequences?

❑Yes ❑Not yet

8. Accommodate learner differences by providing a variety of ways to demonstrate learning?

❑Yes ❑Not yet

9. Use strategies for re-teaching, which are different from those strategies used to teach the skills and the concepts for the first time?

❑Yes ❑Not yet

[243] "Differentiated Instruction Self-Assessment," Matan, September 10, 2013, accessed January 8, 2016, http://www.matankids.org/differentiated-instruction-self-assessment/.

Creating a School Wide Inclusion Brit (word map generator)
00:00-00:05- Introduction
00:05-00:15- Small Group Writing of Brit
00:15-00:25- Large Group Writing Brit
00:25-00:30- Wrap-Up

The Barriers We Can't See (people first language)
00:00-00:05- Introduction
00:05-00:20- Group I (Either listening to parents or students)
00:20-00:35- Group II (Either listening to parents or students)
00:35-00:45- Debrief in Small Groups

Behavior Management & Teaching Strategies
00:00-00:05- Introduction
00:05-00:08- Scenario 1
00:08-00:15- Debrief Scenario 1
00:15-00:18- Scenario 2
00:18-00:25- Debrief Scenario 2
00:25-00:28- Scenario 3
00:28-00:35- Debrief Scenario 3
00:35-00:40- Wrap-Up

Finding Opportunities For All People to Be an Integral Part of our Community (Adapting Roles to Fit the Needs of Individuals)
00:00-00:05- Introduction
00:05-00:10- Set Induction (different jobs/roles at synagogues on Post-Its on walls, what are requirements/qualifications)
00:10-00:20- Small Group Discussion - Adapting these roles & creating job descriptions (each group will be given a description of a person and will have to adapt the role/job for them)
00:20-00:30- Small Groups - Present to rest of participants
00:30-00:35- Wrap-Up

Appendix B
Interview Protocol

Top Priority Questions For Congregations

1. Does your religious/Hebrew school serve students with special needs? If so, what disabilities are you working with?
2. What types of accommodations is your school able to make for students with disabilities and/or special needs?
3. What challenges has the school faced in determining how best to accommodate the various types of special needs?
4. Do you have a written inclusion policy for your religious/Hebrew school? If so, who was involved in the creation of this document?
5. Does your school have any sort of inclusion program? If so, how was this conceived of and received by the congregation (students, parents, teachers, staff, congregants, etc.)? IEP accuracy?
6. Please talk about b'nai mitzvah programming
7. What are the best practices that you have developed administering your program for students with special needs?
8. Does your school provide any type of training about inclusion for the teachers and madrichim? If so, in what format is this training presented? If you offer this training, please provide an example or sample of the material used.
9. What, if any, training takes place prior to the school year regarding working with students with special needs?
10. Do you provide teacher, staff and madrichim (teacher assistant) training specifically focusing on the special needs agenda? If so, please provide examples of those sessions. Please specify if any have focused specifically on the topic of inclusion of students with disability/special needs within the congregational community.
11. If a student with special needs is enrolled in the school, is any additional training provided to that specific student's teachers about inclusion in the classroom and accommodating the student's needs?
12. Do you believe that your efforts to include students with special needs have been successful so far? How do you evaluate and measure this success?
13. What are your goals for improving inclusion over the next few years?
14. What advice can you share with other congregational religious schools wanting to improve their special needs/inclusion programming?
15. Is there anything that I didn't ask about that you would like to add?

Additional Questions For Congregations (Time Permitting)

1. Is your school limited in its ability to accommodate different types of special needs?
2. How would you describe your limitation? How is it determined?

3. How do parents inform the school about their child's special needs?
4. What type of staff support does the school provide for students with special needs?
5. To better assist students with special needs, does the school conduct any sort of conversation with the family prior to the beginning of the school year?
6. If so, who at the school communicates with these families, and what information does the school from this conversation?
7. Have you had families who were counseled out of, or not able to participate in, religious school due to the school's inability to accommodate students with disabilities or special needs? If so, can you please describe the counseling out process?
8. Are there alternative educational routes that these families may be able to pursue through your congregation?
9. Do you have a written inclusion policy for your congregation? If so, who was involved in the policy's development?
10. Does your school provide any programs both for parents of typical students and parents of special needs students that focus on including all students in the classroom and other congregational settings?
11. Does your school provide any student programs for typical students and students with special needs that focus on including all students in the classroom and congregational setting?
12. Have you found that adopting your accommodation practices has benefited the typical students as well as those with special needs?
13. Is there any specific lens (Jewish or otherwise) influencing how you teach about inclusion? How would you describe this influence and can you provide an example?
14. Does your school employ anyone whose role includes inclusion specialist? How would you describe their role during the year?
15. Do you collaborate with any other congregations to develop strategies for working with and including students with special needs? If so, how do you do this?
16. If you work with other congregations on these strategies, in what ways has collaborating been benefited or deterred your school's work with students with disabilities/special needs?
17. Have you collaborated with any local Jewish organizations when developing your inclusion strategies for students with special needs?
18. Have you received any funding from Jewish organizations outside your school or congregation to provide aide in working with students with special needs, or for creating a inclusive curriculum for your students?
19. Have there been any congregation-wide educational programs involving your school that have focused on working with and including people with special needs?

Top Priority Questions For Day Schools

1. Are there students with special needs in your school? What types of disabilities do your students live with?
2. What are the standard accommodations for students with special needs already in place in your school ?
3. What services, if any, are offered by the school (PT, OT, Speech, Resource Room ,Self-Contained classrooms, etc.)? How is support delivered to your students? Pull-out? In class? Individually? Small Groups? Co-teaching? Self-contained classrooms?
4. Does your school have an inclusion program? If so, how was this conceived of and received by the school (parents, teachers, students, administrators, etc.)?
5. If you do not have an inclusion program, have you considered developing one? If so, where are you in the development process? If not, why do you not have an inclusion program?
6. What challenges does the school face in accommodating the various types of special needs?
7. Do you have a written inclusion policy for your school? If so, who was involved in the policy's development?
8. Does your school provide any student programs focusing on inclusion both for typical students and students with special needs?
9. Do you believe that that your current special needs program successfully delivers services? How do you evaluate and measure success?
10. Has adoption of any of your inclusion and accommodation practices benefited the typical students in addition to those with special needs?
11. Do you provide professional development for teachers and/or staff specifically focusing on special needs? If so, please provide some examples of the types of programs . Specify if any programs have focused specifically on the topic of including students within the school community.
12. What are the best practices that you have developed administering your program for students with special needs?
13. What do you hope to goals for d/sn in future?
14. What advice can you share with Jewish day schools wanting to improve their special needs programming?
15. Is there anything that I didn't ask about that you would like to add?

Additional Questions For Day Schools (Time Permitting)

1. Does your school provide any parent programs for both parents of typical students and parents of special needs students, focusing on including all students in the classroom and school setting?
2. Have you ever collaborated with any other schools when developing strategies for working with and including students with special needs?
3. If so, in what ways has this collaboration been beneficial or detrimental to the way that your school works with students with special needs?

4. Have you collaborated with any local Jewish organizations when developing your special needs curriculum?
5. Have you received any funding from outside Jewish organizations to provide aide in working with students with special needs, or in creating a curriculum of inclusion for your students?
6. Has your school been involved in any community-wide educational programs focusing on working with and including people with special needs?
7. Is your school limited in the types of special needs you are able to accommodate? If so, please describe the limits. How were they determined?
8. Approximately what percentage of your student body has one or more diagnosed special needs?
9. Of that number, what percentage receives accommodations, modifications, or services at the school?
10. What percentage receives accommodations, modifications, or services outside of the school?
11. When a family comes to the school with a child who already has diagnosed special needs, who in the school works with the family to address these needs?
12. Who handles communication with the families of children who have suspected special needs that are not yet diagnosed,? How is communication between this person and the families handled?
13. How is communication regarding a student's special needs handled among the staff, faculty and administration?
14. Prior to a diagnosis, do you market the services, accommodations and modifications that your school has made available for students?
15. What sort of staff support is provided for students with special needs?
16. How many hours of support services do students receive? Is there a point beyond which you can't accommodate students?
17. Have you had families that were counseled out of the school due the school's inability to accommodate them? If so, can you please describe the family's counseling out process?

Top Priority Questions for Camps

1. Does your camp serve people who have special needs? If so, what types of special needs are you able to accommodate?
2. What type of accommodations is your camp able to make? (e.g., providing one-on-one aids, having a therapist or social worker for the camper to work with, etc.)
3. Does your camp have a written inclusion policy? If so, who was involved in the creation of this policy?
4. During the summer, is there any specific inclusion program provided? If so, how was this conceived of and received by the camp participants (this includes campers, staff, faculty, parents, etc.)
5. If you do not have an inclusion program, have you thought about developing one? If so, where are you in the process? If not, why has the school not developed an inclusion program?
6. Is there any inclusion training provided for the counselors and staff prior to the beginning of the summer? If so, how is this training presented? What kinds of materials are used?
7. If you know you will have a special needs camper, is any additional training provided to that specific camper's counselors?
8. Does your camp employ anyone whose role involves the work of an inclusion specialist (psychologist, social worker, etc.)?
9. If so, what is their role prior to camp sessions?
10. What is their role during camp sessions?
11. What training, if any, do staff receive during the staff training week(s) prior to the beginning of a camp session, if they will be working with campers with special needs? If you do provide training, please provide an example or sample of the material used.
12. Does your camp provide camper programs for typical campers and campers with special needs focusing on inclusion in the camp setting?
13. Is there any specific lens (Jewish or otherwise) influencing how you teach about inclusion? How would you describe this influence and can you provide an example?
14. Do you consider your camp to be a successfully inclusive camp? How do you evaluate and measure this success?
15. What are the best practices you have developed to make your camp environment more inclusive?
16. Challenges?
17. What advice can you share with other Jewish summer camps wanting to improve their inclusion programming?
18. Goals for the future?
19. Is there anything that I didn't ask about that you would like to add??

Additional Questions For Camps (Time Permitting)

1. Are there specific types of special needs that your camp is unable to accommodate?
2. Has your camp always served campers with special needs? If not, when did your camp begin providing opportunities for these campers? What was the impetus for this change?
3. Have you turned away campers because of the severity of their special needs? If so, how did you determine the camper was not able to enroll for the summer?
4. Prior to the summer do you conduct any sort of conversation with the family of your campers with special needs?
5. If so, who communicates with the families? What information are they looking to glean from the conversation?
6. Do your campers with special needs live with typical campers, or do they bunk separately?
7. If the special needs campers live with typical campers, what sorts of accommodations have you made within the cabins? (e.g., number of staff, physical layout of the cabin, monitoring the number of campers with special needs in the cabin, etc.)
8. Are the cost of accommodations for special needs campers covered by the cost of tuition for camp, or do those campers' families have to pay an additional fee?
9. Does your camp programs to assist special needs campers' transition from being campers to staff (Is this even a possibility for these campers)?
10. Does your faculty (rabbis, educators, cantors, etc.) provide any sort of assistance to their congregants or campers to ensure all campers are fully included within their cabin, unit, camp, etc.?
11. Does your camp provide any type of programming for campers who are not able to function within the parameters of the main camp setting?
12. If your camp is not able to accommodate certain groups of people with special needs, does your camp have a separate camp program for them before or after the regular camp season?
13. If you have a camp program dedicated to special needs campers, do your regular summer counselors also participate as counselors in this program? If so, what training do they receive to work with the challenges of camping with special needs children?
14. During the year, does your camp provide programming for your campers, or potential campers? If so, do you ever address issues of inclusion? How?
15. Have you found that adopting accommodations or modifications have benefited the typical campers as well as those with special needs?
16. Has your camp collaborated with other summer camps (Jewish or otherwise) to determine how best to include campers with special needs?
17. If so, how has this collaboration been beneficial for your camp in its work with campers who have special needs?

18. When developing your plan for working with campers with special needs, did you collaborate with any local Jewish organizations ?
19. Have you received any funding from outside Jewish organizations to provide aide in working with students with special needs, or in creating a curriculum of inclusion for your campers?

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