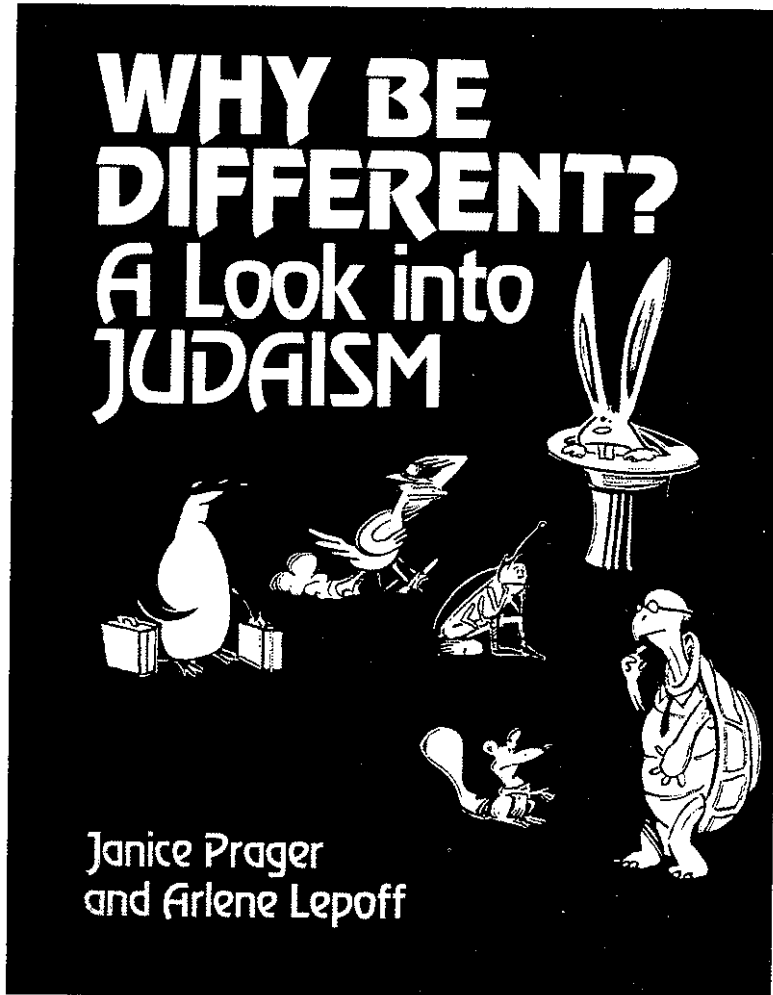


Family Guide

to



By Rhonda Rosenheck



BEHRMAN HOUSE, INC.

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INTRODUCTION

Why Be Different? A Look into Judaism explores the many challenges of being Jewish. The text encourages students to examine their own experiences. It challenges students' moral and religious values. Using stories and exercises, the text demonstrates how Jewish laws and ideals can guide the students to ethical solutions to life's dilemmas.

This *Family Guide* has two goals. The first is to let parents know what issues their children are studying in class. The second is to create family learning experiences through which parents and children can explore these issues together.

The *Guide's* five parts correspond to the divisions of the text. In each part, the *Background for Parents* offers reading which can help parents understand the issues raised in the text. Following that, *Family Activities* allow parents and children to explore these issues together. Activities are structured to encourage an open exchange of ideas, questions and insights. While children should record the family's response, the most important activity is the discussion that takes place before anything is written down.

In addition to the five parts, parents may find useful the Glossary of Terms on page 14.

FOR THE TEACHER

This *Why Be Different? Family Guide* can be used in a number of ways. Below are three suggestions for using the guide to involve parents in study with their children.

INITIAL PARENT MEETING, FOLLOWED BY HOME STUDY

Introduce the *Why Be Different? Family Guide* at an informational get-together early in the school year. Discuss with parents the goals of the course, and give them the *Guide*. Then ask students and their parents to discuss the issues raised in the *Guide* at home throughout the year.

FAMILY PROGRAM

Invite parents to participate in class at specific points in the year, coordinating participation with the subjects studied in class. On these special days, parents and children can explore the material together through the *Family Guide*.

PARALLEL EDUCATION

Invite parents to meet as a group to study at an adult level what their children are studying in class. Use the *Family Guide* as the foundation for these meetings. Parents and children can work together on the activities either at combined classes or at home.

* * *

These methods can be adapted easily to the needs of each school. If Part I of the *Family Guide* will be used in school, please remember to have a current newspaper or newsmagazine for each family. In implementing "Creating Kidushah" in Part IV, it may be helpful to provide photocopies of relevant blessings with transliterations, prayers, and Torah portions.

PART I—WHY WE NEED GOD

BACKGROUND FOR PARENTS

Approaching the Activities

Why talk about God in an ethics course? Judaism teaches that God is good and people are meant to emulate God's goodness. This belief gives us an ethical standard by which to guide human behavior. Without such a standard, there would be no firm way to distinguish good from evil. Judaism teaches that God's goodness is the standard, and that Godliness is the ideal toward which human beings should strive.

God Talk

Torah describes God in many ways. We read about a creative God, then about a seemingly destructive God. We see God angry in one instance, forgiving in the next. At times God "talks" with the prophets, at other times God is silent. The Bible illustrates God's many aspects. Some scholars imagine these aspects to be like facets on a diamond reflecting God's light, and illuminating each human being uniquely.

Torah often uses anthropomorphisms, such as "God spoke" and "with a mighty hand." Moses Maimonides, in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, warns Jews not to take anthropomorphisms of God literally. God, Maimonides insists, is purely spiritual, and these expressions are metaphors for understanding God. Since God does not have a physical image, making humanity "in God's image" cannot mean that human beings look like God. Rather, it means that human beings reflect the essence, the spirit, of Godliness.

God Wrestling

Through 4,000 years of Jewish history, Jews have argued with God. Abraham haggled with God to save Sodom and Gomorrah. Jacob wrestled with God before entering Canaan, and arose from the struggle a changed man. Moses convinced God not to annihilate the idol-worshipping Israelites at Mount Sinai. Jewish tradition cites many examples of leaders expressing confusion, anger, and frustration with God, as well as love, trust and appreciation. "Wrestling" with God can heighten our love for God, just as working through difficulties in a loving relationship can strengthen that love.

Where is God?

Judaism teaches that God is everywhere. A Jewish folk saying asks, "Where is God?" and answers, "Wherever you let God in." Each person must decide where and how to let God into her or his own life. Belief in God can guide people past the obstacles along the path to goodness. It can make clear humanity's role in the world, if only we allow it.

In God's Image—Finding God-Like Qualities Within Ourselves

"God created humanity in the divine image" does not mean that we look like God. Rather, it means that we can act like God in many ways. "You shall walk after the Lord your God." (Deut. 13:4) How can we do this?

We can do this by emulating God's attributes (*midot*): clothe the naked, visit the sick, comfort the mourner, bury the dead. On the first page of the Torah God clothed the naked—Adam and Eve. On the last page God buried the dead—Moses. (Talmud B. Sotah 14a).

Below are some words Jews use to describe God. Choose three words that best describe another member of your family. Discuss your choices.

Responsive	Forgiving	Strong	Faithful	Law-giver	Comforter
Good	Powerful	Merciful	Kind	Caring	Resourceful
Provider	Wise	Loving	Just	Peace-Maker	Demanding

"... Walk Humbly in God's Ways"—Striving Toward the Ideal

Each person can do both good and evil. Doing good often means controlling our impulses and desires. But sometimes even recognizing good can be difficult. And even with the best intentions, doing good is no guarantee that things will turn out well. Nonetheless, Torah instructs us to emulate God, do the good thing, make the ethical choice.

Choose a news story from a recent newspaper or newsmagazine. Referring to the Godly characteristics listed above, critique the participants' actions. (Stories with which you are familiar may be easier to analyze.)

- A. Who are the main participants in the story?
- B. Which Godly characteristics does each person seem to be acting on, even if the results are not ideal?
- C. Which Godly characteristics are being ignored, and by whom?
- D. Do you think that any of the participants had difficulty making the ethical choice? If so, what made it difficult?
- E. Pick one participant. If you were in a similar situation, what might you do differently?

PART II—WHY WE NEED LAWS

BACKGROUND FOR PARENTS

Approaching the Activities

Laws, rules, limits, restrictions, obligations: the very things we all wish there were less of. In fact, parenting through the teen years is often like a balancing act: rules on one side, free choice on the other. Similarly, Judaism balances free choice with restrictions, laws, and obligations.

"Free Will is Granted To Everyone" (Maimonides)

Each person is endowed with free will. In the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides cited the existence of Torah itself as evidence of individual free will. If human beings were without free will, he wrote, a body of laws would be unnecessary and useless. Think of a flower, which lives completely in response to natural conditions. A flower does not need, and cannot use, a book of laws. It is powerless to choose its own path, unlike human beings, who can choose their actions. We were given Torah because we can learn the difference between good and evil. And because the urge to do good (*yetzer ha-tov*) and the urge to do bad and to behave expediently (*yetzer ha-ra*) coexist in each human being, we need motivation and guidance to choose good.

Are All Laws Good?

No. What makes a law good? Judaism teaches that the answer to that question lies not with the majority, not with custom, not with government leaders or civil courts, not with any human source at all. The answer lies with God. God is the source of good. Godliness is the ideal to strive toward. Laws are good only if they bring people closer to reaching that ideal.

At one time, black people in the South could sit only in the back of public buses. In the early stages of the Holocaust, Jewish children were banned from German schools. Both these cases of legalized segregation set person against person, fanning the flames of hatred and violence. These laws did not lead people closer to justice and goodness. They were wrong.

Justice, respect for life, and compassion are eternal and universal standards of morality, according to Jewish Law. They apply across cultural and national boundaries, and across all generations.

Jewish Law In a Secular World

Why should Jews observe Jewish laws and mitzvot when living in a democratic, secular society? Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) offered this among several reasons: even though all people are capable of determining truths—through reason—the human spirit tends to lead people astray. Torah's laws give people a moral standard by which to live. Torah commands Jews to serve as a "light to the nations," by living according to strict moral laws. Rabbi Leo Baeck (1874-1956), Holocaust survivor and leader of Liberal Judaism, challenges every Jew to "...so live and act that all will see what he is and what his faith is, what it can do to educate and elevate man."

As citizens we are bound by the laws of our countries. But when we see that laws are unjust, it is our duty to protest them and work to change them, to pursue justice, to right wrongs.

Home Sweet Home

Imagine that there were no laws, rules, expectations or limits set for anyone in your home. Everyone could do exactly as they pleased, without meeting the demands or needs of anyone else.

Tell a story of life in your home without laws or rules.

Now imagine the consequences of this freedom as time passes. Think about the most important consequences:

One Week Later:

One Month Later:

One Year Later:

Discuss what you like about this story, and what you dislike. Then name one accommodation or rule that your family has made for the children, and one for the parents. Identify one rule that all family members agree is important to every family member.

The Ethics Behind the Laws

Laws and rules govern everything from international relations to worship practices to card games. They help us structure our relationships. Laws are tools, based on underlying ethics or beliefs. Many of the laws governing modern democracies are based on the ethics of Torah.

Which ethics of Torah are the foundation of each of these governmental laws? On what other beliefs might they be based?

(EXAMPLE: Product labeling and advertising may not make false claims. "You shall not cast a stumbling block before the blind" (Lev. 19:14). It is unfair to sell something by describing it incorrectly. We are all entitled to know what we are buying so we can make a sound judgment about whether we want it.)

- A. Children must be enrolled in school through the age of 16.**
- B. Dangerous weapons must be registered with the proper authorities.**
- C. Vehicles must come to a full stop at a red light.**

PART III—MITZVOT BETWEEN PEOPLE

BACKGROUND FOR PARENTS

Approaching the Activities

Most of us agree that we should help others. But how, and how much? The world's problems are so many, people can become overwhelmed. Rabbi Tarfon addressed that tendency. "You are not required to complete the work," he advised, "but neither are you at liberty to abstain from it" (Ethics of the Fathers 2:4). Jews must devote time and resources to others. Torah helps us determine how, and how much.

Categorizing Mitzvot

Scholars have found it useful to count and categorize God's commandments. There are 613 mitzvot in the Torah. 365 of them are "negative" mitzvot: things we may not do. The remaining 248 mitzvot are "positive": things we must do. Scholars categorize mitzvot in several different ways. Some divide *mitzvot beyn adam l'havero* (between one person and another) from *mitzvot beyn adam la-Makom* (between people and God.) Others speak of ethical versus ritual mitzvot, and mitzvot concerning life in Israel versus those concerning life in "exile". Still others divide rational mitzvot, which people can understand, from revealed mitzvot, which are beyond the possibility of human understanding.

The Golden Rule

† This story of the Golden Rule illustrates Torah's emphasis on Mitzvot between people. A man once challenged Rabbi Hillel and said, "I'll gladly accept the Jewish faith if you can teach me the entire Torah while standing on one foot." Hillel answered, "**Do not unto others what you do not wish others to do unto you.** That is the whole Torah. Everything else is commentary. Now go and study!" (Talmud B Sabbath 31a).

Tikkun Olam—Repairing the World

Sefer Yetzira, a creation story, tells about God pulling back, removing the Divine Presence (which had been everywhere) from part of the universe, to make room for the world. A cosmic accident scattered sparks of God's light and pieces of the "vessels" created to hold the light. Jews were given the task of gathering the sparks of light, sifting out worthless vessel pieces, and doing *tikkun olam*, "repairing the world." Most Jews define *tikkun olam* more pragmatically. "Repairing the world" means bringing it closer to a just, good, and peaceful existence. Giving *tzedakah*, doing acts of loving kindness, and caring for the environment are some of the tasks of *tikkun olam* for which Jews accept responsibility.

Maimonides' Ladder of Tzedakah (the eight degrees)

Maimonides taught that all giving is not equal. The more dignity a needy person can maintain during the transaction, the more righteous is the act of *tzedakah*.

1. (highest) Providing work, or a partnership, so the person can become self-supporting.
2. The giver and the receiver do not know each other.
3. The giver knows the receiver, but the receiver does not know the giver.
4. The giver does not know the receiver, but the receiver knows the giver.
5. The giver puts coins in the hands of the poor without being asked.
6. The giver puts coins in the hands of the poor after being asked.
7. The giver contributes less than the proper amount, but does so cheerfully.
8. (lowest) The giver contributes with resentment, humiliating the receiver.

Let the Honor of Another Be as Precious to You as Your Own

Maimonides emphasizes the *zedakah* recipient's dignity because each person reflects God's essence, regardless of wealth or status.

In the following situations, identify together what you could do that would fit specific levels of *zedakah* from Maimonides' ladder on page 8.

- A. A young woman—skinny and dirty—approaches you on the street. Two other people have already asked you for money. Consider how you could respond:

What would be an 8th rung response?

5th rung?

3rd rung?

- B. A fire in your town has just left an entire block of people homeless. They need assistance. They have lost everything.

What would be a 7th rung response?

2nd rung?

1st rung?

- C. A classmate's family is having terrible problems. Her dad is seriously ill, and her mom has been unemployed. She told you she saw cancellation notices from the electric and phone companies. Discuss ways in which your family can help.

What would be a 5th rung response?

3rd rung?

1st rung?

Gemilut Hasadim—Acts of Loving Kindness

People need kindness and help in many ways. Not all problems can be solved with a gift of money or goods. Sometimes we can help by doing a good thing, or even simply saying something nice. And sometimes we can help most by not doing or saying something hurtful. Six of the Ten Commandments are phrased in the negative form ("You shall do no work on the Sabbath"), yet all have very positive consequences.

In situation (C) above, how else could your family help the classmate and her family? List three positive mitzvot that would help them. Then list three negative mitzvot that would avoid hurting them.

PART IV—MITZVOT BETWEEN PEOPLE AND GOD

BACKGROUND FOR PARENTS

Approaching the Activities

Belief in a divine presence can lead to appreciation of the world's richness, magnificence and wonder. Judaism helps Jews hold onto a sense of awe by setting aside time for us to experience this richness, and to express gratitude for it. Performing the mitzvot between people and God is faith building, like lifting weights is body building. The more we practice, the stronger our faith becomes.

Radical Amazement

Radical Amazement, a phrase coined by Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), describes the wonder and awe human beings feel when aware of the divine presence, such as when contemplating a rainbow. Radical amazement comes easily to children. To a baby, a hand is an amazing thing. So is a piece of paper, the sound of a telephone, a plastic key ring.

But as we grow older we often lose our sense of mystery. And science can take away even more of this mystery. Yet many scientists have not lost their awe. They know that with each new discovery come more questions, more implications, more evidence of an ordered and remarkable universe.

Heschel would tell us that the baby is right. A piece of paper is awesome. It is evidence of a divine presence in a world that produces trees, and in human beings who create finished work from raw materials. The sound that baby hears when crinkling paper is evidence of the miracle of ears that can hear, and hands that can manipulate. The baby's laugh reveals a soul, developing within a tiny body.

Blessings

Blessings, *brachot*, are the Jews' way of focusing on the divine in everything. Jews have specific blessings for every type of food and drink. There is a blessing for noticing every attribute, ability and form of diversity in people. We recite blessings over every natural phenomenon, and for every occasion in our lives. This ability to reflect and to appreciate, is part of what separates human beings from the rest of creation. We say blessings not because God needs to hear them. We say them to draw closer to God, to become more fully human.

"The Savior of the Jews is the Sabbath" (Ethiopian Jewish saying)

The Sabbath started a revolution. In the ancient world, who had heard of anyone but royalty taking one day out of each seven to rest? Certainly not the former slaves receiving this Law at Mount Sinai. The Romans and Greeks scorned the Jews for not laboring on the Sabbath; they could not understand how a common person could achieve sanctity by not working. Could the common person pause in the struggle to survive, and still survive? Israelites of long ago, and observant Jews today, prove that the answer is yes.

But the revolution did not end there. The commandment to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy continues "...you shall do no work—you, your son or daughter, your servants, your domestic animals, or the stranger in the community." All of creation reflects God and deserves to rest on Shabbat. No person has greater rights than another. Even animals are granted this rest. In a world where "might equaled right" and wealth was everything, this was truly a revolutionary idea.

Counting Our Blessings

Reciting blessings reminds us that our problems should be viewed in perspective with the beauty and goodness in our lives. Can we regain a sense of awe and wonder—"radical amazement"—through a few words of gratitude? Perhaps. But only practice can lead to success. The *Shulchan Aruch* advises every Jew "to recite at least one hundred blessings a day."

Talk through a typical day, stopping to say "thank you" for as many things as you can. It may help to divide your day into parts, (for example, waking up, first family meal, going to school,) finding a few blessings for each. Identify at least 18 blessings.

Creating Kidushah

Setting aside Shabbat to appreciate creation can bring us joy, and refresh our spirits. As the prayer *Yismechu* proclaims, "All who make holy the seventh day shall be gladdened by Your goodness."

Pick a special Shabbat during which you will observe more mitzvot than usual. Read the list below. Identify at least three mitzvot which you do not regularly observe, and observe them on the special Shabbat.

Attend Friday evening services	Light/bless Shabbat candles	Dress up for dinner
Share Shabbat dinner	Recite haMotzi over challah	Say Kiddush over wine
Eat Shabbat lunch together	Say one hundred blessings	Do not answer the telephone
Have friends from temple over	Walk places rather than drive	Leave TV and electronics off
Go to Shabbat morning services	Study the weekly Torah portion	Rest
Recite Havdalah blessings	Recite the blessings after meals	Find three stars to end Shabbat

After experiencing this special Shabbat, discuss any ways in which you felt it was special.

PART V—BELONGING TO AM YISRAEL

BACKGROUND FOR PARENTS

Approaching the Activities

We all understand that there are benefits and obligations in belonging to a group. In oppressive circumstances, Jews cling to each other for survival. We are fortunate to live in freedom, to have no fears about physical survival. Our struggles are of a different nature. We must find meaningful answers to the questions: Why be different? Why be Jewish?

Who are the Jews?

What kind of group are the Jews? We have heard Judaism called a religion, the Jews a nation. A non-religious Jew might answer that Jews are an ethnic group.

Are the Jews a Religious Group? Judaism is a religion. Jews share a sacred text, tradition, beliefs and rituals. Jews are people obligated to fulfill a covenant (agreement) between God and the people of Israel.

Are the Jews a Nation? Certainly we were in the biblical commonwealths of Israel. We were a nation in exile when living as outsiders among other nations. But when the French Revolution elevated Jews to the status of equal citizens in many countries, the idea of Jews as a nation became blurred. In 1807, Napoleon Bonaparte assembled a *Sanhedrin* (Jewish legal court) of French Jews. The *Sanhedrin* ruled that Torah's political commandments—those relevant to a nation with its own land and political leadership—were "no longer applicable since Israel is no longer a nation." Yet Zionist activity in Europe during the 19th and 20th centuries reflected a resurgence of Jewish nationalism.

Most Jews today believe that Jews are a people. Others say we are a nation, bound to a homeland. Some believe Israel is the only place to live a fully Jewish life. For others, it represents a safeguard against destruction. Some think of Israel as a safe haven for every Jew. Still others believe that Israel is the center of Jewish creative, spiritual and ethical growth.

Are the Jews a Race? No. Any assertion that Jews are a race is disproved by the diversity within *Am Yisrael*. There are black Jews, brown Jews, olive-skinned Jews, yellow-skinned Jews, blond blue-eyed Jews.

Are the Jews an Ethnic Group? One could say Jews are an ethnic group, but there is much ethnic diversity. The two broad streams of Jewish culture developed vastly different traditions. Ashkenazim originate from Central and Eastern Europe. Sephardim originate from Mediterranean Europe, North Africa and the Near East. And although smaller in number, Jews in places such as Ethiopia and India developed different, yet equally rich traditions.

Are the Jews a Community? The Jews are a community bound together by history, language, covenant, land, God, and ethic. The *Sh'ma* is recited in Hebrew everywhere. Each year, Jews all over the world conduct Passover Seders. Jews share the responsibility to bring the world closer to peace, goodness, justice and abundance, an ideal we call the Messianic Age.

Being Jewish: the Challenges and Celebrations

Sometimes being Jewish provides the opportunity for celebration. Sometimes it presents dilemmas of morality and identity. Jewishness, regardless of its form, is part of who Jews are.

A. Draw a line from each Jewish activity to the responsibility it fulfills.

Light Shabbat candles	Love peace and pursue peace
Support organizations that work to release political prisoners	Comfort the bereaved
Make a shiv'a call (visit a house of mourning)	Personally enter into the covenant with God
Suggest a solution or compromise in a disagreement	Next year in Jerusalem
Become Bar/Bat Mitzvah	Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy
Visit Israel	Free the captives

B. Pick one Jewish activity from above that can be a joyful experience. Discuss what makes it joyful.

C. Pick one Jewish activity from above that can be difficult or uncomfortable. Why is it so?

Belonging to Am Yisrael

"Do not separate yourself from your community" (*Pirke Avot 2.5*). We are each members of many communities. We are members of a family and citizens of a country. We can belong to a scouting troop and to a neighborhood, to a group of friends and to the Jewish people. Within each community, members are expected to fulfill certain obligations, and can expect many benefits.

A. Identify three reasons to be proud of belonging to *Am Yisrael*. (For example, creators of the idea of an ethical God, able to bear oppression without surrender and without becoming oppressors.)

B. List two obligations, and two benefits, of belonging to *Am Yisrael*.

C. Choose one community to which you belong, other than the overall Jewish community (for example, the Red Cross, Hadassah, B'nai B'rith.) Identify two obligations and two benefits of belonging to that community.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Part I—Why We Need God

Ethical Monotheism: The belief that the One God requires ethical (good) behavior from every human being. Judaism introduced this idea to the world.

Chosen People: This term, used to describe Jews, does not imply superiority. It implies the acceptance of responsibilities set out as terms of the Jewish people's covenant with God.

Anthropomorphism: The use of human terms to describe non-human objects; used in literature to make abstract concepts more concrete or more poetic. (For example: "The hand of God" or "The face of God.")

Part II—Why We Need Laws

Halacha: Jewish law; laws of Torah applied to specific situations, and codified in centuries of Rabbinic deliberation. Halachic Judaism believes that Rabbinic laws are as mandatory as laws in the Torah. Liberal Judaism believes they should be studied and evaluated as Jews forge contemporary ways to live according to Torah.

Mitzvah (pl. Mitzvot): A commandment, from God. The important distinction between a mitzvah and a good deed is this: we do good deeds because we want to; we do mitzvot because we are obligated to. A good deed becomes a mitzvah when the person doing it considers it an obligation.

Yetzer Ha-Ra and Yetzer Ha-Tov: The "Urge to do Evil" and the "Urge to do Good". Judaism believes that these urges co-exist in every human being. Tension between these two impulses shapes individual creative and moral development.

Part III—Mitzvot Between People

Mitzvot Beyn Adam L'havero: Mitzvot between people. All the *mitzvot* in this category guide Jews to be just and kind, to fight evil, and to help reduce suffering.

Tzedakah: Help given to the needy or to worthy institutions (hospitals, schools, etc.) Comes from the Hebrew word *tzedeq*, which means justice. The English word *charity* comes from the Latin, *caritas*, and implies that you should give because you care. Judaism states that you must give, whether or not you care, because it is right.

Part IV—Mitzvot Between People and God

Mitzvot Beyn Adam La-Makom: Mitzvot between people and God. Mitzvot in this category help us bring God into our thoughts and actions, and to appreciate God's presence.

Kidushah: Holiness, closeness to God. We can make times, places and actions *kadosh* (holy) by bringing God into them.

Shabbat: The day of rest, which God commands us to observe, remember and keep holy.

Part V—Belonging to Am Yisrael

Am Yisrael: The people of Israel; the Jewish people. Another term which emphasizes our unity despite our being scattered throughout the world is *Klal Yisrael*, the congregation of Israel, which refers to all Jews everywhere.

Diaspora: Dispersion. Jews "living in the Diaspora" live outside the land of Israel. Another term for Jews living outside of Israel is *Galut*, which means exile. Using *galut*, or exile, implies a temporary, forced absence. "Diaspora" does not necessarily share that connotation. Many Israelis say there is no difference between the two. They are *sho'li'lei ha'golah*, negators of the exile.

Jerusalem: "*Yerushalayim*," capital city of Israel; home in ancient times of both the first and second Holy Temples; The name incorporates the Hebrew letters *shin*, *lamed*, and *mem*, which spell *Shalom*, peace. The name also sounds like *ir shel shalom*, meaning the city of peace. Jews throughout history have prayed for Jerusalem to become a beacon of peace.

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