



United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism's  
Commission on Inclusion of People with Disabilities

Open Wide the Gates, the Gates of the Temple  
So That All May Worship:

Information for the High Holidays 5769

September 2008

Human beings mint many coins from the same mold, and they are all identical. But the Holy One, blessed be God, strikes us all from the mold of the first human and each one of us is unique. (*Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5*)

Oh God, may all created in Your image recognize that they are kin, so that in one spirit and in one friendship, they may be forever united before You. (Traditional Liturgy)



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## Introduction

As Yom Kippur draws to a close with the **Ne'ilah** service, we plead with God in the haunting **P'tah Lanu Sha'ar B'Eit Ne'ilat Sha'ar** prayer:

***Open for us the gates, even as they are closing.  
The day is waning, the sun is low.  
The hour is late, a year has slipped away.  
Let us enter the gates at last.  
Lord, have compassion Pardon, forgive, take pity.  
Grant us atonement. Help us to conquer our iniquity and sin.***  
*Excerpted from a piyyut recited at Ne'ilah on Yom Kippur  
Harlow Mahzor for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*

This prayer refers to the image of the gates of heaven closing at the end of the Day of Atonement. However, for a person with a disability, the gates to his/her synagogue may prevent him/her from being able to participate fully in all aspects of congregational life. Consequently, this must be a year-round prayer and challenge.

As we reflect upon our personal lives during this High Holiday season, let us also examine our congregation and do *teshuvah*, if we have failed to make it fully accessible and inclusive for everyone, including people with disabilities.

United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism's Commission on Inclusion of People with Disabilities is pleased to provide you with this High Holiday information packet. We designed it to provide you with information and resources focused on enhancing inclusion and meaningful participation of your congregants with disabilities. As we approach 5769, the Commission recognizes the challenges you face but also acknowledges your desire to remove barriers.

May the New Year be one of peace among **all** people...and may we continue to open wide the gates to Jewish Life so that **all** may worship.

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## Acknowledgments

The materials included in this Packet were developed in response to frequently asked questions received by United Synagogue's Commission on Inclusion of People with Disabilities some of which are posted to the Inclusion Page on [USCJ's website](#). This is a work in progress and you are strongly encouraged to help populate this page with additional information.

Many thanks to our lay and professional leaders who share a commitment to inclusion of Jews with disabilities. They serve on USCJ's Commission on Inclusion of People with Disabilities and are listed on page 4.

Special appreciation goes to a few women who went above and beyond to share their expertise and graciously devote their time to create this packet. They are Sara Rubinow Simon, Linda Zimmerman, Sandy Miller-Jacobs, Lenore Layman, Susie Drazen, Sally Abbey, and Shelly Christensen. Additional gratitude is extended to Shelly and Lenore for granting permission to draw from their excellent publications included in the Resource Section starting on page 14. They are:

- Jewish Community guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities by Shelly Christensen, The Minneapolis Jewish Community Inclusion Program for People with Disabilities; and
- Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month Resource Packet by Lenore Layman.

In order for our Synagogues to truly be a House of God—a house for all people during the upcoming High Holidays, we are well-advised to hear the words of Rabbi Tarfon (*Pirke Avot* 2:20 and 2:21):

***You are not required to complete the task, yet you are not free to desist from it.***

We hope you find these materials helpful. If you have any questions about how to incorporate this information into your holiday preparations, we have Disability Specialists who have agreed to make themselves available. They are listed in the section, "Disability Specialists Available to Answer Your Questions About Inclusion as You Prepare for the High Holidays" on page 10.

And, finally, when you have a moment, please let us know if these materials were useful and if so, how. If not, what can the Commission do to help you open your gates even wider? Please send your comments and suggestions to [palmer@uscj.org](mailto:palmer@uscj.org) with the subject line: High Holidays Information Packet.

May the coming year be one of inclusion and meaningful participation for all who seek to enter the gates of our Synagogues.

*Shelley Kaplan*  
*Co-Chair, USCJ Commission on Inclusion of People with Disabilities*

*Sara Rubinow Simon*  
*Co-Chair, USCJ Commission on Inclusion of People with Disabilities*

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## **USCJ's Commission on Inclusion of People with Disabilities**

Our Jewish values teach us that each of us is created in God's image and each of us is to be valued. The mission of United Synagogue's Commission on Inclusion of People with Disabilities is to sensitize and educate professional and lay leadership to the profoundly important responsibility of synagogues and their programs to be accessible to those who would otherwise be denied the opportunity to participate in all aspects of synagogue life, and to assist Congregations in meeting the needs of members with disabilities for creating an inclusive and welcoming environment.

Our website is a work in progress. Help us to assist others by sharing your stories. Please tell us how you've helped remove barriers for people with disabilities in your Synagogues and Religious programs. This information will be posted to our website for others to try in their communities.

Email: [palmer@uscj.org](mailto:palmer@uscj.org)

Website: <http://www.uscj.org/Accessibility7508.html>

### **Advisory Council Members**

Rabbi Robert Abramson	<a href="mailto:Abramson@uscj.org">Abramson@uscj.org</a>
Shelley Kaplan (Co-Chair)	<a href="mailto:2kaps@earthlink.net">2kaps@earthlink.net</a>
Dr. David Ackerman	<a href="mailto:dackerman@bjela.org">dackerman@bjela.org</a>
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### **Regional Disability Liaisons**

In nine regions across the United States and Canada, USCJ Regional Presidents have identified an individual to serve as its region's Disability Liaison. These individuals have professional and/or personal experiences and interests in the disability field. They assist USCJ's Commission on Inclusion of People with Disabilities by increasing awareness about meaningful inclusion and participation, identifying inclusion activities in our

Synagogues and Religious Programs, and answering disability-related inquiries, when needed.

If your region does not have a Disability Liaison, contact your Regional President and encourage him/her to identify an appropriate person. Send the contact information to Shelley Kaplan at [2kaps@earthlink.net](mailto:2kaps@earthlink.net).

### **Connecticut Valley Region**

Sally Abbey  
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### **Midwest Region**

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## **A Message about Inclusion from United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism**

It is the goal of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism's Commission on Inclusion of People with Disabilities to remind and teach us that **all human beings** are created in God's image and each of us is to be valued.

Our holy and sacred mission is simple—to sensitize professional and lay leadership to the profoundly important responsibility of synagogues to be accessible—architecturally,

programmatically and attitudinally—to those who would otherwise be denied the opportunity to participate in all aspects of synagogue life, and to assist Congregations in meeting the needs of members with disabilities.

Together, we will determine what has failed, what works and what needs improvement. We will learn from your own practices, successes and failures and determine how to better serve Jews with disabilities.

As you prepare for the High Holidays, and beyond, remember that we all hope to live long enough to reach the age where certain abilities are diminished. Let us create a world that will embrace and include us as we, God willing, reach that stage of life.

“*Kol Yisrael Areivim Zeh BaZeh*”—all Israel is responsible for one another.

*Rabbi Jerome Epstein*  
*USCJ Executive Vice-President*

*Dr. Ray Goldstein*  
*USCJ International President*

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## Getting Started

### **Form a Committee on Inclusion**

To get started, bring together a group of individuals who are interested in helping your synagogue become more welcoming to people with disabilities and their families. Learn why everyone in a synagogue benefits from an [Inclusion Committee](#).

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### **How Welcoming is Your Congregation: Identifying Barriers**

Identifying barriers to inclusion is your next step. The Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities (JCG) by Shelly Christensen and the National Organization on Disability (NOD) offer several tools are available to help you find out.

The **Checklist for Your Journey** is published in [Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities](#), a comprehensive survey tool designed for Jewish organizations.

Use [Audit of Barriers](#) to identify the specific attitudinal, communications and architectural barriers that are keeping people with disabilities from fully participating in

congregational life. This information will soon be moved from this location to the website for the [American Association of People with Disabilities \(AAPD\)](#).

Use [Journey of a Congregation](#) to determine your congregation's overall level of commitment toward the goal of full participation and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities. This information will soon be moved from this location to the website for the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD).

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## **Providing Effective Communication**

Communication is the interchange of thoughts, ideas, feelings, and facts. There is a barrier to communication when the content of a message is not understood. Various devices and sensitive actions can help compensate for visual, auditory or mental disabilities so that every person can absorb the message of God's love.

Here are some ways to provide effective communication for your congregants who may have hearing and/or visual impairments:

1. Provide large-print *siddurim* and *humashim*.
2. Provide all print information in other formats such as large print, Braille and/or audio tape. Use 18-point, bold, sans serif font.
3. Assistive listening devices (ALDs) are available for people who are hard of hearing. Provide neck loops that are compatible with hearing aids.
4. Sermons are available in large print and on tape.
5. The entire services are available on tape. Listen to Rabbi Mark Zimmerman [sing parts of the liturgy](#) from the Conservative movement's *Siddur Sim Shalom*.
6. Make sure your existing sound system is in good working order.
7. Provide a sign language interpreter upon request, if needed and available.
8. Provide adequate lighting.
9. Provide a comfortable way for people with disabilities within the congregation to offer suggestions for removing barriers without being made to feel like they are complaining.

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## **A Word about Large Print**

The symbol for large print is '**Large Print**' printed in **18 Point** or larger text. In addition to indicating that large print versions of **books, pamphlets, guides** and **programs** are available, you may use the symbol in your High Holiday materials to indicate that print materials may be provided in large print. Sans serif or modified serif print with good contrast is highly recommended, and pay special attention to letter and word spacing.

<p><b>Large Print</b></p>
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## **Ways to Include People with Disabilities during the High Holidays**

People with disabilities can greatly enrich the entire community through their presence. They may not believe that general invitations are really for them. Personal contact following announcements and mailings will confirm your sincerity. The following are possible ways in which to include your congregants with disabilities during the High Holidays and throughout the year:

1. Membership in sisterhood and men's club
2. Committee involvement
3. Social action
4. Usher / greeter
5. *Aliyot*
6. *Petihot*
7. Volunteer activities
8. Fundraising
9. Religious school aide
10. *Kiddush* and *oneg* set up
11. *Minyan* member
12. *Bar* and *Bat Mitzvah*
13. Educational supports

Source: Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month Resource Packet by Lenore Layman, Partnership for Jewish Life and Learning. [www.pjll.org](http://www.pjll.org)

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## **10 Steps to Making a Difference Now: Usher Training**

Ushers enhance High Holy Day services by greeting worshippers, taking tickets, and providing hearing aids and large *siddurim* and *humashim* to those who need them. They are usually the first people to greet incoming congregants and can set the tone for a positive experience. Strengthen their presence by providing training for your ushers and greeters prior to the High Holidays. Make sure they are aware of all accessibility features and accommodations provided by your synagogue.

The following may be used as a handout during this training:

1. I will treat ALL people as PEOPLE FIRST—as I would like to be treated.
2. I will SPEAK DIRECTLY to the person with a disability, not only to the nearby family member, companion, interpreter, or the canine companion.
3. I will offer to SHAKE HANDS when introduced to a person with a disability (Persons with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb may shake hands. Shaking the left hand is OK, too.)
4. I will place myself at EYE LEVEL, in front of the person for easy conversation with a person in a wheelchair or with a walker.
5. I will OFFER ASSISTANCE AND WAIT until the offer is accepted. I will wait and then ask for instructions.

6. I will be PATIENT AND WAIT for the person who has difficulty speaking, rather than speaking for the person. If I don't understand, I will tell the person to PLEASE REPEAT BECAUSE I REALLY WANT TO BE OF ASSISTANCE. I may help by asking short questions that require short answers, a nod, or a shake of the head.
7. I will see the WHOLENES OF SPIRIT beneath the surface of someone with a disability and overcome the tendency to turn away or ignore the person.
8. I will treat adults with developmental disabilities as adults, not as children. I will use first names only when using the same familiarity for all people.

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### **Use Words That Shows *KAVOD***

Words reflect and mold attitudes and should be chosen with care. Understanding the importance of appropriate language is the first step toward recognizing that people with disabilities are, first and foremost, people who should NOT be defined by their disability.

We respect a person's humanity not only through how we treat each other, but through the language we use. When we treat people with *kovod*, we use language that shows respect.

- Sarah is a person with a disability (not Sarah is disabled or handicapped.)
- Yosef has epilepsy (not Yosef is epileptic.)
- David uses a wheelchair (not David is wheelchair bound.)

Source: Excerpts from the Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities.

Additional [Communication Guidelines](http://www.uscj.org/Communication_Guidel7517.html) are available on the USCJ website at [http://www.uscj.org/Communication\\_Guidel7517.html](http://www.uscj.org/Communication_Guidel7517.html).

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### **Low Cost Solutions for Removing Barriers at Your Synagogue**

Removing barriers to inclusion and meaningful participation doesn't always have to be expensive. There are many things you can do right now that are relatively easy and inexpensive to begin to [make your building more inclusive](#) such as:

1. The application form for High Holiday Tickets has an area set aside for persons with disabilities to specify the type of accommodation needed.
2. Your *mezuzot* are posted at wheelchair height in appropriate locations
3. Assign volunteers, such as members of your youth group, to assist with congregants who have developmental or and learning disabilities in synagogue prayer.

4. Provide a “quiet room” with an intercom so that anyone who experiences anxiety, for whatever reason, can go and still hear the service.
5. Large print *siddurim*, *birkat hamazon* books available, (can also use photocopy machine to make large print copies if finances are tight.)
6. Connect the “music on hold” feature of your synagogue telephone systems to the sound systems in the sanctuary. Then services can be transmitted to members that are homebound or in the hospitals. Purchase loaner speaker phones to aid in listening.
7. Provide or arrange transportation using volunteers to assist members with disabilities attend services.
8. Build a portable non-electric Reader’s table with height adjustments to accommodate wheelchair and non-wheelchair users with a simple adjustment.
9. For people who use wheelchairs or are unable to ascend the *bimah* and are called for an *aliyah*, set up a table on main level or sanctuary and take the *Sifrei Torah* from the main lectern to this table.
10. Provide lighted magnifiers.
11. Provide signage to let people know that accommodations are available from the ushers upon request. Train your ushers!
12. Distribute a booklet about your efforts to welcome people with disabilities.
13. Install handrails on the steps to the *Aron HaKodesh*.
14. Establish an “inclusion fund” to defray the expenses associated with improved access. Money is deposited into this fund either by direct donation or is the result of fundraising activities of the Inclusion Committee.

For more ideas on [low cost solutions](#), check out USCJ’s “Making Your Building More Inclusive at [http://www.uscj.org/Low\\_Cost\\_Changes7513.html](http://www.uscj.org/Low_Cost_Changes7513.html).

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## **Disability Specialists Available to Answer Your Questions about Inclusion during the High Holidays**

The following professionals have specialized expertise in working with people with disabilities and have graciously agreed to be available to answer your questions during the upcoming High Holidays:

Dr. Shana Erenberg, Chairman, Department of Education, Blitstein Institute of Hebrew Theological College; Special Needs Consultant to the Board of Jewish Education of Metropolitan Chicago; Co-chairman, Jewish Special Educators International Consortium  
[erenberg@htc.edu](mailto:erenberg@htc.edu)

Dr. Sandy Miller-Jacobs, Professor and Director of Special Education  
Hebrew College, Newton Centre, Massachusetts  
[smillerjacobs@hebrewcollege.edu](mailto:smillerjacobs@hebrewcollege.edu)

617-559-8615

Dr. Sara Rubinow Simon, Co-Chair, USCJ Commission, North Bethesda, Maryland  
[srsimon@verizon.net](mailto:srsimon@verizon.net)  
301-468-0220

Linda F. Zimmerman, Executive Director, The Amit Program, Inc., Atlanta, Georgia  
[Lzimmerman@amitatlanta.org](mailto:Lzimmerman@amitatlanta.org)  
404-961-9966

Becca Hornstein, Executive Director, Council for Jews with Special Needs  
Scottsdale, Arizona  
[becca@cjsn.org](mailto:becca@cjsn.org)  
480-629-5343

Shelly Christensen, Program Manager, Jewish Community Inclusion Program  
for People with Disabilities, Minneapolis, Minnesota  
[schristensen@jfcsmpls.org](mailto:schristensen@jfcsmpls.org)  
952-542-4838

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## Jewish Sources & Texts to Use in Sermons and Study Sessions

The following quotations come directly from Jewish sources and provide an excellent foundation for use in sermons or other study sessions when talking about the inclusion of people with disabilities.

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God saw **everything** that he had made, and behold, it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)

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*For my house shall be a house of prayer for **all** people.* (Isaiah 56:5)  
Welcome everyone—with joy. (*Pirkei Avot* 1:15)

---

Oh God, may **all** created in your image recognize that they are kin, so that in one spirit and in one friendship, they may be forever united before you. (Traditional Liturgy)

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Welcome **everyone** with joy. (*Pirke Avot* 1:15)

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*You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind.* (Leviticus 19:14) [We do not wittingly place a stumbling block before people with disabilities, yet by ignoring their needs, we do inadvertently place a stumbling block before them.]

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And Moses said unto the Lord: 'Oh Lord, I am not a man of words, neither in the past, nor since hast Thou spoken unto Thy servant; for I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.' (Exodus 4:10)

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When a person insults someone else, it is his own defect that he is revealing. (*Kedushim* 70a)

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

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Human beings mint many coins from the same mold, and they are all identical. But the holy one, blessed be God, strikes us all from the mold of the first human and each one of us is unique. (*Mishnah Sanhedrin* 4:5)

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**Every** member of the people of Israel is obligated to study Torah—regardless of whether one is rich or poor, physically able or with physical disability. (Maimonides, *Mishne Torah, Hilkhos Talmud Torah* Ch. 10)

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If there be among you a person with needs, thou shalt not harden thy heart, but thou shalt surely open thy hand. (Deuteronomy 15:7)

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Do what is good and right in the sight of God. (Deuteronomy 6:19)

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Hillel said, "Be like the disciples of Aaron, love peace and pursue peace, love **all** people and bring them close to the Torah. (*Pirke Avot* 1:12)

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What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

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Anyone who deprives a student of being taught Torah is as if he robs him of his father's legacy. As it says, "*Torah tziva lanu Moshe morasha kehilat Yaakov* – Moshe

commanded us the Torah, an inheritance of the Congregation of Yaakov. (*Devarim 33:4*) (*Sanhedrin 91b*)

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Rav Yochanan said: during the entire forty days and nights that Moshe Rabbeinu spent on Mt. Sinai, he kept learning the Torah and forgetting it. Finally, it was given to him as a gift. Why did this happen? To provide an answer for the slow learners.

The *Penai Moshe* explains:

“Why,” the Gemara asks, “was the Torah not given to Moshe as a gift at the outset? To provide an answer for the slow learners who forget whatever they learn. “When they ask, ‘why should we labor for no purpose?’ The answer will be from Moshe himself, who learned and reviewed even though it was all forgotten, until finally it was given to him as a complete gift. (*Horayot 3:5*):

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Ben Azzai taught: Do not disdain **any** person; do not under-rate the importance of anything – For there is no person who does not have his hour, and there is no thing without its place in the sun. (*Pirkei Avot 4:3*)

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A student should not say “I have understood” when s/he has not understood. Rather, s/he should ask again, even several times. And, if the teacher gets angry and abuses the student verbally, she or he should say to the teacher, “Teacher, this is Torah and I must learn it, even if my capacity is inadequate.” (Maimonides, *Mishne Torah, Hilkhot Talmud Torah, 4:4*)

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When the Israelites left Egypt, most of them were disabled in some way. Why? Because they had been working with clay and bricks climbing to the tops of buildings. Those doing the construction work in Egypt would get to the upper levels of the building, and a rock would fall on them and cut off their hands; or a beam, or some clay would get into their eyes and blind them. This is how they became disabled. When they arrived at the Sinai Desert, God said, “Such is the honor of Torah that I will give it to this generation of disabilities. If I were to wait for others, I would hold up the giving of the Torah.

The *Midrash* goes on to describe how angels “cured” all of the disabilities so that they could receive the Torah, but I don’t think that adds to the point. If anything, it may make it worse. In my view, the point is *kakh hu k’vodah shel torah*--such is the honor of Torah that our community cannot afford to exclude people from hearing its message. (Rabbi Michael Safra, B’nai Israel Congregation, Rockville, Maryland)

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In so many ways we are trying to create the sense of community by inviting **all** people to use the front door of the Congregation as a portal from the impersonal world of business

to the personalized community of spirit. (Rabbi Rick Sherwin, Congregation Beth Am, Longwood, Florida)

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

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....and **all** Thy children shall be taught of God and great will be the peace of Thy children. (Isaiah 54:13)

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## Resources Available

### **Readings on Inclusion**

- In [Mishaneh Ha-Briyyot: A New Jewish Approach to Disabilities](#), Rabbi Elliot Dorff presents what he calls a Copernican revolution in how Jews should understand and treat disabilities.
- Susie Drazen points out ways for synagogue leaders to [start thinking more inclusively](#).
- Rabbi Jack Reimer examines a section of Leviticus that [deals with disabilities](#)
- Rabbi Artson's son, Jacob, writes movingly about [how it feels to have autism](#); this is an extraordinary look at a generally poorly understood condition.
- Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson explores how his son, Jacob, who has autism, taught him not to put his head down and rush but instead to walk with God in [Jacob Who Loves the Sabbath](#)
- Shelley Kaplan looks at ways in which synagogues have made prayer accessible to people with disabilities in [Opening the Gates of Prayer](#)
- Rabbi Michael Safra writes about Disability *Shabbat* in [Beyond Accommodation: The Need for the Truly Inclusive Community](#)
- Rabbi Avi Weiss points out why we all benefit when we use ramps rather than stairs in [Lessons of the Ramp](#)

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## ***Tools and Resources***

- [Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities](http://www.jfcsmpis.org/pdf%20new/inclusionguide.pdf) by Shelly Christensen offers a step-by-step road map for inclusion committees to assess, envision, organize and implement an inclusion plan tailored to meet the unique needs of each Jewish organization  
[<http://www.jfcsmpis.org/pdf%20new/inclusionguide.pdf>]
- [Disability Resource Guide](http://www.jfcsmpis.org/inclusionresources.html) by Shelly Christensen offers a wealth of information and resources to enhance your inclusion activities to ensure meaningful participation by people with disabilities.  
[<http://www.jfcsmpis.org/inclusionresources.html>]
- [Who Makes People Different](#) presents traditional sources about disabilities and examines modern views and theological implications.
- [V'Khol Banayikh: Jewish Education for All, A Jewish Special Needs Resource Guide](#), Edited by Sara Rubinow Simon, Linda Forrest, and Ellen Fishman, Torah Aura Publishing Company, this new Guide contains an extensive section on building an inclusive Jewish community with pieces from USCJ and is available from the Torah Aura website at [www.torahaura.com](http://www.torahaura.com).
- [Life Through the Lens of a Special Educator](http://lifethroughthelensofaspecialeducator.blogspot.com/) by Sandy Miller-Jacobs is an informative and insightful blog about inclusion and meaningful participation,  
[<http://lifethroughthelensofaspecialeducator.blogspot.com/> ]
- The Anti-Defamation League offers a [curriculum](#) with lessons for all grade levels on integrating people with disabilities into mainstream schools.
- The [Americans With Disabilities Act](#) has [implications](#) for synagogues and other religious institutions.
- The [Council for Jews with Special Needs](#) offers a wealth of resources on inclusion.
- Listen to Rabbi Mark Zimmerman [sing parts of the liturgy](#) from the Conservative movement's Siddur Sim Shalom.
- [JBI International](#) offers people who have visual impairments audio, large print, and Braille books, magazines and cultural programs; many of which are of Jewish interest.
- [Jewish Education Service of North America \(JESNA\)](#)

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## Best Practices for Inclusion of People with Disabilities: A Work in Progress

“A **best practice** is a technique or method that, through experience and research, has proven to reliably lead to a desired result.”

(Source: [http://searchsoftwarequality.techtarget.com/sDefinition/0,,sid92\\_gci498678,00.html](http://searchsoftwarequality.techtarget.com/sDefinition/0,,sid92_gci498678,00.html))

### **USCJ's Solomon Schechter Awards 2007: Inclusion of People with Disabilities**

#### HTML File

<http://64.233.169.104/search?q=cache:YT7Vx6tw1xAJ:www.uscj.org/images/SolSchAwards2007Inclusion.pdf+Solomon+Schechter+awards+2007+Inclusion&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=2&gl=us>

#### PDF File

<http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&sitesearch=www.uscj.org&q=Solomon+Schechter>

### **Accommodations at Congregation Beth El in Bethesda, MA**

Learn from Congregation Beth El. Their approach to inclusion serves as one of many models for other synagogues. They list what they provide rather for various congregants with disabilities.

[<http://www.bethelmc.org/AboutUs/SpecialNeedsDisabilities/tabid/403/Default.aspx>]

### **Rodef Shalom Congregation in Pittsburgh, PA**

This Synagogue offers training for ushers prior to the High Holidays. To learn more, contact Jeffrey Herzog: (412) 621-6566 x119 or [herzog@rodefshalom.org](mailto:herzog@rodefshalom.org).

[[http://rodefshalom.org/Events/index.cfm?id=3178&pge\\_prg\\_id=5604&pge\\_id=1001](http://rodefshalom.org/Events/index.cfm?id=3178&pge_prg_id=5604&pge_id=1001)]

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## National Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month

### National Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month



Dear Leader:

Imagine the transformation that could occur if we all joined together in achieving the common goal of including people with disabilities in our Jewish organizations and communities. Imagine the opportunities that would arise if we simultaneously endeavored to raise awareness, increase educational and spiritual growth, and accept every individual in every aspect of the Jewish community.

United Synagogue's Commission on Inclusion of People with Disabilities is joining efforts together with the Orthodox Union National Jewish Council for Disabilities and the Union for Reform Judaism to heighten awareness and make a difference.

As the issue of inclusion has been brought towards the forefront of Jewish life and more synagogues, Jewish schools, camps and JCC's have begun to welcome people with disabilities and provide programming to include all, **we propose that a unified commitment across the religious spectrum be made to designate the month of February as a national month of recognition and commitment to inclusion.**

We are asking for your commitment, along with other Jewish communities throughout North America, to encourage your congregations to participate in **Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month in February, 2009**. This is not a request to endorse any specific programs in your community; rather it is a request to encourage the synagogue communities that you work with to highlight the importance of inclusion of Jewish people with special needs and disabilities in the mainstream of Jewish life.



**USCJ  
Commission on Inclusion  
of People with Disabilities**

Tremendous strides have been made in communities that have set aside specific time to focus on inclusion in a Jewish context. In several communities across the country, including Washington, DC, Minneapolis, Boston, Atlanta and New York City, congregations designate special time each year in order to recognize the importance of inclusion. In some cases, this is marked by a designated weekend devoted to increasing awareness of this critical issue, and in others it takes the shape of a month-long initiative. In all cases, it has brought much-needed focus to issues of inclusion, and has connected people to the Jewish community who previously had been left to watch others experience Jewish living opportunities that were not accessible to them.

Ideas about what you can do to support Disability Awareness Month in the Jewish Community are available on the [USCJ website](#) and will soon be available on the [Partnership for Jewish Life and Learning website](#).

Please let us know as soon as possible about your willingness to work with your partner synagogues to encourage them to participate in **Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month in February 2009**. We will be providing suggested resources and ideas electronically which you will be able to share with the congregations that you partner with at a later time. Thank you for your commitment to making the Jewish community more inclusive to all. For questions, please contact, Lenore Layman, [llyman@cesjds.org](mailto:llyman@cesjds.org), 301-881-1400 or Shelley Kaplan, [sakaplan@law.syr.edu](mailto:sakaplan@law.syr.edu); 404-541-9001.

Sincerely,

*United Synagogue's Commission on Inclusion  
of People with Disabilities*

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