



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

“Family Values”
by Benjamin Weitz
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Values are guidelines for life. They give our lives meaning and direction. They help us set goals. So if we decide on our values, we can really decide how we will live our lives.

We don't choose our values all by ourselves. We are influenced by others, and especially by our parents. We are also influenced by our experiences when we are growing up, just like our parents were. Even though my values might change during my life, they will always start with that influence.

After talking to my parents and grandparents about their values, at first their values did not seem that similar. But as my mother says, all values are connected in some way. For example, you cannot respect your parents if you are not honest with them. And you cannot really love someone if you are not kind to them.

From my parents, I first learned about Love -- in Hebrew, Ahava. Their unconditional love always made me feel very secure. Love is one of my most important values too. Love means caring for someone, being there for them, giving them affection, and not hurting them. I will value love in my life by trying to understand the people I love, their needs, and who they are. I will try to solve my anger and my bad feelings so that love won't die.

Healing the World, Tikkun Olam, has also been very important in my family. My dad's father Robert became an attorney so that he could help others. He worked very hard for civil rights, tenants' rights, human rights, and improving his community. He says it made him feel good to be on the side of the good guys.

My father has participated in many civil rights and humanitarian political causes. He chose a career in social services, working with welfare recipients and homeless people. Healing the world is one of my values too. I would like to try to make the world a better place. Through my community service and other Bar Mitzvah work, I came to realize how important this is to me personally, because everyone deserves the same justice and should have the same rights. I will always try to speak out about things that I believe in, to help make the world better for everyone.

When I was talking to my parents and grandparents about their values, the one value everyone agreed on was Family, or Mishpacha. My mother says that her large family was always together on weekends when she was growing up. She feels like her cousins are more like brothers and sisters to her. Even now that they live all over the United States, they stay very close to each other with a family Internet group.

My Dad's mother, Dottie, said that family gave her a sense of belonging. She always loved her children and her grandchildren so much, and she loved sharing holidays and family gatherings with them. She tried to attend every single event I had, from birthdays to graduations, to class presentations and talent shows. I know that throughout my life my family will always be there for me, and I will be there for them too. I value my family.

Friendship, Chavayrut, is also very important to me. True friends can feel like family, and bond in a way that might never be broken. I feel that my friends and I are loyal to each other, and that I can trust them. I hope they also trust me. I will try to support my friends, even if it means putting myself in a bad spot.

Being Charitable, Tzedakah, and helping others is also very important in my family. My Mom's father, whom I call Poppy, grew up during the depression, and they didn't have much money. But he remembers that they always gave to charity. He says that his own parents, my great-grandparents, used to take in strangers who just arrived in this country. If they had no other place to stay, they could stay with Poppy's family. He and all of his five brothers and sisters would be squeezed into one bedroom, so that the new arrival could have the other. I can see myself how my Poppy continues this tradition of charity by doing whatever he can when someone asks for help. I have seen how important charity is to people in need, and it has become one of my values, too.

Poppy also values Humor, and so do I. Having humor means to laugh in life, and not to take everything so seriously. In particular, I like to find the irony in situations. Poppy says that sometimes you have to decide if you're going to sit and cry or lighten your situation by trying to laugh, even if it's at yourself, to find a bit of joy. For Jews, who have been persecuted throughout history, humor has often been another way to survive. Humor is also important to me because it has helped me to make friends. It's a universal way of communicating.

When talking to my family about their values, no one mentioned Concern for the Suffering of Animals – Tzaar Baalei Hayim, Happiness – Simcha, or Music -- Musica. That doesn't mean they don't value those things, but it wasn't a main focus for them when they were growing up. I have been influenced by my parents' values of course, but I am also developing my own values through my own thoughts and experiences.

All of my life, I have felt empathy for animals. I can't stand to see an animal suffering. Concern for Animals means understanding that they are living things with feelings. When I wanted a dog, I chose to adopt one from North Shore Animal League instead buying one, because I wanted to save his life and give him a loving home. My dog Harry is now a best friend. I am continuing to help animals by supporting a foster dog through the North Shore Animal League.

I have learned to love Music, and I have learned to play the drums to express that love. I think that music is so important because it lifts the spirits and gives people a sense of hope.

Happiness is the feeling that allows us to enjoy life without worry or sadness. Happiness is important so that our lives are not cluttered with the chaos of worrying, and so we can live a better life. I think I am a happy person, and that means that I'm also optimistic and have a bright view of the future.

My mother's family and my father's family are from very different cultures. Not only that, but one family has always been secular, and the other religious. Yet, my parents' marriage shows how people connect with each other through shared values.

I'm glad that my parents are raising me to be a good person, a person with values. All values are connected, and when we choose our values we are all trying to live a better life. We just might choose to focus on one thing or another a little differently. Right now, this is my focus. These are some of the values that are most important to me, and how I hope to live by them.