



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

**“Family Values”
by Emily Dyke
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Before coming to the City Congregation for Humanistic Judaism (or TCC), I did not know much about the Jewish religion or history. I had never gone to Hebrew school or celebrated the holidays in a religious manner. Attending TCC has provided an opportunity for me to learn more about my Jewish heritage from a secular perspective. I have been challenged to explore my family history, examine my family values and give thought to my own set of values and where they come from. The purpose of this paper is to share with all of you what I have discovered about the values that have been passed down throughout my family and those values that are most important to me.

Personal choices are what make up one’s life. They shape personalities and determine the outcome of every situation. What is it that motivates people to make the choices they make for themselves? I believe it is our values that make each of us different from one another and that inform our choices and behaviors. Values are moral principles that guide individuals’ belief systems and choices. For instance, if someone values creativity she may choose to have a profession that is related to art. Different groups, particularly religious groups, influence individual’s value systems. Some of my values are inspired by my cultural heritage, some I share with my family, but others are unique to me.

Ahmitut, authenticity, is a value that I share with several family members. My mother, Debbie, grew up in a Jewish family. When she was young her family belonged to a Conservative congregation. My grandmother, Lois, had a hard time relating to the services there. She desperately wanted to switch to a congregation that was more meaningful and interesting to her. When my mother was in fourth grade they discovered The Birmingham Temple, a Humanistic congregation in suburban Detroit, which was founded by Rabbi Sherwin Wine. It just so happens that my grandmother Lois and Rabbi Wine knew each other from high school. Almost immediately the Morrison family knew that Humanistic Judaism was their preferred belief system. Changing congregations, especially to one as “radical” as the Birmingham Temple, took courage to stay true to their feelings and belief system. Being an authentic person and behaving in a way that is honest was very important to my grandmother Lois and continues to be important to my mother and me.

I also strongly value self-acceptance, mash-lee-mah eem atz-mah. I have been encouraged to accept myself by my mom and my friends. I know I can trust them when they tell me to be comfortable in my own skin. With all the social pressure to look and behave in a particular way, I admire those who resist that influence. My grandmother, Lois, exhibited self-acceptance through her actions. She would speak her mind freely and did not care who heard. Lois is commonly described as having been silly. She would behave in crazy ways that she was not self-conscious about. My Papa John, my dad’s father, was also self-accepting and confident. Because of this quality other people listened to him and trusted him. He was given positions of authority at work and close friends turned to him for help and advice.

I share the value of kehillah, community and shevyon, equality, with my mother, father, and all of my grandparents. A phrase my father remembers hearing from his father is “The people who look down their noses at the milkman are the first people to complain if their milk is not delivered on time.” I

understand this to mean that arrogant people who think that the world is organized in a hierarchy of human value do not understand that community is a circle of people depending on each other. My father's father was a well-respected physician in a hospital who treated everyone who worked at the hospital with equal respect, regardless of his or her status or role. My father's mother's favorite memories of her childhood revolve around her neighborhood and family community. My mother's father was a champion of the downtrodden, supported labor unions and was a huge believer in civil rights. He reached out to those less fortunate than himself whether through generous financial assistance or providing work opportunities to those in need. My mother and father also value community, treat everyone with respect, and chose professions which contribute to the well being of the community.

A value I hold that closely follows community is that of true friendship, or *chaveyrut*. My grandfather often said, "Better to have a few real friends than many false ones." He used to say this to my dad when he was facing social pressure to be in the "cool crowd" in high school. Though popularity can be fun sometimes, it is important to keep a level head and value true friendship and people you know you can trust. My mother's parents had a group of friends they maintained from their own childhood. This expresses to me the importance not only of having friends but keeping them. I love to create friendships. I usually can become pretty close to a person within a short amount of time. When I create a close relationship with someone I feel deeply connected to that person.

Another value I share with my mother and her mother is the ability to look at a situation and find humor in it. I particularly value intelligent, clever humor. My mother believes that humor is both healing and connecting. Many times if she is stressed or in a bad mood, that can be changed with a few good laughs. I find that I laugh a lot with my friends. Sharing a sense of humor with friends brings us closer and creates a deep feeling of comfort.

One value that I learned from my father, his parents, and my mother, who was taught by her own parents, is empathy and compassion, or *rachamim*. This value is expressed by the phrase my grandmother often said: "Treat others the way you would want to be treated." Being sensitive to other people's feelings and treating them accordingly is very important to me. This value influences the way I make friends in that my empathic ability enables me to get close to people quickly and work through conflicts when they arise.

Critical thinking, *cha-shee-vah bee-kor-tee* and scientific reasoning are values that I have adopted from my father and his father. My dad grew up in a Christian family. They celebrated the Christian holidays, occasionally attending church on Easter and Christmas Eve, but they were not strongly observant. This was in part because my grandmother, Rose, was forbidden to attend church when she was a child. It is said that her mother had a traumatic encounter with a priest as a young girl and never attended the Catholic Church again. My grandfather was raised in a Protestant family and, though he believed in God, he was strongly devoted to science. Scientific proof and critical thinking were important to him, which sometimes conflicted with religious practice. My father feels similarly to my grandfather; the importance of scientific reasoning is more essential to him than his spiritual or religious beliefs. Though my mother and father come from different religious backgrounds, their shared value of critical thinking enhances their compatibility.

Repairing the world, *tikkun olam*, is important to my family and me. Of course, we try to conserve energy, reduce global warming, and definitely use less plastic but we are not only thinking of repairing the world in that way. Another important aspect of our lives is the political situation of our nation. My entire family felt very strongly about the presidential election, especially my mother and father. In an attempt to do her part in repairing the world, my mother went to Pennsylvania to support Barack Obama's campaign. It is important to think about the future of our country and to try to enhance it. One way that I can incorporate this value in my life is to become more active in my school and town

communities. I can participate in making decisions for my school or help organize funds to raise money for the community. We can improve our world in many small ways and make a large impact. For example, I used to underestimate the importance of turning a light off in a room at home. However, if everyone turns a light off it can make a huge difference. I now understand that we should do everything we can, large and small, to repair our world. Someone who inspires me to repair the world is Ms. Walsh, a teacher in my school. She teaches an environmental class and works at a shelter when she is not teaching French! She is passionate about social action.

The value of *hitlahavut*, passionate commitment, is a huge part of my life. I am passionate about so many things: my friends, family, acting, and singing. Passion is what stimulates many of my hobbies and relationships. I function best when I have a strong connection with another person. For example, I learn most effectively when I have a good relationship with my teacher. Another great passion for me is acting and the theater group I attend. This group is important to me for many reasons. One is that most of the people who participate share many of my values. The entire group shares a sense of community, friendship, respect for each other and passion. We have developed great trust and created a sense of safety, which allows us to be our authentic selves.

Masoret, tradition, is a central value to me as well. One of my yearly traditions is going to Canada with my family and friends in the summer. We do it every year and I always get very excited for the trip. It is nice to look forward to something familiar with people you love. Another tradition in my family is celebrating Christmas with my dad's family. We do not attend church but we spend time with each other and exchange gifts. We also celebrate Hanukkah, and, depending on when it falls, sometimes we are lighting the menorah and trimming the tree on the same day! Having traditions is comforting to me.

My enjoyment of tradition is compatible with my attending a secular humanistic congregation. I enjoy the traditional celebrations of Judaism and they are more important and meaningful to me than the religious practice.

Before working on this project, I had not given much thought to my values and what they mean to me. Working on this paper has not only shown me the huge impact that values have on the choices I make for myself, but it has helped me to understand how my family, and those who I am close to have influenced the development of my values. Though I never knew my grandmother, Lois, the research I have done has shown me how many values and personality traits we have in common. I also learned that I have a very similar view on life as my grandfather, John. I see how strongly my mother and father's opinions influence mine. And as I stated previously, through this project I have not only learned about my family, but I have learned about myself as well. I am able to understand why I am passionate about the things that I love and how important that passion is to me. I understand more about where the strength of my opinions comes from and how much it means to me to stand by my convictions. In general, writing this paper has helped me to appreciate both the values I have inherited as well as the values that I have developed on my own.