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"Family Values"
by James Ryan
October 22, 2011

When the time had come for me to begin working on my family values essay, I began by interviewing my family members and asking them about our ancestors' history. I also asked them about what values are important to them. Eventually, I created a list of values shared by me and my family that was nine values in total.

The first is the value of community, or *k'heela*. Members in my family have helped each other in tricky situations for many years. Ranging from offering advice to assisting another person financially, my family has done acts such as this, thus creating a sort of community among us.

My family also believes that social change in the communities they live in is extremely important. For instance, my maternal grandmother Reva recently joined the board of her co-op in Queens in part to change the buildings for the other people in the complex. My paternal grandparents Jim and Jeanne also belong to the organization PROTECT! The Adirondacks, which is dedicated to preserving the Adirondack Park, where their summer house is located. Last, my grandfather Jim, whom I call Oopa, is on the board of the building that we live in so that he can ensure a better experience for the community of tenants in our building.

This also ties into the value of *meeschpaha*, or family, in that we have created a community among ourselves. In terms of family, traditions within our "community" are important. For instance, my name, James Daniel Ryan, has been passed down through the Ryan family for four generations so far in America. It began with my great grandfather, who passed the name to my grandfather, and so on and so forth. It was of great significance to the family, in that all of the fathers insisted that their sons carry the family name. I hope also to someday pass the name on to my son, if I have one, and he will continue to pass it on, *l'dor v'dor*, from generation to generation.

Second is the value of bettering the world, or *tikkun olam*. For decades, my family has been helping to better their communities and the environment. Members of my family have donated extensively over time to charities that benefit the environment. Back in New York City, my Nana Jeanne spends much of her spare time in the spring helping to work on our building's garden by planting and maintaining it. In addition, my parents and I have always believed that the earth is the only home that we will ever have. We must therefore care for it and respect it as such. For example, we respect the earth by recycling all of our cans, bottles, cardboard, and newspapers. I also strive to place any trash that I have in an appropriate recycling bin, as well as picking up litter and trash that others may leave behind.

Third is the value of charity, or *tzedakah*. For many years, it has been a family tradition to donate money or services to those who are less fortunate, disabled, sick, or those in need of general assistance. Also, I personally believe that one who is homeless or poor deserves at least a second chance at a better life. Due to this, I have encouraged my family to donate to the Red Cross in several instances, including the earthquake in Haiti.

Fourth is one of my family's most important values, education, or *cheenuch*. For example, my maternal great-grandmother Sally immigrated to America at the age of twelve, for, among other reasons, education. My maternal great-grandparents made sure their children had better educations than they did, and they, in turn, made sure that my mother and my Uncle Dave did even better than that. This is also true on the other side of my family, in that my father's ancestors immigrated for education, among other reasons such as freedom and to escape certain undesirable elements of the government. My grandfather Jim was also a history professor, and taught much of what my father was not taught in school to him and his siblings, who passed along their knowledge to me. My father also teaches me most of the information that I do not always learn in school, generally in the fields of science and history. He also teaches me, upon occasion, certain life skills, such as cooking and home improvement, that I may need to know in my later years of life. He also teaches me basic skills for emergencies, such as how to put out a small fire to prevent it from spreading quickly.

I also believe that education is very important for many reasons later in life. For instance, I study Spanish because it may open up many job opportunities for me. My parents also encourage me to do well in school by helping me with concepts that I did not understand. Many of my other family members also helped me this way, and taught me about things that I still would not know in the fields of history and science.

My fifth value is that of good health, or *breeoot*. My grandparents always taught me that good health is important. They taught me that this is the only life you will have, and therefore the body needs to be well maintained for longevity. It is also important because, in some cases, the health of one person can affect many other people. This became clear when my maternal grandfather Jack, whom I simply called Grandpa, died in 2006. It was a great shock to all of us, and we grieved for a very long time as a result. His deteriorating health over time caused grief and distress for all members of the family. My father and I also work to stay in good health by staying active, eating well, and going to the gym often.

Sixth is the value of humor, or *humor.* This is probably one of the most important in the family because of the family traditions that tend to come with it. For instance, it is typical that if my grandfather Jim tells a joke, chances are the joke is either dirty, or pokes fun at my grandmother Jeanne. This good – natured humor also tends to carry on through the family, being that my father and I are able to make such jokes ourselves, as my mother can concur.

However, it is not just the corny jokes, but also the meaning of them that makes humor important to the family. It is not the time when the jokes are told, but usually the response and the laughs that make the sitting around the table telling bad jokes memorable to the family. It helps us remember the good times and lets us know that there are good things in life, and that family is one of them.

Seventh is the value of music, or *mooseka.* Most of the actual musical talent in my family comes from my father's side, where my grandfather Jim learned to play guitar. While it is arguable that playing an instrument skips a generation in my family (my father, aunt Julie, and uncle Matthew do not play music, whereas I do and my cousin Evander is learning), my parents have played classic rock for my entire life such as the music of the Beatles, the Who, Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, and others, which has inspired me to play music.

This value was greatly reinforced during the trip that my mother and I took in the summer of 2010, where we visited sites related to classic rock such as Cleveland, Chicago, Memphis, and Nashville. Aside from the fact that there were very few, if any arguments about music that we were

listening to on the road, we had a great time visiting such sites as the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Graceland, Sun Studio, the Gibson Guitar Factory, and RCA Studio B. We had such a good time because we both understood the history involved with these places. I learned the history from my mother. She knows so much of it, including what Sun Studio and RCA Studio B were in relation to the history of popular music. For those who do not know, Sun Studio was where artists such as Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Roy Orbison, and others at later points, such as Bono, recorded. RCA Studio B was the place in which Elvis Presley regularly recorded many songs after he left Sun Records.

Eighth is the value of respect, or *kavod*. My family has always valued respect for several reasons. First, respect can help to build relationships between two people. For instance, if a grandson respects his grandfather and vice versa, they tend to be closer to each other and understand each other more than they otherwise would. This has personally happened between me and both of my grandfathers, and continues to happen today in the case of my grandfather Jim on my dad's side of the family. It is also important, for me, to respect somebody such as a teacher or mentor because it can help him or her to teach you better.

Finally is the value of hard work, or *avodah ka-shay.* Work has been important to my family not only because it is a source of income, but for the benefits that result for the person doing the work and other people. For instance, work has led to the existence of many things that we take for granted today, such as inventions that make simple tasks much more convenient. Also, work and the money and skills that come with it have, in my family, been used to grow the family to its size today. I believe that work can also create a better life for yourself and others with its benefits. Work has always been, as far as my family and I are concerned, essential, and not working is considered to be a great liability to yourself and those you live with.

In conclusion, there are many values that I share with my family. Many of them are of great significance to me only, such as music and work, while others, such as education and humor, have brought together members of my family. While some are far more important than others, all of these have a role in our lives, and will for many future generations to come.