



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“Family Values”  
by Mattori Birnbaum  
October 23, 2010**

For me, values are the ideals that a person or a group of people prefer to follow. We try our best to follow our values as often as possible. These values reflect what we do, how we do it, and our personality. Values often can define a person quite accurately.

The first value I will talk about is family, or meesh-pah-cha. My family is very close and my family members always care for each other. For example, on my father’s side, my great-uncle Fred Matts had a daughter named Susan. Her mother had died of cancer when Susan was a teenager. Fred was not able to handle raising a teenage girl on his own. So, my Dad’s parents took Susan in to live with them until she was old enough to live on her own.

My dad’s mother’s parents practiced meesh-pah-cha when they sent food to family members in New York City. It was the Depression. My great-grandfather, David Matts, was a Kosher butcher, one of the first Kosher butchers in Hartford, Connecticut. My Dad says that his family often shared with family members because that’s what families did back then. My Mom and Dad say that we would do the same thing today.

One of the primary reasons why my grandfather, great-grandfather, and probably great-great-grandfather on my mom’s side came to America was to support their family in China. They sent money on a regular basis, and also when their family had a special need, such as to start a business or when someone got married or had a baby.

My family has a history of treating people who aren’t family members as if they were in our family. My parents really like to donate to charity, or tz-dah-kah.

My great-grandfather David, the butcher, and his wife were generous to others besides family members. What was really remarkable was that they would make sure that if someone truly hungry came into their shop, they would leave with food. Even if that meant a major discount. Even if that meant it was free. They were very kind people who loved their community.

My parents have taught me that tz-dah-kah involves more than just giving money...it is also about acts of kindness. Back in 1990 my dad heard that the soup kitchen down the street at St. Ignatius Church was looking for help. He gave them a hand. It felt good and seemed right that he was helping homeless people in the community. He has been doing that ever since, for 20 years now. He’s the head person in charge on the 4th Monday of every month and when there’s a 5th Monday he’s in charge then too.

Another thing that is important to my family is friendship, or cha-very-root. We really try to stay close to our friends. One example is my dad’s friend Keith Wilson. They’ve been friends since

kindergarten. Even during long periods of not seeing each other they always remained really good friends. My dad is excited that Keith is now working in midtown, so that they can see each other more often. My parents still care about our friends even though they don't see them as much as they used to. As for myself, I have many great friends and I enjoy my friendships deeply.

There is a saying: "anything worth achieving requires hard work." Hard work. A-vo-dah ka-shey. Now that's a value my family knows. My parents taught me that it's not necessarily true that hard work is always required. Sometimes in life things just come naturally or we get lucky. However, when natural gifts and good luck aren't enough, there is no substitute for hard work. My dad's parents owned their own store called Mille Mills, named after my grandmother Mille. They were on their feet helping customers 6-7 days a week, often from 9am-9pm. They needed to do that to make their business a success, with the bigger goal being to be able to provide a good life for themselves and most importantly for their children – my dad and my Aunt Beth.

My mom's family always believed in hard work too, because they felt hard work would produce results and success. When my great-grandfather came here he worked on the Transcontinental Railway. For a while he was a laborer working on the actual railway. He decided to learn English, and mastered it quickly. He felt this difficult task would help his career. It did. He was given more responsibility and made more money. He became a railway foreman. The Railway officials would send him to different parts of the Railway in order to settle disputes between the Chinese laborers and the company. When my grandfather followed from China at the age of 12, he wanted to help his family as well. So, he became a laborer. My grandmother on my mom's side was always working. She was a seamstress, which, at that time, was one of the only things women were allowed to do. She was allowed to sew, work in a restaurant and do laundry, and that was about it. Since my grandmother couldn't speak English there were further limits on what she was able to do. When my mom was a child, my grandmother would drop her kids off at school, and then go to work, then pick them up, and then make dinner.

Here's another value my family has: prevention of cruelty to animals or tza-ar ba-ah-ley hy-eem. My dad is really protective of animals and pets. He became a vegan because he doesn't feel it is right for him to eat animals or animal products. He thinks this is a personal decision, and does not try to convince other people to be vegans. Along with that, my parents will not buy animals from pet stores, which often get dogs from puppy mills.

My Aunt Beth came up with the idea for a law in Massachusetts that prevents pet rentals. She then got other people together and helped convince lawmakers to pass the laws. Many animal rights organizations agreed with her that it is horrible for the rental pets to be "shuttled from one place to the next, never knowing stability or love." Think about how rental cars are treated. Or rental DVDs. Now, think about what it must be like for a rental animal. See what she means?

Education, or chee-nuch, is another important value to my family. Both sets of my grandparents thought that education is critical for achieving a better life and passed that value onto their children. They made sure their children had a chance to go to college. My parents are doing the same for me, and I plan to do the same for my children.

My mother also went back to school a few years ago. She got a Master's degree in Integrated Marketing from NYU. She now works at a company in email marketing (NOT SPAM!). When she was

in school it seemed a bit strange because she was doing homework at the same time as I was. My dad also went back to school at night to learn more about financial planning and to qualify for various securities and insurance licenses. My parents have taught me that education is a very important factor in any successful life. You're never too old to learn something new and you can become a life-long learner. If you want to have a long, happy life it's much easier if you get a good education.

All of these values have shaped the history of my family, and will probably continue to shape the future of it too. I see how my family's values are reflected in how I do things. Like, for example, hard work. I've been playing piano since I was about 4 years old. It's been a lot of hard work throughout the years getting to where I am today. I can read and arrange music. I even recorded several songs with my friends in our own rock band. These values are important to me and I will pass them down to my children. They have shaped my family and I hope they will continue to guide my family for a long time to come.

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