

# Jewish Disability Awareness Month

From Awareness  
to Inclusion

**February 2015**



## Program Guide

Shelly Christensen, MA

[shelly@inclusioninnovations.com](mailto:shelly@inclusioninnovations.com)

© 2014 All Rights Reserved

Like us on 

<https://www.facebook.com/JewishDisabilityAwarenessMonth>  
[#JDAM2015](https://www.facebook.com/JewishDisabilityAwarenessMonth)

Please use the Jewish Disability Awareness Month logo on all of your communications. Contact [shelly@inclusioninnovations.com](mailto:shelly@inclusioninnovations.com) for the files.

# About Jewish Disability Awareness Month

**J**ewish Disability Awareness Month (JDAM) is a unified effort among Jewish organizations worldwide to raise awareness and foster inclusion of people with disabilities and those who love them. Established in 2009 by the Jewish Special Education International Consortium, JDAM is observed each February.

## The Mission of Jewish Disability Awareness Month

*The mission of Jewish Disability Awareness Month is to unite Jewish communities worldwide to raise awareness and champion the rights of all Jews to be included and participate in all aspects of Jewish life just like anyone else.*

- Elevate Jewish awareness of how people with disabilities have been regarded by Jewish society.
- Understand the importance of choosing one's own Jewish journey.
- Encourage Jews around the world to become more empathetic and welcoming toward people with disabilities.
- Urge Jews to welcome people with disabilities into their communities and personal lives.
- Include people with disabilities in ALL aspects of communal life, for we support the self-advocacy anthem "Nothing about Us without Us."
- Advocate for the rights of people with disabilities.

## What is Inclusion?

**A human being mints many coins from the same mold but the Holy One, Blessed be God strikes us all from the mold of the first human and each one of us is unique. Therefore every single person is obligated to say, 'The world was created for my sake.'"**

*(Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5)*

The relationship between Judaism and disability goes back to our roots. Why did Eve listen to the snake and engage in risk-taking behavior? Some might say she had ADHD or oppositional-defiant disorder. Jacob challenged the angel and consequently emerged with a physical disability. And Moses cited his speech disability as the reason he couldn't fulfill his leadership role. God knew differently and appointed Aaron as the first known reasonable accommodation so Moses could speak to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites on their journey.

Having a disability is not, and should never be, used as a reason to exclude someone from meaningful participation and contribution to this wonderful place we call "The Jewish Community."

Inclusion is the opportunity for every person, regardless of ability, to participate in meaningful ways in the life of the Jewish community. How do we know what is meaningful and important to another person? We open our doors, we ask and we take the journey together.

We do not do things **for** people with disabilities. We do things **with** people with disabilities. We don't always need "special" programs. We need support and a willingness to collaborate. That is how we achieve inclusion and meaningful participation.

Participation in Jewish Disability Awareness Month is only a first step. What your organization does in the next eleven months will determine your commitment to ensuring that all people feel that they belong.

The JDAM Resource Guide provides ways to get started. Be sure to check out the 2015 selections for JDAM Reads! located in this guide. The Jewish Special Education Consortium chose books that will appeal to adults and children. We hope you enjoy these reads!

Finally, the last page of this guide is a commitment form that you can share with your organizational leaders and members.

Warmest regards,

Shelly Christensen, MA  
shelly@inclusioninnovations.com  
www.inclusioninnovations.com

## Getting Started

- Establish a planning group for JDAM. Suggestions include:
  - Your inclusion committee
  - Representatives from several committees including education, adult ed, ritual, membership, sisterhood, brotherhood, youth.
  - Include clergy and professional staff
  - Include people with disabilities in your planning. Nothing about us without us!
- Establish goals for JDAM.
- Brainstorm activities that will help you achieve your goals.
- Ask yourselves “how will this activity impact inclusion in this particular area of organizational life?” It’s important to know this because you will be setting the expectation that there will be something **AFTER JDAM**.
- Promote. Use traditional media plus social media.
- Extend personal invitations to people who may be on the margins of the community.
- Display a banner or placard in your lobby announcing Jewish Disability Awareness Month. (Yes, you can use the logo!)
- The Torah portions during JDAM are rich with study material. Include study of the text at committee and board meetings, Torah study and religious school sessions. Discussions are robust, eye-opening and very powerful ways to help people understand and act
- Start a book group and read the JDAM Reads! 2013 selections. Discuss the differences in raising a child and being someone who has a disability.
- Saturday Night at the Movies. Select Autism: the Musical or Front of the Class, the films related to the JDAM Reads! selections or hold a ReelAbilities Film Festival in your city or community in February.
- Panel discussions featuring people with disabilities, family members and disability experts can generate food for thought
- I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again! Use JDAM as a springboard for the rest of the year!!!
- Community conferences are great for kicking off a community initiative.
- Invite people from group homes or your local Jewish program for adults with disabilities to services. Make the service accessible. Most important, greet and welcome them. Sit with them. Talk with them. Remember Abraham and Sarah welcoming the strangers. Think about inviting them to services the rest of the year. This isn’t just a “Taste of Judaism!”
- Holidays! Depending on the calendar Tu B’shevat or Purim fall during JDAM. There’s a seder in that—or a Purim spiel. Use your creativity.

## Become Inclusive...

### ...In Your Sanctuary

- Give the sermon on Inclusion. Engage worshippers through discussion.
- Offer tours of the sanctuary to people who are new or visiting so they can become familiar and feel more comfortable. They can see and touch ritual items, stand on the bimah, hold the Torah, and find a seat where they will be comfortable sitting. Familiarity can help ease some anxiety about a new situation.
- Announce page numbers often. Describe the prayer book and commentary by color and size, in addition to name.
- Ask people with disabilities ahead of time to participate in rituals and prayers during the service. Honor them with aliyot and help them practice the blessings. Ask people with disabilities and their family members to give the d'var Torah, carry the Torah for hakafah, light Shabbat candles and say the Kiddush.
- If your bimah is not accessible, move the reading desk to the main level of the sanctuary so the Torah itself is accessible to all.
- Train ushers to welcome and seat people with disabilities. Make sure they know where assistive listening devices and large print prayer books are located.
- Have a congregational discussion during services on ways the synagogue can support life cycle events for people with disabilities.
- Encourage families to hold the ceremony for a child with a disability at Erev Shabbat or Shabbat morning services, whatever the typical tradition of your congregation so that your congregation can attend.
- During this month, include inclusion in Torah study and sermons. Extend the discussion to your board and committee meetings.
- Use social media to promote inclusion. Post about your events, quote text that resonates with Jewish values about inclusion. YouTube a short Torah commentary about inclusion.
- Provide prayer books and Torah commentaries in accessible format (i.e. Braille, large print, audio versions).
- Make your worship service accessible to people who have diverse sensory needs, such as sign language interpretation (set seats aside so those worshipers can see the interpreter clearly) and picture schedule of the service order. Include in your service handout the start and stop time of services, the prayer order and the location of restrooms and drinking fountains.
- Start each service with the opportunity for congregants to turn to their neighbors and introduce themselves. Make sure that every person has someone with whom to share this greeting.

## ...In Your Organization

- Plan a Shabbat of Inclusion and include people with disabilities on the planning committee.
- Start your Inclusion Committee. This committee can help plan the activities for the Shabbat of Inclusion and continue to guide your congregation afterwards. During the Shabbat of Inclusion, let people know that the Inclusion Committee is seeking new members. (Inclusion Committees are the best way to engage lay and professional leadership in a long-term inclusion plan).
- Identify barriers to participation within the organization. Examine:
  - Architectural barriers
  - Communication barriers
  - Attitudinal barriers
- What does your organizational mission statement say about inclusion? If you have an Inclusion Committee, spend the necessary time to create the mission statement of this committee.
- Promote Inclusion. Every time you advertise an organizational event or program, include an accessibility statement (see end of this guide for examples of accessibility statements). Also, include a simple statement on all of your printed materials and website that support inclusion of people with disabilities.
- Braille signage on elevators, room and directional signs.
- Have a mezuzah ceremony. Place mezuzot at wheelchair height. It is six inches below the standard placement for a mezuzah.
- Start an Inclusion or Accessibility Fund to help provide money for accommodations and modifications and accessible transportation to youth group events.
- Evaluate each of the programming areas as well as architecture to identify barriers to inclusion. Use these evaluations to set priorities and goals for inclusion in your organization.
- Write a monthly column for the bulletin on different aspects of inclusion in your congregation.
- Use language that promotes respect and dignity. For example, Sam is not handicapped or disabled. Sam is a person with a disability. Using Person First language is respectful and does not define a person by their disability, rather, having a disability is just one aspect of who they are.
- Are people with disabilities on your board? On your staff?
- Launch an Inclusion Initiative that extends well past Jewish Disability Awareness Month!

## ...For Jewish Disability Awareness Month

- Start a JDAM Reads! Book Club
- Host a congregational Shabbat dinner to kick-off Jewish Disability Awareness Month. Invite all members of your congregation, as well as other members of the Jewish community to join you. Put requests for accommodations on the invitation. If someone requests that food be cut for them, do that in the kitchen, not in the dining area. Continue the Shabbat celebration with a unique Erev Shabbat service recognizing that we are all created in the Divine Image—B'zelem Elohim.
- Host a congregational Havdallah service with activities. Advertise this to your entire community, and encourage people with disabilities and their families to attend. The music and the scents of Havdallah provide a beautiful setting for art activities, games and stories.
- Integrate Jewish Disability Awareness Month into other activities:
  - Youth group participation in a community mitzvah opportunity such as bowling with people who live in a group home.
  - The youth group can provide afternoon activities for children with disabilities so parents and siblings have special time together.
  - The Men's Club or Brotherhood could sponsor a breakfast and invite a speaker from the community to talk about disability services (such as training service dogs).
  - Coordinate a program for parents of children with disabilities to bring them together and minimize isolation. Invite a speaker from Jewish Family Services to lead a parent education group. Provide child care.
  - Organize a program for siblings, such as SibShops, or invite a family life educator to come talk about sibling needs.
  - Torah Study can include other citations in our text that help us wrestle with inclusion.
  - Lunch and Learn following Shabbat morning services or on Sunday afternoon brings people together to process what they have learned and experienced from the weekend.
- Your religious school can have age appropriate programming for students focused on the concept of B'zelem Elohim—we are created in the Divine Image. Read books and stories written about children with a diverse range of abilities. Prepare teachers to try a different teaching strategy to engage all learners. Invite parents of students who have disabilities to come to class and share their family's story.
- Be responsive to concerns expressed by people with disabilities and their families. Is there something that would be appropriate to address with programming during the month?
- This is a time for your organization to do some self-examination and self-discovery.

## ...In Your Community

- Make the commitment. Share page 10 of this guide at all of your events and invite people to fill it out.
- Hold a community-wide event inviting everyone to support inclusion of people with disabilities
  - Resource Fair
  - Keynote speaker
  - Conference with workshops
  - Film screenings
  - Concert featuring performers who have disabilities
  - Art exhibits by artists who have disabilities
- Ask each organization in your community to contribute a small amount of funding to defray costs for film rentals, speakers and food
- Recognize every organization that contributes in some way to the community effort in your program, on your website and at the actual event
- Encourage your community to like the JDAM Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/JewishDisabilityAwarenessMonth?ref=hl>
- Publicize webinars and online videos that are relevant
- Partner with your local Arc, parent training center, governors council or disability organization to sponsor specific topics that appeal to the community
- Create a community calendar of events that are open to the public
- Publicize all of the Jewish organizations that welcome and support people with disabilities and their families including housing, recreation, vocational and educational with links to those organizations
- Offer training to building committee chairs and staff on the Americans with Disabilities Act and what to look for to provide accessible spaces
- Offer training to congregations and organizations on how to become more inclusive and accessible, how to start an inclusion committee and begin an inclusion initiative
- Write press releases about JDAM and the community programming
- Gather representatives from every Jewish organization to convene an inclusion roundtable that will meet regularly after JDAM to discuss the needs and work toward building capacity in the community
- Publish a list of resources and promote on your community website and individual websites.
- Remember that you are recognizing JDAM to encourage and promote inclusive practices all year long.
- Choose a theme such as “Person First” and live it through teaching and actions. Identify Jewish values that enhance understanding.



## Welcome People by Communicating Accessibility Auxiliary Aids and Services Request Statements

- Invite people with disabilities to attend worship services, programs and events by including an accessibility statement in all of your publications.
  - Your website, bulletins, weekly service programs, invitations to events and notices about programs should clearly state that your institution is accessible to people with disabilities.
  - The following examples support the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and are provided by the Great Lakes ADA Center. These statements may be used to communicate that you are an inclusive organization and invite individuals to let you know about their need for special accommodations. The regulations implementing the ADA do not require specific language to be used in notifying the public. The obligation under the ADA is for entities covered to provide appropriate auxiliary aids and services in order to allow for individuals with disabilities to participate in the programs, activities or services.
- ◆ Individuals needing special accommodations to participate in the meeting should contact \_\_\_\_\_ at 222-222-2222 no later than \_\_\_\_\_.  
(name)  
(deadline if appropriate)
  - ◆ Special Needs accommodation requests should be directed to \_\_\_\_\_ at  
222-222-2222 no later than \_\_\_\_\_. (name)  
(deadline if appropriate)
  - ◆ Direct requests for special accommodations \_\_\_\_\_ at 222-222-2222  
no later than \_\_\_\_\_. (name)  
(deadline if appropriate)
  - ◆ Requests for sign language interpreter or materials in alternative format should be made no later than \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ at 222-222-2222.  
(deadline if appropriate) (name)
  - ◆ Individuals with disabilities requiring additional services to participate in the meeting should call 222-222-2222 by \_\_\_\_\_.
  - ◆ (deadline if appropriate)

Additional language may be added to state that requests for accommodations made after the advertised date will be honored to the maximum extent feasible.

## A Few Words about Inclusion

These are my favorite quotations about inclusion. Each one reminds us how critically important inclusion is in our lives and helps expand our awareness.

1. "I love my new life!" Community Member
  
2. "It's true I will always use a wheelchair and that my speech will always be hard to understand. If people would only let themselves look at me without having any fear of what they see in front of them we all would get along just fine."  
Community Member
  
2. "To be known, you have to be shown."  
My Zadie Max of blessed memory
  
4. "Good intentions alone not accompanied by action are without value. The main thing is the action as this is what makes the intention so profound."  
Yehudi Hakadosh
  
5. "No one does this alone."
  
6. "We don't do things for people with disabilities. We do things WITH them."
  
7. "Inclusion is not up to one person or one committee-everyone has a role to play."
  
8. "Inclusion is woven into the fabric of Jewish life."
  
9. "A procession of angels pass before each person, and the heralds go before them saying 'make way for the image of G-d'  
(Deut. Rabbah 4:4)
  
10. "All I've ever wanted was to belong" Community Member

## **Judaism and Disability Resources**

Christensen, Shelly. Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities Available at [www.inclusioninnovations.com](http://www.inclusioninnovations.com)

Eidelman, Steven, ed. A Guide to Funding Disabilities and Special Needs. Jewish Funders Network. <http://www.jfunders.org/disabilityguide>

Gaventa, William. Jewish Perspectives on Theology and the Human Experience of Disability Available at <http://www.amazon.com/Jewish-Perspectives-Theology-Experience-Disability/dp/078903445X>

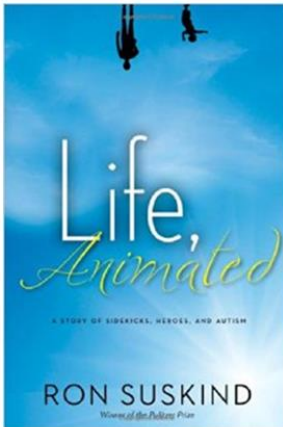
Levin, Jeff and Prince, Michele. Judaism and Health: A Handbook of Practical, Professional and Scholarly Resources. Jewish Lights. <http://www.jewishlights.com/page/product/978-1-58023-714-7>

Pinsky, Mark I. Amazing Gifts: Stories of Faith, Disability and Inclusion. Alban Institute. <http://www.alban.org/amazinggifts.aspx>

Prosser, Ora Horn Esau's Blessing: How the Bible embraces those with Special Needs. Ben Yehuda Press. 2011. <http://www.benyehudapress.com/catalog/prouser-eb/>

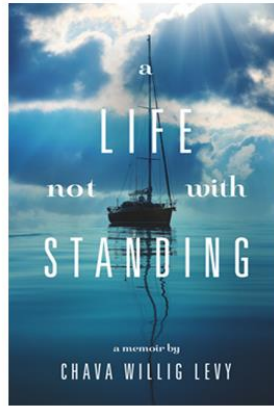
Simon, Sara Rubinow, Forrest, Linda & Fishman, Ellen, eds. V'khol Banayikh: Jewish Education for All, eds. Available at [http://www.torahaura.com/item\\_Jewish\\_Educations\\_for\\_All.aspx](http://www.torahaura.com/item_Jewish_Educations_for_All.aspx)

Strauss, Jane. A Part or Apart? Photographic essays of people who have disabilities active in their Jewish community. [www.apartorapart.com](http://www.apartorapart.com)



Over the last two decades, Ron Suskind has been known as a hard-hitting, Pulitzer Prize-winning political reporter, a thorn in the side of the Bush administration, a chronicler of the Obama White House. In private, though, Mr. Suskind was Iago the parrot, Baloo the bear, Merlin the wizard: Disney characters whose dialogue, songs and even “wisdom” he borrowed to communicate with his autistic son, Owen.

NY Times May 21, 2014



As an eyewitness to—and survivor of—the polio saga and its ensuing hospitalizations, surgeries and segregation, I want my words to shatter stereotypes, affirming that people with disabilities: Are neither patients to be cured, children to be taken care of, nor brave souls to be admired; should be in charge of the assistance

they may require, that is, free to be independently dependent.; are victimized by a prejudiced society, not the disabilities they happen to have.

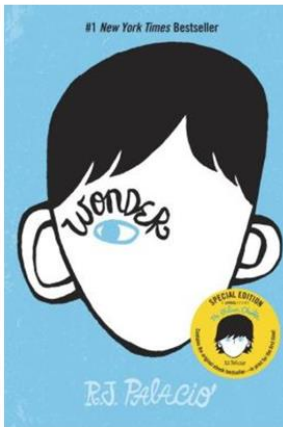
Chava Willig Levy

**Engage More People with Books!**

**JDAM Reads 2015!**

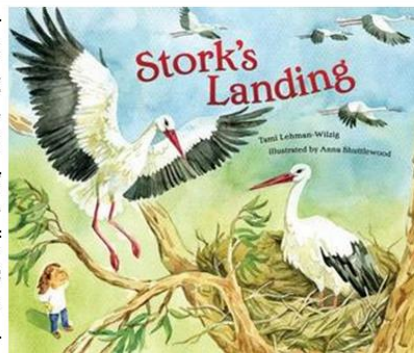
JDAM Reads Program recommends two adult reading books, *Life, Animated* and *A Life Not With Standing*. For b’nai mitzvah age kids, we recommend *Wonder*. And for the little ones in pre-school and early elementary, we recommend *Storks Landing*. For more info go to

<https://www.facebook.com/JewishDisabilityAwarenessMonth?ref=bookmarks>



It’s the fictional story of August Pullman, a 10-year-old with a very different-looking face—the result of a chromosomal abnormality and an illness—and his journey from the nest of homeschooling to the wilds of middle school. Auggie knows that his appearance shocks people; he’s confronted constantly by that reality. Still, he’s got enough confidence to try to make friends. And over the course of his fifth-grade year, he’s rewarded for the effort. His perseverance came as an enormous relief to everyone in my family, because this is a children’s book, after all, and because the character had completely imprinted on our hearts.

Emily Bazelon Slate.com Oct. 2012



In spring, migrating storks always stop at young Maya’s kibbutz on their way back to their European homes.

When one stork breaks its wing on some netting in a kibbutz fish pond, Maya becomes the bird’s advocate; with help from her father, the stork becomes a surrogate mother to a nestful of needy stork chicks. Lehman-Wilzig (Zvuvit’s Israel) immerses readers in rhythms of kibbutz life from the very first page.

Publishers Weekly

## All Israel is Responsible for One Another

Good intentions alone without action are without value for it is the action which makes the intentions so profound.

*The Great Chassidic Master Yehudi Hakadosh*

Complete this form with your good intentions and the actions to achieve meaningful inclusion of people with disabilities.

Ideas that will turn my good intentions into action are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

I commit to take these actions:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

I will invite the following people to join me:

How do I think this will impact the lives of people with disabilities in my own community or organization?

Dated:

Thank you for joining us to ensure that people with disabilities and their families find warmth and welcoming waiting for them.

