AAIDD Religion and Spirituality Special Interest Network and Stone Belt Arc’s 

Boundaries and Belonging: We are Called to Create Boundaries Without Exclusion or Chaos

**Bonus Resources**

Various Religious Texts

Muslim

From “The Qu’ran: A Handbook for the Disabled Muslim Community”

Unlike pre-Islamic times where a disability was regarded as a form of punishment, the Quran views disability (like many other things) as a test of one's faith (chapter *Al Ankabut* verses 2-3) and gratitude to God (chapter *Al Insaan* verse 2). These two aspects, namely faith and gratitude, reap equal rewards from the Almighty. This means that disability could be turned into a land of opportunity for someone to reap God's rewards as long as he is truly faithful that there is a wisdom behind his condition (which he may not understand) and is grateful for what God has given to him.

Surah At Taubah, verse 90 – states that those who are chronically ill, sick, disabled or weak are not obligated to take part in jihad (literally defined as a struggle in the way of Allah) provided they are sincere to Allah and His Messenger.

Surah *Al Hujurat* verse 11 – “O believers! Do not let some ˹men˺ ridicule others, they may be better than them, nor let ˹some˺ women ridicule other women, they may be better than them. Do not defame one another, nor call each other by offensive nicknames. How evil it is to act rebelliously after having faith! And whoever does not repent, it is they who are the ˹true˺ wrongdoers.”

“The Qur'an clearly prohibits such behavior for any reason. It is said that making fun of other people by laughing at them or calling them by inappropriate names is the hallmark of the wrongdoers and those who possess no feeling of humanity (chapter *Al Hujurat* verse 11). In this verse, God also says that those who are mocked may be better than those who mock. According to the Qur'an, the quality of an individual is not measured by his or her physical conditions, but by their faith and obedience to the Almighty.” – The Qu’ran: A Handbook for the Disabled Muslim Community

Christian

Church community is a place where deep welcome, access, and accommodation are central features of life together, through which all members “have the same care for one another” (1 Cor. 12:25) in co-creating life together.

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Ephesians speaks of the church as a household/family of God (Eph. 2:19) in which “dividing walls” based upon human ordinances are abolished (Eph. 2:14-15).

Paul notes in Rom. 12 and 1 Cor 12 that gifts are received from all members of the body (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12; see also 2 Cor. 12), some of whom may be assumed to be weaker but who are in fact indispensable (1 Cor. 12:22).

Jewish / Abrahamic traditions

Genesis 1:27

And God created humankind in the divine image, creating it in the image of God— creating them male and female.

Deuteronomy 29:9-11

You stand this day, all of you, before your God — your tribal heads, your elders, and your officials, every householder in Israel, your children, your wives, even the stranger within your camp, from woodchopper to waterdrawer—to enter into the covenant of your God, which your God is concluding with you this day, with its sanctions;

Genesis 18:1-8

God appeared\*to him by the terebinths of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot. Looking up, he saw three figures\*standing near him. Perceiving this, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground, he said, “My lords! If it please you, do not go on past your servant. Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree.

And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on—seeing that you have come your servant’s way.” They replied, “Do as you have said.”

Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Quick, three *seah*s of choice flour! Knead and make cakes!” Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it. He took curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them; and he waited on them under the tree as they ate.

Boundaries and Belonging Additional Jewish Texts

https://www.dropbox.com/s/n6nduemi94q642k/Boundaries%20and%20Belonging%20add itional%20texts.pptx?dl=0

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Book and Resources:

Multifaith

Gaventa, William. Chapter 12: Relationships Are Not Easy: Challenging Behaviors, Positive Behavior Supports, and Spirituality in *Disability and Spirituality: Remembering Wholeness* (Waco: Baylor University Press. 2018

McFalls, Jim. Oh, That's What You Mean By Positive Approaches! *TASH Connections, January 2003.*

*https://cdn.ymaws.com/member.tash.org/resource/resmgr/Webinars/2016/2016-PBIS Webinar/2003-Jan\_Connections\_PBIS.pdf*

Pitonyak, David: All behavior is Meaning-full Supporting a Person With Difficult Behaviors/Supporting the People Who Care. https://dsagsl.org/wp

content/uploads/2014/04/All-Behavior-is-Meaningful.pdf

Pitonyak, David. *10 Things You Can Do to Support a Person with Difficult Behavior*. November 20, 1993. Accessible on the web at

http://www.worksupport.com/documents/10things4.pdf

Smull, Michael and Susan Burke Harrison, *Supporting People with Severe Reputations in the Community* (Alexandria: National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disability Services, 1992) Accessible online at http://www.nasddds.org/resource library/behavioral-challenges/program-design/supporting-people-with-severe reputations-in-the-community/.

Muslim

Video by Sh. Omar Suleiman about loving people with disabilities

“We Will Not Be Hidden” about Muslims living with disabilities

Disability organizations primarily focused on American Muslim communities • MUHSEN (Muslims Understanding and Helping Special Education Needs, muhsen.org), a non-profit striving to promote awareness, acceptance, and inclusion in Muslim communities and mosques (building model mosque

disability inclusion programs)

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o Click here for suggested topics for programming and discussions around inclusion and disability

o Click here for Muhsen’s “Blueprint for a Better Masjid,” which includes suggestions for how to create a more inclusive environment and physical space at our mosques for people with disabilities.

o Click here to learn more about Muhsen’s Masjid certification program, which lays out a program for mosques to become more accessible and

inclusive of their disabled congregants with a mapped out plan and

requirement of physical accommodations, supports, programming and

partnerships.

• Global Deaf Muslim (globaldeafmuslim.org), a non-profit that advocates for the rights and needs of deaf Muslims worldwide and particularly strives to improve accessible Islamic education and programming

Disability organizations founded and led by Muslims, serving the needs of people of all faiths:

• EquallyAble Foundation (equallyable.org), a non-profit seeking to empower and include people with disabilities worldwide, by helping provide education, employment, medical equipment, innovative technology, outreach to promote inclusion, and religious community supports

• ETI – Empowerment Through Integration (etivision.org), a non-profit that propels disadvantaged blind youths to explore and achieve their career goals, with programs in the U.S., Lebanon, and more

Organizations serving the mental health needs of American Muslim communities: • Muslim Wellness Foundation (muslimwellness.com), an organization working to reduce stigma associated with mental illness, addiction and trauma in the American Muslim community

• Naseeha Muslim Helpline (naseeha.net), 1-866-NASEEHA, a confidential youth helpline for young Muslims to receive immediate, anonymous, and confidential support over the phone

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• Stones to Bridges (stonestobridges.org), dedicated to empowering and supporting the needs of Muslim and other youth in North America, as a means to promote their emotional, social, and mental well-being

• The Family & Youth Institute (thefyi.org), a non-profit research and education institute helping young people and their families realize their fullest potential through the development of the mind, body, and spirit

Muslim disability organizations and networks in Canada and the United Kingdom: • SMILE (smilecan.org), dedicated to supporting children living with disabilities and their families in Canada

• Canadian Association for Muslims with Disabilities (camd.ca), focused on community-based approaches to meet the needs of Canadians with disabilities and their families

• Disabled Muslims Network, UK (facebook.com/disabledmuslimsnetwork), working to support and assist Muslims who have a disability and Muslim parents of children with disabilities

…and check out these stories of notable Muslims living with disabilities:

• An episode of *PBS Religion & Ethics* featuring the community Masjid Waarith Ud Deen in Irvington, NJ

• Video of Mona Minkara’s 2009 Commencement Speech at Wellesley College

• *Living with Blindness: Lessons from the life of Imran Sabir*, a book about an exceptional Scottish Muslim with a severe disability

• Read about Safiyyah Amina Muhammad and Leila in the book, *Amazing Gifts: Stories of Faith, Disability, and Inclusion* by Mark I. Pinsky (not online)

• The Muslimah Next Door blog (www.patheos.com/blogs/muslimahnextdoor), written by Dilshad D. Ali, for a wide variety of articles and post about the intersection of disability and special needs issues and the Muslim community, as well as a plethora of personal posts chronicling her family’s autism journey.

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Christian

United Church of Christ, Disability Ministries: https://uccdm.org/resources/

Christian Reform Church, Disability Concerns:

https://www.crcna.org/disability/resources

Finnegan-Hosey, David. *Christ on the Psyche Ward* (New York: Church Publishing, 2018)

Spellers, Stephanie. *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, The Other, and the Spirit of Transformation* (New York: Church Publishing, 2006). A new edition has just been released.

Tam, Cynthia. *Kinship in the Household of God: Toward a Practical Theology of Belonging and Spiritual Care of People with Profound Autism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021)

Yong, Amos. *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision for the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011)

Wrobleski, Jessica. *The Limits of Hospitality* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012)

Jewish

Bet Shalom Inclusion Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D72NKCZlNNA Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities by Shelly Christensen From Longing to Belonging by Shelly Christensen

Inclusion Presentation Program (Pittsburgh)

https://www.dropbox.com/s/livmrx4tu433hvr/Btzelem%20Elohim%20presentation.doc? dl=0

Robert and Julie Article

https://www.dropbox.com/s/ap9c6xfbfjr2tt2/Robert%20and%20Julie%20article.doc?dl= 0

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Sacred Architecture: The Building of Bet Shalom by Norman Cohen

Excerpt pp. 31-34

Inclusion and Accessibility

Inclusion is a core value of Bet Shalom. One of the signs on the window by the front door indicates that there will be no impediments to participation within our community. “Bet Shalom shall be a House for all people; there shall be no stumbling blocks to any who enter.” *- Isaiah 56 & Leviticus 19*

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Indeed, our building is both physically and spiritually open as well. A ramp in the entryway behind the fireplace and gift gallery enables wheelchair accessibility from the lobby to the main floor. An elevator located at the north side religious school entrance gives easy access to the lower level where we find our auditorium and primary classrooms as well as to the upper level’s youth lounge, classrooms and Rabbi Emeritus study.

The ramp in our lobby behind the fireplace and gift gallery is not there only for accessibility. It was designed to provide a path of honor and dignity at funerals for our loved ones’ caskets to be carried in and out of the building. The recessional, led by the clergy, is within view of the line of mourners and friends at the end of the service.

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In the sanctuary, the pulpit is not very elevated. Even so, the floor begins to slope upward from about 12 feet away as you approach it so that everyone ascends on the same path.

Among other things, weddings take place in the sanctuary. Contrary to the popular phrase “walking down the aisle”, at Bet Shalom we walk up the aisle toward the pulpit. This makes physical inclusion easy, as there is no separate handicap ramp in our sanctuary.



The entire floor of the sanctuary enables all to ascend the *בימה ,bimah, “the pulpit”*. As one ascends for an honor of being called to the *Torah,* one actually goes up, as the meaning of the word *עליה ,aliya,* conveys. The experience of *aliya* is without obstruction, a natural free flowing act.

Our Building Planning Committee included a long-time member of our congregation, Jackie Hirsch, *z”l*, stricken by Multiple Sclerosis, who served as a consultant throughout the process. Although she died in 2003, she was there for the building dedication! It was a joyful and powerful moment for her and for all of us.

The *מזוזה ,mezuzah,* “Jewish doorpost marker” fastened halfway up the door, makes it possible for people in wheelchairs, and our youngsters, to touch it, opening up the *מצוה , mitzvah,* “commandment” to all. Inside each *mezuzah* is a parchment on which is written the *שמע ,Shema,* “Hear O Israel, *Adonai* is our God, *Adonai* is One” and the paragraph that follows, which includes the instruction to affix it ’on the doorposts of your houses’.

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Inclusion is not just about physical disabilities. We are continually searching for new ways to be sensitive to the barriers and impediments that get in the way of people participating in their Jewish lives. We have used grape juice instead of wine for the *קדוש ,Kiddush,* “Sanctification” each *שבת ,Shabbat,* “Sabbath” so that all members can accept the honor of leading the congregation in those prayers. Nobody has to decline because they are recovering alcoholics. The myth that there are no Jewish alcoholics has long been dispelled. Jewish AA and Al-Anon groups, one of which meets regularly at our synagogue, are evidence of our need to respond in a supportive manner.

One other significant kind of inclusion for which Bet Shalom is noted is how we have made our community and building a comfortable place for non-Jewish spouses and other relatives who participate with their Jewish family. That has been missing from the Jewish community for too long.

Members of our synagogue, some of whom never were able to experience a meaningful Jewish congregational life because of the many stumbling blocks decades ago, serve on many committees and our Board of Trustees.

We know that there are many other barriers that often get in the way, and we hope to discover them as we move forward clearing the path to Jewish life for all who wish to participate.