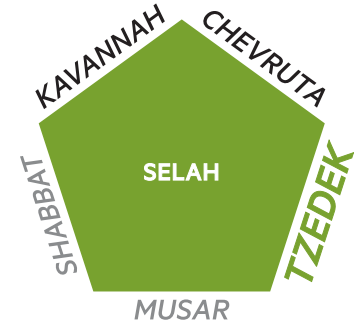


Tzedek

The commitment to work for social justice



Jewish Articulations of Social Justice

- **Empathic/Historical Experience**
- **Prophetic**
- **Exodus**
- **Radical/Revolutionary**
- ***Halachic* / Legal Obligation**
- ***Tzelem Elohim* / Image of God**
- ***Tikkun Olam* / Repairing the World**

Thanks to Rabbi Jill Jacobs for helping to compile some of these texts.

Tzedek (continued)

Empathic/Historical Experience

Talmud, Shabbat 31a

מעשה בנכרי אחד שבא לפני שמאי, אמר לו: גיירני על מנת שתלמדני כל התורה כולה כשאני עומד על רגל אחת. דחפו באמת הבנין שבידו. בא לפני הלל, גייריה. אמר לו: דעלך סני לחברך לא תעביד - זו היא כל התורה כולה, ואידך - פירושה הוא, זיל גמור.

A non-Jew once came to Shammai and said to him, "I will convert to Judaism on the condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot." Shammai pushed him away with the measuring stick that was in his hand. The same person came to Hillel to convert. Hillel said to him, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. This is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary—go and learn it."

Hillel and Shammai were first century rabbis. The Talmud records many disagreements between the two. In general (though not always), Shammai holds the more stringent position.

Ramban on Exodus 22:20 (You shall not wrong or oppress the *ger*, for you were *gerim* in the land of Egypt)

לא תונה גר ולא תלחצנו ותחשבו שאין לו מציל מידך, כי אתה ידעת שהייתם גרים בארץ מצרים וראיתו את הלחץ אשר מצרים לוחצים אתכם ועשיתו בהם נקמה, כי אני רואה דמעת העשוקים אשר אין להם מנחם ומיד עושקיהם כח, ואני מציל כל אדם מיד חזק ממנו. וכן האלמנה והיתום לא תענו כי אשמע צעקתם, שכל אלה אינם בוטחים בנפשם, ועלי יבטחו. ובפסוק האחר הוסיף טעם ואתם ידעתם את נפש הגר כי גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים (להלן כג ט). כלומר, ידעתם כי כל גר נפשו שפלה עליו והוא נאנח וצועק ועיניו תמיד אל ה' וירחם עליו כאשר רחם עליכם, כמו שכתוב (לעיל ב כג) ויאנחו בני ישראל מן העבודה ויצעקו ותעל שועתם אל האלהים מן העבודה. כלומר לא בזכותם רק שרחם עליהם מן העבודה

"You shall not wrong or oppress the *ger*" thinking that none can save him from your hands. For you know that you were *gerim* in the land of Egypt, and "I saw the oppression with which Egypt oppressed you," (Exodus 3:9) and I brought revenge on them; for "I see the tears of those who are oppressed and have no comforter, and on the side of their oppressors there is power," (Ecclesiastes 4:1) and I save every person "from the hands of those who are stronger than they." (Psalms 35:10) Similarly, "you shall not wrong the widow or the orphan," for I will hear their cries, for all of these people do not rely on their own power, but trust in me. And, another verse adds a reason for this: "For you know the feelings of the *ger*, having been *gerim* in the land of Egypt." That is to say—you know that every *ger* feels depressed and is always sighing and crying, and always directs his eyes toward God. Therefore, God will have mercy upon the *ger* as God showed mercy to you, as it is written, "and the children of Israel sighed by reason of their bondage, and they cried, and their cries came up unto God by reason of the bondage." (Exodus 2:23) God had mercy on them not because of their merits, but only on account of the bondage.

Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, Nachmanides, Spain 1194-1270) was one of the most influential biblical commentators, as well as a mystic and philosopher.

Tzedek (continued)

Empathic/Historical Experience (continued)

Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech, December 10, 1986

Of course, since I am a Jew profoundly rooted in my peoples' memory and tradition, my first response is to Jewish fears, Jewish needs, Jewish crises. For I belong to a traumatized generation, one that experienced the abandonment and solitude of our people. It would be unnatural for me not to make Jewish priorities my own: Israel, Soviet Jewry, Jews in Arab lands ... But there are others as important to me. Apartheid is, in my view, as abhorrent as anti-Semitism. To me, Andrei Sakharov's isolation is as much of a disgrace as Josef Biegun's imprisonment. As is the denial of Solidarity and its leader Lech Walesa's right to dissent. And Nelson Mandela's interminable imprisonment.

Elie Wiesel a Romanian-born Jewish-American writer, professor, political activist, and Holocaust survivor. The author of 57 books, Weisel was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986 for his powerful message "of peace, atonement and human dignity" to humanity.

Tzedek (continued)

Prophetic

Isaiah 58:1-7

קרא בגרון אל תחשף פשוף הרם קולך והגד לעמי פשעם ולבית יעקב חטאתם: ואותי יום יום ידרשון ודעת דרכי יתפצון כגוי אשר צדקה עשה ומשפט אלהיו לא עזב ישאלוני משפטי צדק קרבת אלהים יתפצון: למה צמנו ולא ראית ענינו נפשנו ולא תדע הן ביום צמכם תמצאו חפץ וכל עצביכם תנגשו: הן לריב ומצה תצומו ולהכות באגרף רשע לא תצומו כיום להשמיע במרום קולכם: הקנה יהנה צום אבחרהו יום ענות אדם נפשו הלכה באגמן ראשו ושק ואפר יציע הלזה תקרא צום ויום רצון לה': הלא זה צום אבחרהו פתח חרצבות רשע החר אגדות מוטה ושלח רצוצים חפשים וכל מוטה תנתקו: הלא פרס לרעב לחמך ועניים מרודים תביא בית פי תראה ערם וכסיתו ומבשרך לא תתעלם

Cry with full throat, without restraint; raise your voice like a ram's horn! Declare to My people their transgression, to the House of Jacob their sin. To be sure, they seek Me daily, eager to learn My ways. Like a nation that does what is right, that has not abandoned the laws of its God, they ask Me for the right way, they are eager for the nearness of God: "Why, when we fasted, did You not see when we starved our bodies, did You pay no heed?" Because on your fast day you see to your business and oppress all your laborers! Because you fast in strife and contention, and you strike with a wicked fist! Your fasting today is not such as to make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast I desire a day for people to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrush and lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, a day when the Lord is favorable? No, this is the fast I desire: To unlock fetters of wickedness, and untie the cords of the yoke to let the oppressed go free; to break off every yoke. It is to share the bread with the hungry, and to take the wretched poor into your home; when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to ignore your own kin.

Isaiah was an 8th-century BCE prophet from the Kingdom of Judah.

Tzedek (continued)

Prophetic (continued)

Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, pp 45-46

[One of the prophet's tasks is] to bring to public expression those very fears and terrors that have been denied so long and suppressed so deeply that we do not know they are there. . . The prophet must speak evocatively to bring to the community the fear and the pain that individual persons want so desperately to share and to own but are not permitted to do so. . . . The prophet does not scold or reprimand. The prophet brings to public expression the dread of endings, the collapse of our self-madness, the barriers and pecking orders that secure us at each other's expense, and the fearful practice of eating off the table of a hungry brother or sister. It is the task of the prophet to invite the king to experience what he must experience, what he most needs to experience and most fears to experience, namely, that the end of the royal fantasy is very near. The end of the royal fantasy will permit a glimpse of the true king who is no fantasy, but we cannot see the real king until the fantasy is shown to be a fragile and perishing deception.

Walter Brueggemann (b. 1933) is a Christian Bible scholar and professor emeritus at Columbia Bible College.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets*

Indeed, the sort of crimes and even the amount of delinquency that fill the prophets of Israel with dismay do not go beyond that which we regard as normal, as typical ingredients of social dynamics. To us a single act of injustice--cheating in business, exploitation of the poor--is slight; to the prophets, a disaster. To us injustice is injurious to the welfare of the people; to the prophets it is a deathblow to existence: to us, an episode; to them, a catastrophe, a threat to the world."

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972) was one of the most important theologians of the 20th Century. Born and educated in Berlin, Heschel left Nazi Germany in 1938 to go first to England and then to America. He was a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary and an active participant in the civil rights movement.

Tzedek (continued)

Exodus

Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, *The Jewish Way*, p.35

On one level, this (Exodus) is a very specific incident in the particular history of a small Middle Eastern tribe...On another level, however, the entire experience is highly paradigmatic. Slavery is merely an exaggerated version of the reality endured by most human beings. Oppression and deprivation are not that dissimilar. The most devastating effect of slavery, ultimately, is that the slave internalizes the master's values and accepts the condition of slavery as his proper status. People who live in chronic conditions of poverty, hunger, and sickness tend to show similar patterns of acceptance and passivity. As with slaves, their deprivation derives from their political and economic status and then becomes moral and psychological reality. It is this reality that is overthrown in the Exodus.

The freeing of the slaves testified that human beings are meant to be free. History will not be finished until all are free.

Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg is a Modern Orthodox American rabbi, scholar, author, and former president of CLAL and the Jewish Life Network.

Michael Walzer. *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 149

So pharaonic oppression, deliverance, Sinai, and Canaan are still with us, powerful memories shaping our perceptions of the political world. The "door of hope" is still open; things are not what they might be—even when what they might be isn't totally different from what they are. This is a central theme in Western thought, always present though elaborated in many different ways. We still believe, or many of us do, what the Exodus first taught, or what is has commonly been taken to teach, about the meaning and possibility of politics and about its proper form:

- first, that wherever you live, it is probably Egypt;
- second, that there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land;
- and third, that "the way to the land is through the wilderness." There is no way to get from here to there except by joining together and marching.

Michael Walzer is professor emeritus at the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) in Princeton, New Jersey, he is co-editor of *Dissent* and is one of the leading proponents of the "Communitarian" position in political theory.

Tzedek (continued)

Radical/Revolutionary

Emma Goldman, "National Atavism" in Mother Earth March 1906

In one respect the Jews are really a "chosen people." Not chosen by the grace of God, nor by their national peculiarities, which with every people, as well as with the Jews, merely prove national narrowness. They are "chosen" by a necessity, which has relieved them of many prejudices, a necessity which has prevented the development of many of those stupidities which have caused other nations great efforts to overcome.

Repeated persecution has put the stamp of sorrow on the Jews; they have grown big in their endurance, in their comprehension of human suffering, and in their sympathy with the struggles and longings of the human soul.

Driven from country to country, they avenged themselves by producing great thinkers, able theoreticians, heroic leaders of progress. All governments lament the fact that the Jewish people have contributed the bravest fighters to the armies for every liberating war of mankind.

Owing to the lack of a country of their own, they developed, crystallized and idealized their cosmopolitan reasoning faculty. True, they have not their own empire, but many of them are working for the great moment when the earth will become the home for all, without distinction of ancestry or race. That is certainly a greater, nobler and sounder ideal to strive for than a petty nationality.

Emma Goldman (1869–1940) was an anarchist known for her political activism, writing and speeches. She played a pivotal role in the development of anarchist political philosophy in North America and Europe in the first half of the twentieth century.

Tzedek (continued)

Radical/Revolutionary (continued)

Betty Friedan, *"Jewish Roots: An Interview with Betty Friedan,"* Tikkun 3: (Jan/Feb. 1988)

I remember very distinctly that [being Jewish] was first oppressive to me when I was in high school. Sororities and fraternities dominated social life in this Midwestern town. All my friends got into sororities and fraternities and I didn't because I was Jewish. . . So being Jewish made me an observer, a marginal person and, I made one of those unconscious vows to myself: "they may not like me but they're going to look up to me." Although it was many years before I identified in any way with feminism, I think my passion against injustice came from my experience of being a Jew in Peoria.

Betty Friedan (1921-2006) was a leader in the American feminist movement. Her influential book, *The Feminine Mystique* critiqued the idea that women can only find fulfillment through raising children and doing household work. Friedan was among the co-founders of NOW and of NARAL.

Abbie Hoffman

I see Judaism as a way of life. Sticking up for the underdog. Being an outsider. A critic of society. The kid on the corner who says the emperor has no clothes on. The Prophet.

Abbie Hoffman (1936 –1989) was a political and social activist who co-founded the Youth International Party ("Yippies") and became a symbol of the youth rebellion of the 1960s and 70s.

Tzedek (continued)

Halachic/Legal Obligation

Rabbi Pinchas Eliyahu, HaBrit, II:13, "Love of Neighbors"

פרק ה' [מעשה השכל נותן שמוטל על כל אדם חוב גמור לשמור תמיד היושר וצדק בתוך חברת מינו כדי שיתקיים הקבוץ ויהיה שוקד על שמירתם להרחיק מעול ומהזיק לאחד מהם ולהיות דורש שלומם וטובתם כל הימים למען קיום ברית החברה ועבודות קשורם בעשותו מעשים נאותים וראויים להפיק להם ומהם רצון, הרי מבואר מצד השכל שזה הוא חוב גמור על כל אדם בעלי ברית עולם כי השכל מחייב...להקביל בטובה למי שקבל ממנו טובה ותועלת

Chapter 5. Now, reason dictates that there rests on every person an absolute obligation to constantly attend to fairness and justice in the society of one's species, in order that the society should survive. And one should be diligent to uphold these principles, to distance oneself from injustice and from damaging any one of them, and to constantly be seeking out their welfare and their best interests, all of one's days, for the sake of maintaining the covenant (brit) of the society, and the ropes that bind them, when one does the pleasant and appropriate acts that will give them, and derive from them, favor. Behold, it has been explained that reason dictates that this is an absolute obligation on every person, parties to the world covenant (brit), that reason dictates that one must grant goodness to one from whom one has received goodness and benefit...

Chapter 8...Behold the Sages included the nations in the *mitzvah* of loving one's neighbor. And how great is their wisdom and how true is their teaching, for this matter is an obligation upon every person, to bring benefit to all creatures, on the basis of his being a person who is part of the world community and who receives benefit from the society of all human beings... Because all the nations have shaken hands... they have all become one society, and we have also been beneficiaries of this society. Thus, each person is obligated to act with every person and all the families of the Earth, with goodness and fairness and with fraternity... Behold it has been made clear that this obligation is incumbent upon us also from the tradition which is the Oral Law.

Rabbi Pinchas Eliyahu (1765-1821) was a kabbalist who is best known for his Torah-based encyclopedia of different fields of knowledge, entitled *Sefer HaBrit*.

Tzedek (continued)

Halachic/Legal Obligation (continued)

Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Chai Uzziel Mishpetei Uzziel vol. 4 Hoshen Mishpat 42

מה הן ההגדרות הברורות לקביעת יחסים הדדיים בין הבעלים והעובדים

תשובה

דבר זה לא מצאתי מפורש בדברי רז"ל הראשונים, אבל נלמד הוא במכלל שכן ממאמרם ז"ל בדרשת הכתוב כי ימכר לך אחיך וכו' שתנהג בו אחוה. הא כיצד אתה נוהג בו אחוה והוא נוהג בעצמו בעבודתו(ספרא ויקרא פ' בהר פ"ז ה' ע"ט

מכאן אתה למד הגדרה ברורה זו ליחסים ההדדיים שבין הבעלים והעובדים הבעלים חייבים להתנהג עם העובדים

במדת אהבה וכבוד, עין טובה ונדיבות לב. והפועל נוהג הוא בעצמו מדת נאמנות ומסירות גמורה לעבודה שהוא נשכר לעבוד בה.

Question: What are the precise definitions of establishing a reciprocal relationship between workers and employers?

Answer: I have not found an explicit answer to this in the words of the early rabbis, but we can learn this regardless from their words, in the expositions of the verse "When one of your kin sells himself/herself to you—whether a man or a woman—s/he should work for you for six years and should go free on the seventh year." (Deuteronomy 15:12) that say that you should behave toward him with fellowship. How is this? You should act with fellowship toward this person, and this person should act in the same way in his/her work. (Sifra, Leviticus Behar 5:7) From this, we learn one clear definition of the reciprocal relationship between workers and employers. Employers are obligated to behave toward workers with love and honor, and with goodwill and generosity. And the worker, on his/her part, acts faithfully and gives him/herself fully to the work that s/he was hired to do.

Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Chai (Jerusalem 1880-1953) served as the *Chacham Bashi* (the Chief Rabbi recognized by the Turkish government) of Jaffa and the surrounding areas) beginning in 1911, but was exiled to Damascus during World War I when he tried to intercede with the Turkish government on behalf of persecuted Jews. He later served as Chief Rabbi of Salonika (1921-23), Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv (1923-1939) and Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel (1939-53)

Rabbi Ira Stone, *A Responsible Life: The Spiritual Path of Mussar*.

The system of mitzvot (commandments) articulated in the Torah and developed further by later Jewish tradition is intended to do two things. Mitzvot keep us awake to our previously understood obligations [to the other]. Moreover, they allow us to invoke the community to share the burden that existentially would otherwise be all our own. It may seem impossible for me to meet all of my obligations to increasing numbers of neighbors to whom I am near. However, the community may be able, through just laws, to care for them appropriately.

Rabbi Ira Stone is the spiritual leader at Temple Beth Zion-Beth Israel in Philadelphia.

Tzedek (continued)

Tzelem Elohim/Image of God

Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 30b

ואהבת לרעך כמוך ר' עקיבה או' זהו כלל גדול בתורה בן עזאי אומ' זה ספר תולדות אדם זה כלל גדול מזה

Rabbi Akiva taught: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Leviticus, 19) This is the most important rule in the Torah." Ben Azzai says: "This is the book of chronologies... [humanity was created in the Image of God]" (Genesis, 5) This is the most important rule in the Torah.

Rabbi Akiva was a tanna of the latter part of the 1st century and the beginning of the 2nd century (3rd tannaitic generation). He was one of the most central and essential contributors to the Mishnah and Midrash Halakha.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion is an Island," in Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996) 238-239

To meet a human being is a major challenge to mind and heart. I must recall what I normally forget. A person is not just a specimen of the species called Homo sapiens. He is all humanity in one, and whenever one man is hurt, we are all injured. The human is a disclosure of the divine, and all men are one in God's care for man. Many things on earth are precious, some are holy, humanity is holy of holies.

To meet a human being is an opportunity to sense the image of God, the presence of God. According to a rabbinical interpretation, the Lord said to Moses: "Wherever you see the trace of man there I stand before you. . ."

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972) was one of the most important theologians of the 20th Century. Born and educated in Berlin, Heschel left Nazi Germany in 1938 to go first to England and then to America. He was a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary and an active participant in the civil rights movement.

Tzedek (continued)

Tzelem Elohim/Image of God (continued)

Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, Seeking the religious roots of pluralism: in the image of God and covenant

Ben Azzai states that the human being as created in the image of God is the *clal gadol*, the central category of Jewish tradition.(1) What does it mean to be an image of God? The Mishnah in the Babylonian Talmud(2) suggests that there are three fundamental dignities that inhere in the state of being a human being (in the image of God). These dignities inhere in the human condition in light of the Creation story, independent of all societal measures or anthropological considerations:

1. An image of the human has a finite value. (The most expensive human image created thus far is a Van Gogh painting that sold for \$82,500,000.) However, the image created by the Infinite God is worth infinitely more. The image of God has infinite value.
2. In human images, there are in fact superior or preferred images. Thus a Vincent Van Gogh painting is worth more than an Irving Greenberg painting. But, all images of God are equal. There can be no preferred image of God. That claim to know the preferred or absolute version of God constitutes idolatry. (The definition of idolatry is to "fix" the ineffable image of God in some frozen or hard-cast form and then to claim to know and/or control God in this fixed image.)
- (3.) The image of God is unique. Human images are replicable; indeed, they are made to be replicable. Dollar bills are printed the same way. All coins that come from one mold are identical. By contrast, says the Talmud, all humans come from one mold (Adam and Eve, if you will), yet each one is unique. That uniqueness is the hallmark of the image of God. The reason we do not recognize a person's uniqueness is that we are not seeing him/her as an image of God.

Infinite value, equality, uniqueness -- these are the characteristics inherent in the very fact of being human. To know persons as they really are, to recognize them in all their distinctiveness, is to know them as an image of God.

Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg is a Modern Orthodox American rabbi, scholar, author, and former president of CLAL and the Jewish Life Network.

Ben Azzai was a *tanna* of the first third of the 2nd century.

Tzedek (continued)

Tikkun Olam/Repairing the World

Lawrence Fine, Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship 141-144

In Lurianic thinking, then, the original crisis that occurred within the realm of the divine was not dependent on the misdeeds of humanity but had to do with qualities of being and dynamic processes intrinsic to divinity itself. Human beings, however, exacerbated the crisis and thus have an indispensable role to play in the completion of the work of cosmic mending. . . According to one important account, at the time of Adam's birth, on the sixth day of creation, the Holy One, Blessed be He, brought him into the Garden of Eden. When Adam was born, the various structures of divinity had already begun to reestablish themselves. . . As for Adam himself, his spiritual position also improved as the Sabbath neared. Whereas when he was born, only the upper part of his body was located in the Garden of Eden, now his entire body resided there. Had Adam acted as he should have, the entirety of the divine pleroma would have reached its highest spiritual level at the moment of the afternoon prayers of Sabbath day. None of this came about, however, as a consequence of Adam's transgression. . . In the wake of Adam's sin, the worlds fell from the positions they had attained. . .

In Luria's view, then, the most fundamental and ultimate goal of human existence is *tikkun*. The project of *tikkun*, the liberation of divine light in all of its forms from its entrapment in the material sphere, its return to its source on high, and the ascent of all the worlds to their proper place within the structure of the cosmos, required the most elaborate and painstaking regimen of contemplative devotion. The ritual practices that Isaac Luria taught his disciples were intended to accomplish nothing less than repair of the defects engendered by the primordial processes of divine emanation and by the primal transgression of humankind. Such reparation. . . was conceived of by Luria and his circle as synonymous with messianic redemption.

Lawrence Fine is professor of Jewish studies at Mount Holyoke College

Tzedek (continued)

Tikkun Olam/Repairing the World (continued)

Rabbi Jill Jacobs, The History of "Tikkun Olam", Zeek. June, 2007

There may be no other term that is simultaneously as beloved and as reviled in Jewish progressive circles as the phrase "*tikkun olam*." For some people, this concept, generally translated as "repairing the world," offers the motivation for involvement in social justice work; for others, the term has become so overused and so little understood as to be meaningless...

I suggest a re-imagining of *tikkun olam* that combines the four understandings of the term that we have seen in traditional text: 1) the *Aleynu's* concept of *tikkun* as the destruction of any impurities that impede the full manifestation of the divine presence; 2) the literalist *midrashic* understanding of *tikkun olam* as the establishment of a sustainable world; 3) the rabbinic willingness to invoke *tikkun ha'olam* as a justification for changing untenable laws; and 4) the Lurianic belief that individual actions can affect the fate of the world as a whole.

Rabbi Jill Jacobs is the Executive Director of Rabbis for Human Rights-North America.

Personal Reflection Questions

- How do Judaism, social justice work, and leadership currently intersect in your life, if at all?
- What questions did this exercise raise for you? What are the areas for deeper exploration?
- What are potential sources of inspiration from Jewish tradition, history, culture, text, ritual, values, spiritual practice for your leadership and social justice work?

“The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, an almost fanatical love of justice and the desire for personal independence—these are the traits of the Jewish Tradition which make me thank my lucky stars that I belong to it.”

– Albert Einstein, 20th century physicist/philosopher