

Text Study for “Judaism, Citizenship, and Democracy”

Part of [To Bigotry No Sanction, a JCRC Cincinnati Speaker Series](#)

Rabbi Lindsey Danziger, RAC Ohio, and Madeline Anderson, JCRC Rabbinic Fellow

Deuteronomy 29:9-13

You stand this day, all of you, before the Eternal One your God — your tribal heads, your elders and your officials, all the men of Israel, your children, your wives, even the stranger within your camp, from woodchopper to water drawer — to enter into the covenant of the Eternal One your God, which the Eternal One your God is concluding with you this day, with its sanctions; to the end that God may establish you this day as a sacred people and be your God, as was promised you and was sworn to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I make this covenant, with its sanctions, not with you alone, but both with those who are standing here with us this day before the Eternal One our God and with those who are not with us here this day.

- Why is the list so specific, rather than just saying, “everyone is included”?
- Who are all the people that need to be included, and why?

Babylonian Talmud Tractate Berakhot 45a

Rava bar Rav Ḥanan said to Abaye, and some say to Rav Yosef: What is the law (*halakha*)? He said to him: Go out and see (*puk chazi*) how the people act.

אָמַר לִיָּה רַבָּא בְּרַב חָנַן לְאַבְיִי, וְאַמְרִי
לָהּ לְרַב יוֹסֵף: הֲלִכְתָּא מֵאִי? אָמַר לִיָּה:
פּוּק חָזִי מֵאִי עֲמָא דְבֵּר.

- What does this say about the role of leaders in relation to the society they lead?

Rabbi Michael G. Holzman - “Can Synagogues Revitalize American Democracy?”

“Regarding the practice of mitzvot, Jewish tradition challenges us to invest in both concrete behavior (*keva*) and right intention (*kavvanah*). The practices of democracy, too, require both deed and intention, both the actions we take and the meaning we make. The Talmud says that a prayer without *kavannah* fails to fulfill one’s obligation. Likewise, our acts of civic participation fail when we ignore (or worse, snicker at) the meaning behind them. When our civic obligations

become rote and lose meaning, the *keva* lacks the *kavannah*, and democracy suffers. Citizenship, in other words, is a spiritual practice which solidifies our awareness of rights and responsibilities, inspires aspiration and motivation, and explains loss and disappointment. It does this by creating harbors for vulnerability, sanctuaries where the normal filters of judgement are suspended, and participants are able to discover meaning. The doing of a mitzvah changes how we are willing to perceive reality, even if it does not change what we perceive.”¹

- How would you respond to Rabbi Holzman’s suggestion that civic obligation requires both *keva* and *kavannah*?

¹ <https://www.sourcesjournal.org/articles/can-synagogues-revitalize-american-democracy>