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On March 15, I was privileged to speak before a gathering of people of faith in Madison who were present to lobby their legislators on issues surrounding the proposed biennium budget for Wisconsin. Below are nine values that seemed appropriate to me to impart to them and encourage them to use during both their lobbying visits and their future advocacy work. These are values that emanate from the biblical tradition of doing what is right, the value of tzedek, or righteousness.

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Religious Values that lead to the Perfection of Our World

Adapted from *Tough Choices: Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice*. URJ Press 1992 and 1998, by Albert Vorspan and David Saperstein

1. The inherent dignity and value of all human beings, derived from the belief that we are all made in the image of God. (Genesis 1:27 – “God created humanity in the divine image, in the image of God, God created it; male and female God created them.”)
2. The equality of all people, rooted in the tradition of our common descent from Adam and Eve. (Genesis 5:1-2 – “This is the book of the generations of humanity. On the day when God created humanity, in the likeness of God, God made them, male and female God created them, and blessed them, and called their name humanity, on the day when they were created.”)
3. The need to empathize with the plight of the Israelites in Egyptian slavery, and, then, to channel our powers of empathy to help people who are oppressed, persecuted, and wronged. (Thirty-six times throughout the Torah we are taught that we should love, as we love ourselves, the stranger who resides with us, for we were strangers in the land of Egypt; see Leviticus 19:34 for example.)
4. The concept of wealth as lent by God in a trust relationship (for example, Psalm 24:1, “The earth and all its fullness belongs to Adonai...”), that requires sharing with the less fortunate. Hence, the special concern that God demands for “the poor, the widowed, the hungry, the orphan, and the stranger,” as the Bible tells us in many places. (Exodus 22:21 – “You shall not afflict any widow, or orphaned child.” Deuteronomy 10:18-19 – “God executes the judgment of the orphan and widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and garment. Love you therefore the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Deuteronomy 14:29b – “The stranger, and the orphan, and the widow, who are inside your gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied, that the Eternal your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.” Deuteronomy 16:11 – “You shall

rejoice before the Eternal your God, you, . . . and the stranger, and the orphan, and the widow, who are among you, in the place which the Eternal your God has chosen to place his name there.” Deuteronomy 24:19-21 – “When you cut down the harvest of your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go again to fetch it. Let it be for the stranger, for the orphan, and for the widow, that the Eternal your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again. Let it be for the stranger, for the orphan, and for the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward. The gleanings shall be for the stranger, for the orphan, and for the widow.

5. The belief that we have a responsibility of “stewardship” over the earth and that we must protect it. (Genesis 2:15 – “The Eternal God took the human, and put him into the Garden of Eden, to serve it and to protect it.”)
6. The inference of certain laws (the seven laws of the Sons of Noah) that are regarded as basic to any civilized society. These include six prohibitions: murder, robbery, blasphemy, idolatry, incest and adultery, and the eating of living flesh; as well as the positive command that every community establish fair courts of justice. (Midrash Genesis Rabbah 34:8)
7. The rule of law to which even the highest human ruler is accountable. (Second Samuel 12:11-12 – “Thus said the Eternal God [to David when he committed adultery with Batsheva and had her husband placed at the most violent battle front], ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own house, and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of the sun. For although you sinned secretly, I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.’”)
8. Freedom of choice, and the responsibility of each person for his or her own actions. (Genesis 2:7 – “The Eternal God formed. . . . [The Hebrew word for formed is יָצַר, yeitzeir. The Rabbis understood the presence of two yud’s (the first letter of that word) – when only one would be expected – to mean that humanity has two inclinations as part of its basic personalities, the good and the bad. Throughout our life as humans we are always choosing between the two.]. . . .the man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.”)
9. The paramount obligation of individuals and societies to pursue justice, righteousness, and ‘pathways of peace’) that is, to be involved in the work of social justice. (Deuteronomy 16:20 – “Justice, only justice shall you pursue, that you may live, and inherit the land which the Eternal your God gives you.” Psalms 34:15 – “Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.”)