

# Jewish Texts Corresponding to Parker Palmer's Five Habits of the Heart

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## Habit 1: An understanding that we are all in this together.

For this reason a single person was created [Adam was created alone] to teach you that anyone who kills one soul is considered as if he has killed an entire world and anyone who sustains one soul is considered as if he has sustained an entire world. Additionally [Adam is the progenitor of all humanity] for peace among humankind, so that one person won't say to his fellow "My father is greater than your father" ....and to tell the greatness of the Holy One Blessed Be God, that a man mints many coins with one stamp, all of them the same as one another and the Ruler of Rulers, the Holy One Blessed Be God minted every person with the stamp of Adam and not one of them is the same as his fellow.

(Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 37b)

1. *The text presents several reasons for a single source for all humanity. Does one explanation resonate more or less with you?*
2. *Are there times in your life when you have felt interconnected with all humanity? What precipitated these feelings?*
3. *According to the text, can one retain a sense of individuality and still retain a sense of belonging to the whole? Does this match your personal experience?*

## Habit 2: An appreciation for the value of "otherness".

A favorite saying of the Rabbis of Yavneh was: I am God's creature and my fellow is God's creature. My work is in the town and his work is in the country. I rise early for my work and he rises early for his work. Just as he does not presume to do my work, so I do not presume to do his work. Will you say, I do much and he does little? We have learned: One may do much or one may do little; it is all one, provided he directs his heart to heaven.

(Babylonian Talmud. Berakhot 17a)

1. *In what ways have you celebrated your distinctiveness from others?*
2. *In what ways have you celebrated others' distinctiveness from yourself?*
3. *In the text above, what is the common denominator?*

### Habit 3: An ability to hold tension in life giving ways.

*The two texts below focus on the disputations of two contrasting schools of thought in Jewish Law. Though they disagreed, tradition asserted that their debates were of great value and of equal merit. For the most part, Jewish Law followed the conclusions of the School of Hillel due to the positive value they placed on their opponents' perspectives. In fact, the Talmud records instances when the School of Hillel changed their views after studying opposing positions.*

When an argument is for the sake of heaven, the argument will lead to an established result. When an argument is not for the sake of heaven, it will not lead to any established result. What is an argument for the sake of heaven? That of Hillel and Shammai.

(Pirkei Avot 5:17)

For three years there was a dispute between the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel, the former asserting, 'The law is in agreement with our views.' and the latter contending, 'The law is in agreement with our views.' Then a *bat kol* (a voice from heaven) announced, 'these and those are the words of the living God, but the law is in agreement with the rulings of the School of Hillel.' Since, however, 'both are the words of the living God', what was it that entitled the School of Hillel to have the law fixed according to their rulings? Because they were kindly and modest, they studied their own rulings and those of the School of Shammai, and were even so humble as to mention the words of the School of Shammai before their own.

(Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin, 13b)

1. *Is there merit in weighing the perspectives of others?*
2. *Are there times in which there might be equally valid courses of action?*
3. *Should an appreciation for the beliefs of others, play a role in our own deliberations?*
4. *Should the willingness to 'change one's mind' be viewed as a positive or negative attribute?*

## Habit 4: A sense of personal voice and agency.

Justice, Justice shalt thou pursue.

(Deuteronomy 16:20)

Why is the word justice written twice? To teach us that we must practice justice at all times – whether it be for our profit or for our loss, and towards all humanity – towards Jews and non-Jews alike.

(Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 32b)

In a place where there are no [good people]\*, strive to be a [good person]\*.

(Pirkei Avot 2:6)

*In the Jewish tradition there is a belief that no word in the Torah is superfluous. When examining the texts of the Torah the Rabbis found deeper meaning in the repetition of the Hebrew word Tzedek/Justice.*

1. *The above text implores us to be active. In what ways have you been active in making the world a better place for yourself and for others?*
2. *Do you believe you have the responsibility to be a good person even in a place without good people?*
3. *Do you believe it might be more difficult to do what is right in an environment where so many are doing what is wrong?*
4. *Can you think of moments throughout history where good people have found their voice amidst the evil actions of others?*

\*Original Hebrew was men and man but the intent was to mean a person of merit.

## Habit 5: A capacity to create community.

We are created along with one another and directed to a life with one another. Creatures are placed in my way so that I, their fellow creature by means of them and with them find the way to God. A God reached by their exclusion would not be the God of all that lives in whom all is fulfilled.

(Between Man and Man, Martin Buber)

*Martin Buber is one of Judaism's great theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In this excerpt from his work on Christian-Jewish Relations he proposed that we are created together so that we might interact as a fulfillment of all our religious journeys.*

1. *Do you find fulfillment in creating community among people of various beliefs backgrounds and points of view?*
2. *How many communities do you belong to and what role do you play among them? Friends, Family, Faith, Nation?*
3. *What gifts and challenges do these communities provide you?*

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