

Paid Leave and the Jewish Tradition

FAMILY

The Torah and Jewish commentaries speak across millennia about the centrality of family. A family that creates and preserves strong bonds through mutual care and respect is one of the greatest blessings G-d offers us. Paid leave helps us honor this gift by allowing us time to care for loved ones and ourselves.

Exodus 20:12: “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your G-d is giving you.” Very few commandments have an explicit reward associated with them—the fact that this one does shows the importance of this law.

Ruth, 1:16: When Naomi, Ruth’s mother-in-law, urges her to follow her sister-in-law back home, Ruth says, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your G-d my G-d. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried.”

Psalms 127:3: “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.”



Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 63a: Rabbi Elazar said, “The sages say of he who loves his wife as himself and honors her more than himself and brings up his sons and daughters righteously and sees them married (in turn), ‘And you shall know that your tent is in peace’ (Job 5:24).”

Midrash Rabbah, Song of Songs 1:4: According to the Midrash, when G-d gave the Torah on Mount Sinai, G-d required guarantors for the Jewish people to receive the Torah. “As a last resort, the Jews declared, ‘Our children will serve as our guarantors!’ ‘They truly are worthy guarantors,’ G-d replied. ‘Because of them I will give the Torah.’”

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Working together toward justice for all is a way of living out our Jewish values, including seeking change through civic engagement. Voting and policymaking for paid leave are important ways to ensure everyone is cared for.

Babylonian Talmud, B'rachot 55a: Rabbi Yitzchak wrote, “We all have a responsibility to ensure that individuals in our community have the opportunity to vote and fully participate in civic life.”

Yerushalmi Talmud, Tractate Demai: Judaism also teaches the importance of working with others in the broader community to achieve social justice, even when we are different from them. We are taught that “in a city where there are both Jews and Gentile, the collectors of alms collect from both Jews and Gentiles; they feed the poor of both, visit the sick of both; bury both and restore the lost goods of both, for the sake of peace.”



EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Jewish teaching says we must take the well-being of others into account in our actions and decisions—a mandate that applies to our families and the wider community. We are to care for the vulnerable (immigrants, elders, people with disabilities, etc.) as well as honor workers. Paid leave policies that cover all families and types of workers help us meet this obligation.

Leviticus 19:9-10: 9 “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. **10** And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner.”

Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a: Hillel the Elder wrote that what we now commonly call “the Golden Rule” is central to the meaning of Jewish teaching: “That which is despicable to you, do not do to your fellow. This is the whole Torah, and the rest is commentary, go and learn it.”