

TZELEM-ESTEEM –
HOW OUR COMMUNICATION AFFECTS
OUR INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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INTRODUCTION:

A community is a form of an interpersonal human covenant. A community can raise individual morale and yet also deplete it. So too, communication between individuals can be used to demoralize individuals or to raise them up and support them. Communication therefore presents opportunities to inspire or to instigate, to hurt or to heal, and careful consideration of how and what one communicates is a sign of growth and maturity. Moreover, interpersonal interactions are also interactions with God, as humanity was created בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים, *b'tzelem Elohim*, resembling God.

When individuals honor each other and genuinely act with decency and integrity, specifically regarding communication, we elevate God's role and place in the world. Conversely, when an individual is demeaned or debased by another, we not only injure their socio-emotional health and safety, but it amounts to disregard of the God-spark contained within them and thereby disrespects God. In these instances, *teshuvah* (repentance) is the responsibility of the offender, but the *tzelem* (the essence of a person) both of the offender and the offended, is the responsibility of the community, through inclusion and integration. One of the best ways we can hope to alleviate these difficulties that inevitably crop up over time is to put standards in place that attempt to eradicate the potential of them happening at all in the first place.

To that end, this text immersion contains two parts. Rooted in Jewish tradition and our classical Jewish textual corpus, the first part contains translations of a series of eight different texts highlighting the themes of this project, which

include communication styles, respect for the individual and the other (especially considering humanity was created *b'tzelem Elohim*), integrity, and responsibility.

While the texts represent theoretical ideas, the second part enacts a practical application opportunity. The *Brit Tikshoret Kehilatit*, A Communal Communication Covenant, offers an opportunity for communities and their leadership to consider the intention and implications of the ways we choose to communicate and to lay the groundwork for engaging in a process of concerted awareness about the ways in which we communicate with and about each other.

It is my hope that as I have been inspired by the powerful impact we have based in our powers of communication, both positively and negatively, so too will those who opt to utilize the teachings from the text immersion by integrating them into common practice more often, leading to a greater level of self-awareness, communal consciousness, and deeper interpersonal relationships, to enhance to connections we have to each other and to raise the level of the *tzelem*-esteem of others and ourselves.

LIST OF TEXTS UTILIZED:

This is a list of all of the texts utilized in the process of this text immersion.

Originally, the scope of this project included the following eight texts:

- Genesis 1 and a variety of commentaries on it
- Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 4:5 *
- Mishnah *Eduyot* 5:6-7
- Babylonian Talmud, *Ta'anit* 20a-b *
- Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Metzi'a* 58b-59b
- Selections from Rambam's *Mishneh Torah*, *Sefer Maddah*, *Hilkhot De'ot*
- *Sefer Ha-hinukh* 338 *
- Selections from *Orhot Tzaddikim*, chapters 21-26

As the project continued, the following texts became a part of the project as well:

- Responsa from the Conservative Movement Committee on Jewish Laws and Standards on related topics and the cited texts contained within them:
 - Unpublished draft on Harmful Communication
(provided upon request by Rabbi Elliot Dorff after he spoke in Rabbi Dr. Dvora Weisberg's class on Reform Responsa on 2018/11/xx)
 - Genesis *Rabbah* 24:7 *
 - Babylonian Talmud, *Pesahim* 113b
 - Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 72b
 - Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 54b-55a *
 - Providing References for Schools or Jobs (HM 28:1.2014)
(All of these sources were small references to one or two lines, many of which repeat across the different texts.)
 - Leviticus *Rabbah* 33:1
 - Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 19b
 - *Sifra*, *Kedoshim*, on Leviticus 19:14
 - Babylonian Talmud, *Nedarim* 62b
 - Babylonian Talmud, *Mo'ed Katan* 17a
 - Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Metzi'a* 75b
 - Babylonian Talmud, *Avoda Zara* 6b
 - Babylonian Talmud, *Pesahim* 22b
 - Computer Privacy and the Modern Workplace (HM 331:1.2001)

- Texts cited in David Golinkin’s article “Death and Life are in the Hand of the Tongue: Yom Kippur 5764” from The Schechter Institute for Jewish Studies:
 - Babylonian Talmud, *‘Arakhin* 15a-b *
 - Midrash *Tehillim* 120 *
 - Genesis *Rabbah* 56
- Babylonian Talmud, *Shevuot* 39a

The following pages contained annotated translations of selected texts from the text immersion. These texts are indicated above with an asterisk (*) and the selections are listed in the table of contents as well.

TORAH¹

בראשית א': כ"ז

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם :

Genesis 1:27

God created humanity resembling² God, resembling God did God create it; male {masculine} and female {feminine}, (God)³ created them.

בראשית ה': א'-ב'

(א) זֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדֹת אָדָם בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם בְּדִמְיוֹת אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֹתוֹ : (ב) זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָאם וַיִּבְרָךְ אֹתָם וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שֵׁמֶם אָדָם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא :

Genesis 5:1-2

This is the book of the descendants of humanity⁴ – on the day on which God created humanity, (God) made it resembling God; male {masculine} and female {feminine}, (God) created them and (God) blessed them, as (God) called their name humanity on the day in which they were created.

¹ In all translations, I have attempted to simultaneously stay true to the original Hebrew or Aramaic text, and yet be sensitive to creating a gender-neutral translation, utilizing the personal informal plural or gender non-specific nouns whenever possible, such as 'one,' 'their,' 'person,' etc. This includes the translation of the divine name or any pronominal suffixes associated with God, which will be indicated by including parentheses around God to indicate the use of a 3ms suffixal ending.

² Brown, *Lexicon*, 853-854.

The word צלם appears as a nominal form in these verses. However, in order to create a coherent translation and based upon my own interpretive understanding, I have chosen to translate the word as "resemble" or "resemblance," but put it into the sentence structure appropriately.

³ This is an example of the 3ms suffixal ending for God being translated without gender, using God's name in lieu of a gendered pronoun.

⁴ אדם is translated as humanity, as opposed to הָאָדָם, which is translated as a person.

בראשית ט':ה'-ו'

(ה) וְאֵף אֶת־דַּמְכֶם לְנַפְשֵׁיכֶם אֶדְרֹשׁ מִיַּד כָּל־חַיָּה אֲדַרְשְׁנֹוּ וּמִיַּד הָאָדָם מִיַּד אִישׁ אָחִיו אֲדַרֵּשׁ אֶת־נַפְשׁ הָאָדָם : (ו) שִׁפְךָ וְדָם הָאָדָם בָּאָדָם דָּמוֹ יִשְׁפָּךְ כִּי בָצַלְם אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם :

Genesis 9:5-6

For surely, I will require⁵ your blood (in exchange) for your life-forces – I will require it from the hand of every living creature as well as the hand of a(ny) person; from the hand of an individual, I will require their equal, a human life. The one who spills the blood of a person, that same person's blood will be shed/spilled by another person, because each person was made resembling God.

⁵ Brown, *Lexicon*, 205.

MISHNAH⁶

משנה סנהדרין ד'ה'

כיצד מאימין את העדים על עדי נפשות, היו מכניסין אותן ומאימין עליהן. שפא תאמרו מאמד, ומשמועה, עד מפי עד ומפי אדם נאמן שמענו, או שפא אי אתם יודעין שסופנו לבדוק אתכם בדרישה ובחקירה. הווי יודעין שלא כדיני ממונות דיני נפשות. דיני ממונות, אדם נותן ממון ומתכפר לו. דיני נפשות, דמו ודם זרעיותיו תלוין בו עד סוף העולם, שכן מצינו בקין שהרג את אחיו, שנאמר (בראשית ד) דמי אחיד צעקים, אינו אומר דם אחיד אלא דמי אחיד, דמו ודם זרעיותיו. דבר אחר, דמי אחיד, שהיה דמו משלך על העצים ועל האבנים. לפיכך נברא אדם יחידי, ללמדך, שכל המאבד נפש אחת מישראל, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו אבד עולם מלא. וכל המקיים נפש אחת מישראל, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו קיים עולם מלא. ומפני שולם הבריות, שלא יאמר אדם לחברו אבא גדול מאביך. ושלל יהו מינין אומרים, הרבה רשיות בשמים. ולהגיד גדלתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא, שאדם טובע כמה מטבעות בחותם אחד וכלן דומין זה לזה, ומלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא טבע כל אדם בחותמו של אדם הראשון ואין אחד מהן דומה לחברו. לפיכך כל אחד ואחד חייב לומר, בשבילי נברא העולם. ושפא תאמרו מה לנו ולצרה הזאת, והלא כבר נאמר (ויקרא ה) והוא עד או ראיה או ידע אם לוא יגיד וגו'. ושפא תאמרו מה לנו לחוב בדמו של זה, והלא כבר נאמר (משלי יא) ובאבד רשעים רנה:

Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5

How do we impress (severity) upon⁷ the witnesses regarding a capital case? We bring them (in) and forewarn them (as follows):

“Lest you say it is an approximation⁸, or from rumors⁹, or hearsay¹⁰, or from the mouth of a trustworthy other from whom you heard; or perhaps you all do not

⁶ For translations of *Mishnaic*, *Talmudic*, and *Midrashic* texts, the following formatting key can be used: Notes about how the *Mishnah* and *Gemara* move away from and return to the argument at hand can be found in brackets [] and in *italicized* font. Biblical citations are indicated by font in SMALL CAPS and without quotation marks. Hebrew terms that cannot be translated are indicated with text that is *italicized* and underlined, where there are already notes in brackets; in other places, they are only *italicized* (such as within these following footnotes). This formatting excludes section titles, which are already formatted with **bold** and *italicized* font. Words which are added for the sake of creating a coherent English translation or to clarify the indefinite prepositions can be found in parentheses ().

⁷ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 50.

⁸ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 75.

⁹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 856; from שמע, *nifal*, nominal form; literally “the thing which is heard”.

¹⁰ Literally “testimony from the mouth of (another) witness.”

know that our purpose¹¹ is to investigate¹² you with inquiry¹³ and interrogation¹⁴ – know that matters of capital offenses are not akin to those of monetary offenses! (Regarding) monetary offenses, a person can give money and rectify (damages) with it.¹⁵ (But) capital offenses – the blood (of the victim) and the blood of (all) their descendants hang upon you for all time. This we learn from Cain, who killed his brother, as it is written: ‘THE BLOOD OF YOUR BROTHER CRIES OUT.’¹⁶ It does not say ‘the blood of your brother,’ but rather ‘the bloods¹⁷ of your brother,’ meaning his blood and the blood of (all of) his descendants.

[*The Mishnah mentions as an aside another interpretation.*] Another take: “the bloods of your brother” – this was the blood (drop)s which were strewn¹⁸ on trees and stones.

[*The Mishnah returns to the judges’ admonishment of the witnesses.*] “Therefore, humanity was (originally) created as a singular entity, in order to teach you that anyone who destroys (even) one life from among Israel, the Torah holds them accountable¹⁹ as though they destroyed an entire world; furthermore²⁰, one who saves²¹ a single life among Israel, the Torah holds them accountable as though they preserved an entire world.

¹¹ Literally “end.”

¹² Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 141.

¹³ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 223.

¹⁴ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 497.

¹⁵ Meaning that in cases of monetary offenses, a false witness can be fined and the victim can be made whole again with the financial reparation and the witness absolved (Bartenura’s commentary, accessed via Sefaria).

¹⁶ Genesis 4:10.

¹⁷ The argument hinges on the fact that the verse uses the word דמי which in the construct form indicates a plurality.

¹⁸ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1585.

¹⁹ Literally “puts it upon them.”

²⁰ Conjunctive I translated here as “furthermore.”

²¹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1330.; *pi’el*, definition 3.

[*The Mishnah mentions as an aside another interpretation.*] Additionally²², it was on account of (promoting) peace (between) creatures, so that one person could not say to another like them “My ancestry is greater than yours.” Furthermore²³, so that heretics could not say: “There are multiple authorities in the Heavens.” Even more so²⁴, it tells of the majesty of the Most Sovereign, blessed be (God), for humanity can fashion²⁵ many coins²⁶ with (only) one die²⁷, yet all of them are exactly alike. Yet²⁸ the Most Sovereign, blessed be (God), fashions each and every person with the (same) die as that of the first singular entity, and not one among them is exactly like another. Therefore, each and every individual is obliged to say “The world was created on account of me.”

[*The Mishnah returns to the judges’ admonishment of the witnesses.*] “Perhaps you all might wonder²⁹ ‘What does it matter to us (that we should subject ourselves) to this trouble³⁰?’ Does the Torah not state (IF) ONE IS A WITNESS—WHETHER BY SIGHT OR KNOWLEDGE—AND THEY DO NOT TELL, (etc.)³¹? Or³² perhaps you all may say ‘What does it matter to us, to be responsible regarding this one’s life?’ Does the text not state: WHEN THE WICKED ARE DESTROYED, THERE IS REJOICING.³³?”

²² Conjunctive I translated here as “additionally.”

²³ Conjunctive I translated here as “furthermore.”

²⁴ Conjunctive I translated here as “even more so.”

²⁵ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 518; entry II.

²⁶ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 519.

²⁷ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 441.

²⁸ Conjunctive I translated here as “yet.”

²⁹ Literally אמר, “to say.”

³⁰ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1300.

³¹ Leviticus 5:1.

³² Conjunctive I translated here as “or.”

³³ Proverbs 11:10.

BABYLONIAN TALMUD

שבת נ"ד ב - נ"ה א

מתני': אין חמור יוצא במרדעת בזמן שאינה קשורה לו ולא בזוג אף על פי שהוא פקוק ולא בסולם שבצוארו ולא ברצועה שברגלו ואין התרנגולים יוצאין בחוטין ולא ברצועה שברגליהם ואין הזכרים יוצאין בעגלה שתחת האליה שלהן ואין הרחלים יוצאות חנונות ואין העגל יוצא בגימון ולא פרה בעור הקופר ולא ברצועה שבין קרניה פרתו של רבי אלעזר בן עזריה היתה יוצאה ברצועה שבין קרניה שלא ברצון חכמים :

Mishnah Shabbat 5:4 / Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 54b

A donkey may not go out with a cushion³⁴ if³⁵ it is not tied³⁶ to it; nor with a bell³⁷, even if it is stopped up; nor with a ladder that is upon its neck, nor with a strap³⁸ on its leg. Roosters may not go out with strings³⁹ or a strap on their legs. Rams⁴⁰ may not go out with a wagon⁴¹ under their tail⁴². Ewes may not go out with a *hanunot*⁴³. A calf may not go out with a yoke/band⁴⁴. A cow (may) not (go out) with a skin of a hedgehog⁴⁵ or with a strap between its horns. Rabbi El'azar ben 'Azaryah's cow used to go out with a strap between its horns, which was not in accordance with the (opinion of the) Sages.

גמ': ... פרתו של רבי אלעזר בן עזריה : וחדא פרה הויה ליה והא אמר רב ואמרי לה אמר רב יהודה אמר רב תריסר אלפי עגלי הוה מעשר רבי אלעזר בן עזריה מעדריה כל שתא ושתא תנא לא שלו היתה אלא של

³⁴ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 837.

³⁵ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 404.

³⁶ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1432; *qal* passive participle.

³⁷ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 383.

³⁸ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1492.

³⁹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 431.

⁴⁰ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 400.

⁴¹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1041.

⁴² Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 68.

⁴³ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 482 – The Gemara explains this could be one of three different items: It is either an oil-soaked swatch of wool used to alleviate an animal's discomfort after shearing, a chip of wood to help a sick animal, or mercy shown to an ill animal. I do not translate this section of the Gemara for this project, because it is outside of its scope. For more information, please see the Koren edition, vol. 2, pgs. 259-260.

⁴⁴ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 239.

⁴⁵ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1339, which redirects to קופד on 1337.

שכינתו היתה ומתוך שלא מיחה בה נקראת על שמו רב ורבי חנינא ורבי יוחנן ורב חביבא מתנו בכוליה
דסדר מועד כל כי האי זוגא חלופי רבי יוחנן ומעייל רבי יונתן כל מי שאפשר למחות לאנשי ביתו ולא מיחה
נתפס על אנשי ביתו באנשי עירו נתפס על אנשי עירו בכל העולם כולו נתפס על כל העולם כולו אמר רב פפא
והני דבי ריש גלותא נתפסו על כולי עלמא כי האי דאמר רבי חנינא מאי דכתיב ה' במשפט יבא עם זקני עמו
ושריו אם שרים חטאו זקנים מה חטאו אלא אימא על זקנים שלא מיחו בשרים

Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 54b-55a (on Mishnah Shabbat 5:4)

[The Gemara returns to quote the Mishnah.]

Did he (Rabbi El'azar ben 'Azaryah) only have one (cow)? Did Rav not say, though
some say that Rav Yehudah said that Rav said, "Rabbi El'azar ben 'Azaryah would
tithe 12,000 calves from his herd⁴⁶ each and every year"?⁴⁷ It was taught (in the
Tosefta) it was not his, rather it was his neighbor's, yet⁴⁸ because he did not protest⁴⁹
about it (the cow going out with a strap between its horns), it (the cow) was called by
his name.

Rav, Rabbi Hanina, Rabbi Yohanan, and Rav Haviva (all) taught:

[The Gemara inserts an aside about this group of teachers.] Throughout⁵⁰ tractate
Mo'ed, each time that this pair (is listed), switch⁵¹ Rabbi Yohanan and insert⁵² Rabbi
Yonatan.

[The Gemara returns to the aforementioned teaching] Anyone who has the capacity
/ capability to / is capable of ⁵³ forewarn(ing) the members of their household and
does not interfere, they are responsible⁵⁴ for the members of their household; (if they

⁴⁶ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1045.

⁴⁷ Meaning if Rabbi El'azar had enough cows that he tithed 12,000 calves each year, how could one possibly
speak about one specific cow which belonged to him?

⁴⁸ Conjunctive I translated here as "yet."

⁴⁹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 759; *pi'el*.

⁵⁰ Literally "in all of it."

⁵¹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 456.

⁵² Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1050; *pa'el*, infinitive.

⁵³ Literally "able."

⁵⁴ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1688.

are capable of warning) the people of the town, they are responsible for the townspeople; (if they are capable of warning) the entire world and all in it, they are responsible for all the inhabitants of the world.

[*The Gemara now shares an example.*] Rav Papa said: “It was that the household of the Exilarch (chief of the Babylonian Jewry)⁵⁵ was responsible for the entire world.” As (indicated by) that which Rabbi Hanina said: “What is (the meaning of) the verse GOD WILL ENTER INTO JUDGMENT WITH THE ELDERS OF (GOD’S) PEOPLE AND ITS CHIEFS.⁵⁶ If the chiefs sinned, how did the elders sin? Rather, say ‘with the elders who did not protest to the chiefs.’”

תענית כ' א-ב

(מלכים א יד, טו) והכה ה' את ישראל כאשר ינוד הקנה במים אמר רב יהודה אמר רב לברכה דאמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן מאי דכתיב (משלי כז, ו) נאמנים פצעי אוהב ונעתרות נשיקות שונא טובה קללה שקילל אחיה השילוני את ישראל יותר מברכה שבירכן בלעם הרשע אחיה השילוני קללן בקנה אמר להם לישראל והכה ה' את ישראל כאשר ינוד הקנה מה קנה זה עומד במקום מים וגזעו מחליף ושרשיו מרובין ואפילו כל הרוחות שבעולם באות ונושבות בו אין מזיזות אותו ממקומו אלא הולך ובא עמהן דממו הרוחות עמד הקנה במקומו אבל בלעם הרשע בירכן בארז שנאמר (במדבר כד, ו) כארזים (עלי מים) מה ארז זה אינו עומד במקום מים ואין גזעו מחליף ואין שרשיו מרובין אפילו כל הרוחות שבעולם נושבות בו אין מזיזות אותו ממקומו כיון שנשבה בו רוח דרומית עוקרתו והופכתו על פניו ולא עוד אלא שזכה קנה ליטול הימנו קולמוס לכתוב בו ספר תורה נביאים וכתובים

תנו רבנן לעולם יהא אדם רך כקנה ואל יהא קשה כארז מעשה שבא רבי אלעזר (בן ר') שמעון ממגדל גדור מבית רבו והיה רכוב על החמור ומטייל על שפת נהר ושמח שמחה גדולה והיתה דעתו גסה עליו מפני שלמד תורה הרבה (**תענית כ' ב**) נזדמן לו אדם אחד שהיה מכוער ביותר אמר לו שלום עליך רבי ולא החזיר לו אמר לו ריקה כמה מכוער אותו האיש שמא כל בני עירך מכוערין כמותך אמר לו איני יודע אלא לך ואמור לאומן שעשאני כמה מכוער כלי זה שעשית כיון שידע בעצמו שחטא ירד מן החמור ונשתטח לפניו ואמר לו נענית לך מחול לי אמר לו איני מוחל לך עד שתלך לאומן שעשאני ואמור לו כמה מכוער כלי זה שעשית היה מטייל אחריו עד שהגיע לעירו יצאו בני עירו לקראתו והיו אומרים לו שלום עליך רבי

⁵⁵ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 247.

⁵⁶ Isaiah 3:14.

רבי מורי מורי אמר להם למי אתם קורין רבי רבי אמרו לו לזה שמטייל אחריו אמר להם אם זה רבי אל ירבו כמותו בישראל אמרו לו מפני מה אמר להם כך וכך עשה לי אמרו לו אעפ"כ מחול לו שאדם גדול בתורה הוא אמר להם בשבילכם הריני מוחל לו ובלבד שלא יהא רגיל לעשות כן מיד נכנס רבי אלעזר בן רבי שמעון ודרש לעולם יהא אדם רך כקנה ואל יהא קשה כארז ולפיכך זכה קנה ליטול הימנה קולמוס לכתוב בו ספר תורה תפילין ומזוזות :

Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 20a-b

GOD WILL STRIKE DOWN ISRAEL IN THE SAME WAY AS A REED SHAKES⁵⁷ IN WATER.⁵⁸

Rav Yehudah said that Rav said "(This, too, is) for a blessing, as Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said that Rabbi Yonatan said 'What is (the meaning of) the verse WOUNDS BY A LOVED ONE ARE LONG-LASTING, AND THE KISSES OF AN ENEMY ARE EXCESSIVE^{59, 60} The curse with which Ahijah the Shilonite cursed the Israelites was more so than the blessing with which Balaam the wicked blessed them. Ahijah the Shilonite cursed them as a reed, saying about them, the Israelites, that GOD WILL STRIKE DOWN ISRAEL IN THE SAME WAY AS A REED SHAKES. What (does it mean)? This reed stands in a place of water – its stem⁶¹ replenishes⁶², its roots are numerous, and even if all the winds in the world come and blow⁶³ it, they cannot move it from its place. Rather, it moves back and forth with them until the winds subside, (with) the reed (still) standing in its place. But Balaam the wicked blessed them as a cedar, as it is said AS CEDARS BESIDE WATER.⁶⁴ What (does it mean)? This cedar cannot stand in a place of water – its trunk replenishes, its roots are not numerous, and even if all the winds in the world come and blow it, they cannot move it from its place. However, (when) a

⁵⁷ נדד; Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 877.

⁵⁸ I Kings 14:15.

⁵⁹ Brown, *Lexicon*, 801; *nifal*.

⁶⁰ Proverbs 27:6.

⁶¹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 231.

⁶² Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 471; *hifil*, definition 2.

⁶³ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 938.

⁶⁴ Numbers 24:6.

southern wind blows upon it, it (the southern wind) uproots⁶⁵ it (the cedar) and flips it over onto its top⁶⁶. And not only that, but the reed merited that a quill would come from it to write a Torah scroll, the Prophets, and the Writings with it.

Our sages taught: A person should always be soft⁶⁷ like a reed and not be hard like a cedar. A story is told of when Rabbi El'azar ben Rabbi Shim'on came from Migdal Gador⁶⁸ from the house of his rabbi, and he was riding upon his donkey and traveling along the banks of the river. He was exceedingly pleased with himself and his opinion⁶⁹ of himself was inflated, because he had learned so much Torah. [*The text continues on 20b.*] He encountered a particular man that was extremely unbecoming⁷⁰. He (the man) said to him (Rabbi El'azar) "Greetings – peace be upon you, Rabbi." But he (Rabbi El'azar) did not return (the greeting) to him. (Rather,) he (Rabbi El'azar) said (disparagingly) to him (the man) "Woah/Woe⁷¹, how strange is this man! Perhaps all the people of your city are strange like you (are)?!" He (the man) said to him (Rabbi El'azar) "I do not know. Rather, go and say to the artisan who made me 'How strange is this vessel which you made.'" When he (Rabbi El'azar) intuited⁷² that he had sinned, he got down off of his donkey, prostrated

⁶⁵ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1108.

⁶⁶ Literally "face."

⁶⁷ רכך; Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1479; denom.

⁶⁸ I am indebted to one of my teachers (Rabbi Dr. Andrea Weiss??) for explaining a modern way of understanding the locations Migdal Gador. *Migdal* is a tower; and *gador* means fenced, restricted, or enclosed. One could then read the location of Migdal Gador with the modern understanding of an ivory tower, where academics work theoretically but do not interact with the real world. The phenomenon of the ivory tower in this regard is a medieval concept, first used in 1894. However, this insight informed my interpretation of this *sugya*.

⁶⁹ Literally "head."

⁷⁰ This verbal form is a *pi'el* passive participle. One eisegetical interpretation I would offer is that it is not necessarily that the man was in fact strange or unbecoming, but rather that others, particularly Rabbi El'azar, deemed him so.

⁷¹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1476.

⁷² Literally "understood."

himself before him (the man), and said to him “I violated you. Forgive me!” He (the man) said to him (Rabbi El‘azar) “I will not forgive you until you go to the artisan who made me and explain ‘How strange is this vessel which you made.’”

He (Rabbi El‘azar) was trailing along after him (the man) until he arrived at his city. The people of the town came out to greet him (Rabbi El‘azar) and they were saying to him “Greetings – peace be upon you, Rabbi, Rabbi, my teacher, my teacher.” He (the man) said to them “(To) whom are you addressing (as) ‘Rabbi, Rabbi?’” They said to him “To this one who is trailing behind you.” He said “If this one is a rabbi, may there not be more like him in Israel!” They said to him “Why? For what reason?” He said to them “He did such-and-such to me.” They said to him “Nevertheless, forgive him, for he is a great man of Torah.” He said to them “For the sake of all of you, behold⁷³, I will forgive him; but only⁷⁴ provided that he does not become in the habit of doing so.” Immediately, Rabbi El‘azar ben Rabbi Shim‘on entered and expounded⁷⁵: A person should always be soft like a reed and not be hard like a cedar. And therefore, the reed merited⁷⁶ that a quill⁷⁷ would come from it to write a Torah scroll, tefillin, and mezuzah scrolls with it.

ערכין ט"ו א-ב

מתני': במוציא שם רע להקל ולהחמיר כיצד אחד שהוציא שם רע על גדולה שבכהונה ועל קטנה שבישראל נותן מאה סלע נמצא האומר בפיו חמור מן העושה מעשה שכן מצינו שלא נתחתם גזר דין על אבותינו במדבר אלא על לשון הרע שנאמר (במדבר יד, כב) וינסו אותי זה עשר פעמים וגו' :

⁷³ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 367; entry II.

⁷⁴ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 138.

⁷⁵ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 325.

⁷⁶ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 347.

⁷⁷ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1328.

Mishnah 'Arakhin 3:5 / Babylonian Talmud 'Arakhin 15a

In regard to the defamer⁷⁸, (the rule) can be lenient⁷⁹ and can be strict⁸⁰. How so?

Whether one defames the highest (woman) that is within the priesthood or the lowliest woman in Israel⁸¹, the person gives (her) 100 *sela'im*⁸². It (therefore) emerges that one who speaks (defamation) with their mouth is severe⁸³ than one who commits an (evil) action. Similarly, we (also) find that the decree of judgment against our ancestors in the wilderness was only solidified⁸⁴ due to defamation, as it is said: YET⁸⁵ YOU TESTED ME THESE TEN TIMES AND YOU DID NOT HEED⁸⁶ MY VOICE!⁸⁷

גמ': ... אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי יוסי בן זימרא מאי דכתיב (תהלים קכ, ג) מה יתן לך ומה יוסיף לך לשון רמיה אמר לו הקב"ה ללשון כל אבריו של אדם זקופים ואתה מוטל כל אבריו של אדם מבחוץ ואתה מבפנים ולא עוד אלא שהקפתי לך שתי חומות אחת של עצם ואחת של בשר מה יתן לך ומה יוסיף לך לשון רמיה ...

תנא דבי רבי ישמעאל כל המספר לשון הרע מגדיל עונות כנגד שלש עבירות עבודת כוכבים וגילוי עריות ושפיכות דמים כתיב הכא (תהילים יב, ד) לשון מדברת גדולות וכתוב בעבודת כוכבים (שמות לב, לא) אנא חטא העם הזה חטאה גדולה בגילוי עריות כתיב (בראשית ט, ט) ואיך אעשה הרעה הגדולה הזאת בשפיכות דמים כתיב (בראשית ד, יג) גדול עוני מנשוא גדולות אימא תרתי הי מינייהו מפקא במערבא אמרי לשון תליתאי קטיל תליתאי הורג למספרו ולמקבלו ולאומרו א"ר חמא ברבי חנינא מאי דכתיב (משלי יח, כא) מות וחיים ביד לשון וכי יש יד ללשון לומר לך מה יד ממיתה אף לשון ממיתה אי מה יד אינה ממיתה אלא בסמוך לה אף לשון אינה ממיתה אלא בסמוך לה תלמוד לומר (ירמיה ט, ז) חץ שחוט לשונם אי מה חץ עד ארבעים וחמשים אמה אף לשון עד ארבעים וחמשים אמה תלמוד לומר (תהילים עג, ז) שתו בשמים פיהם ולשונם תהלך בארץ וכי מאחר דכתיב שתו בשמים פיהם חץ שחוט לשונם למה לי הא

⁷⁸ Literally "the one from whom comes a bad name (of another)."

⁷⁹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1359; entry II, definition 2. Also pg. 1377; *hifil*, definition 2.

⁸⁰ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 479; entry I, *qal*, definition 2.

⁸¹ This would be the lowest caste system designation, as opposed to a member of the priestly caste.

⁸² A *sela'* in this regard is a weight, measure, or value, equivalent to 200 common shekels.

⁸³ This is a translation of the word חמור as found on page 479 of Jastrow. In the Schottenstein edition, the word is not חמור, but rather יתר, so the translation would be "It (therefore) emerges that one who speaks (defamation) with his mouth is worse than one who commits an (evil) action."

⁸⁴ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 514.

⁸⁵ Conjunctive I translated here as "yet."

⁸⁶ Literally שמע, "listen to."

⁸⁷ Numbers 14:22.

קמשמע לן דקטיל כחץ וכי מאחר דכתיב חץ שחוט לשונם מות וחיים ביד לשון למה לי לכדברא דאמר
רבא בעי חיים בלישניה דבעי מיתה בלישניה

Babylonian Talmud ‘Arakhin 15b (on Mishnah ‘Arakhin 3:5)

[After exploring the ten tests referred to in the Mishnah, the Gemara returns to the subject of derogatory speech.]

Rabbi Yohanan said in the name of Rabbi Yosi ben Zimra “What is (the meaning of) the verse WHAT CAN (GOD) GIVE YOU AND WHAT CAN (GOD) ADD TO YOU, DECEITFUL⁸⁸ TONGUE?⁸⁹ The Holy One, blessed be (God), said to the tongue ‘All of the limbs⁹⁰ of a person are upright, yet⁹¹ you lie flat⁹²; all of the limbs of a person are external, yet⁹³ you are internal; and not only that, but I surrounded⁹⁴ you with two walls, one of bone and one of flesh. WHAT (MORE) CAN (I) GIVE YOU AND WHAT (MORE) CAN (I) ADD TO YOU, DECEITFUL TONGUE?’”

[The Gemara then goes on to compare the sin of derogatory speech with the punishment of leprosy, which is outside the purview of this project.]

[The Gemara now explores the severity of committing derogatory speech.]

A *Baraita* was taught in the academy of Rabbi Yishma‘el: anyone who spreads derogatory speech (about another person) proliferates transgressions akin to three sins – idol worship, illicit relations, and the shedding⁹⁵ of blood⁹⁶. It is written here: A TONGUE THAT SPEAKS GRIEVOUSLY...⁹⁷ And it is written regarding idol worship:

⁸⁸ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1482.

⁸⁹ Psalms 120:3.

⁹⁰ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 9.

⁹¹ Conjunctive I translated here as “yet.”

⁹² Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 900; *hofal*, participle, definition a

⁹³ Conjunctive I translated here as “yet.”

⁹⁴ נקף; Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 934; *hifil*, definition 1.

⁹⁵ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1616.

⁹⁶ Euphemism for murder.

⁹⁷ Psalms 12:4.

PLEASE – THIS PEOPLE HAS COMMITTED A CATASTROPHIC SIN.⁹⁸ In regard to illicit relations, it is written: HOW COULD I COMMIT SUCH A TREMENDOUS EVIL?⁹⁹ In regard to the shedding of blood, it is written: IS MY TRANSGRESSION SO EGREGIOUS TO BE REMOVED?”^{100, 101}

Immensity¹⁰² - we could say two (and not all three).¹⁰³ Which (one) of these would (you) exclude¹⁰⁴ (though)?

In the West, they say: the tongue of (person number) three¹⁰⁵ kills three. It (the tongue) kills the one who spreads it, the one who receives it, and the one spoken about.

Rabbi Hama, son of Rabbi Hanina, said “What is (the meaning of) the verse DEATH AND LIFE ARE IN THE HAND OF THE TONGUE.¹⁰⁶ Is this (to say) that the tongue has a hand?! It expresses¹⁰⁷ to you (that) just as a hand can kill, so too a tongue can kill. Maybe¹⁰⁸ just as a hand can kill only one who is close to it, so too a tongue can kill only one close to it? A verse (therefore) says THEIR TONGUE IS A SHARPENED

⁹⁸ Exodus 32:31.

⁹⁹ Genesis 39:9.

¹⁰⁰ Genesis 4:13.

¹⁰¹ Meaning in stories related to all three of these sins, the adjective גדול is used to describe them (translated respectively as ‘catastrophic,’ ‘tremendous,’ and ‘egregious’), and because the same word is also used to describe the tongue and the evil it can commit (translated as ‘grievously’) in the plural form, it must therefore be akin to all three sins combined.

¹⁰² The Gemara continues exploring the term גדול and the implications of it being plural.

¹⁰³ The argument here being that a plurality could minimally refer to only two of the aforementioned sins, not all three.

¹⁰⁴ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 926.

¹⁰⁵ The Schottenstein edition notes here “‘Person number three’ is the gossipmonger (רביל). He is the third party in relation to the man whose secrets he reveals and the fellow to whom he reveals them (see *Rashi*; cf. *Tosafos*).”

Schorr and Malinowitz, *Talmud Bavli*, ‘Arachin, 15b⁵.

¹⁰⁶ Proverbs 18:21.

¹⁰⁷ Literally “tells.”

¹⁰⁸ Literally “if.”

ARROW.¹⁰⁹ Maybe just as an arrow (kills at a distance) up to forty or fifty amot, so too a tongue (can kill at a distance) up to forty or fifty amot? A verse (therefore) says THEY SET THEIR MOUTH IN THE HEAVENS AND THEIR TONGUE STRUTS¹¹⁰ ON THE EARTH.¹¹¹ But once (I have) the verse THEY SET THEIR MOUTH IN THE HEAVENS, why do I need THEIR TONGUE IS A SHARPENED ARROW.? This is what it teaches us¹¹², that it (the tongue) kills¹¹³ like an arrow. But once (I have) the verse THEIR TONGUE IS A SHARPENED ARROW, why do I need DEATH AND LIFE ARE IN THE HAND OF THE TONGUE.? To that of Rava, that Rava said ‘One who desires life, it is by their tongue; and one who desires death, it is by their tongue.’”

¹⁰⁹ Jeremiah 9:7.

¹¹⁰ Literally הלך, “walks.”

¹¹¹ Psalms 73:9.

¹¹² Frank, *Dictionary*, 77.

¹¹³ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1349.

MIDRASH

בראשית רבה כ"ד:ז'

בן עזאי אומר: זה ספר תולדות אדם (בראשית ה, א), זה כלל גדול בתורה. רבי עקיבא אומר: ואהבת לרעך כמוך (ויקרא יט, יח), זה כלל גדול בתורה, שלא תאמר הואיל ונתבזיתי ונתבזה חברי עמי, הואיל ונתקללתי ונתקלל חברי עמי. אומר רבי תנחומא: אם עשית כן דע למי אתה מבזה בדמות אלהים עשה אותו (בראשית ה, א).

Genesis Rabbah 24:7¹¹⁴

Ben 'Azai said "THIS IS THE BOOK OF THE DESCENDANTS OF HUMANITY¹¹⁵ – this is the greatest principle in (all of) Torah." Rabbi Akiba said "LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS (YOU DO) YOURSELF¹¹⁶ – this is the greatest principle in (all of) Torah, so that you cannot say 'Since I was demeaned, let¹¹⁷ my fellow (also) be demeaned with me; since I was cursed, let my fellow (also) be cursed with me.'" Rabbi Tanhuma said "If you do thusly, know whom you are shaming, (for) (GOD) MADE IT (HUMANITY) RESEMBLING GOD.¹¹⁸"

מדרש תהילים ק"ב

ג) מה יתן לך ומה יוסיף וגו'. מה אתה נהנה ומה אתה מועיל הוא חוטא ולא לו. אמר הקב"ה ללשון הגנב גונב לאכול אף על פי שכתוב (שמות כ יג) לא תגנוב. גונב לשעה שנאמר (משלי ו ל) לא יבזו לגנב וגו'. וכתוב (שמות כ יג) לא תנאף. ונאף. ועושה תאות נפשו לשעה שנאמר (משלי ו לב) נואף אשה חסר לב. אף על פי שמשחית נפשו עושה תאותו לשעה. ואתה הלשון כלום הועלת את נפשך והרגת. אומר לך מה אני עושה לך לשון הרע כשם שעשית לעולם מתחלה והלשנת על אדם והוא הנחש. כך אני עושה לך (ונחש המדבר) דכתיב (במדבר כא ה) וידבר העם באלקים ובמשה. מה עשה להם (שם ו) וישלח ה' בעם נחשים השרפים. ולמה

¹¹⁴ See also:

- *Sifra, Kedoshim*, section 2, 4:12
- Jerusalem Talmud, *Nedarim* 9:1 and following or 30b
- *Avot d'Rabbi Natan, nusach bet*, chapter 26.

¹¹⁵ Genesis 5:1.

¹¹⁶ Leviticus 19:18.

¹¹⁷ Verbal form translated using jussive.

¹¹⁸ Genesis 5:1.

נחש אלא הוא המלשין שנאמר (תהלים קמ ד) שנגנו לשונם כמו נחש וגו'. ואף אני כך אני עושה להם כשם שאמרתי לנחש (בראשית ג יד) ועפר תאכל וגו'.

Midrash Tehillim 120

WHAT CAN (GOD) GIVE YOU AND WHAT CAN (GOD) ADD TO YOU, etc.

How¹¹⁹ do you benefit¹²⁰ and what do you achieve¹²¹? You sin, and not regarding yourself. The Holy One, blessed be (God), said to the tongue “The thief steals in order to eat, despite the fact that it is written DO NOT STEAL.¹²² They steal at an hour (of need), as it is said DO NOT DESPISE THE THIEF.¹²³ It is also written DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,¹²⁴ but (if) one commits adultery, they satisfy the appetite of their soul¹²⁵ but for a moment, as it is said ONE WHO COMMITS ADULTERY WITH A WOMAN IS BEREFT OF SENSE.¹²⁶ Despite the fact that they destroy their own wellbeing, in that moment, their lust is slaked. But you, tongue, have achieved nothing yourself, and (yet) you kill (regardless). I will tell you what I am going to do with you, malicious tongue – in the same manner that you acted in the world at the beginning with humanity—and this was through the tongue, which (belonged) to the serpent—thus will I do with you. This is also the serpent of the wilderness, as it is AND THE PEOPLE SPOKE AGAINST GOD AND AGAINST MOSES.¹²⁷ What happened to them? GOD SENT FIERY SERPENTS AMONG THE PEOPLE.¹²⁸ Why a serpent? Merely¹²⁹, because it was the bearer of

¹¹⁹ מה translated here as “how.”

¹²⁰ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 357-358; *nifal*; denom. of הנאח on same page, which redirects to הניח (see page 358), which then in turn is denom. of נאות (on page 866), which then refers to אות (see page 36), entry I, *nifal*.

¹²¹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 584

¹²² Exodus 20:13.

¹²³ Proverbs 6:30.

¹²⁴ Exodus 20:13.

¹²⁵ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1641.

¹²⁶ Proverbs 6:32.

¹²⁷ Numbers 21:5.

¹²⁸ Numbers 21:6.

¹²⁹ אלא translated here as “merely.”

salacious speech, as it is said THEY SHARPEN¹³⁰ THEIR TONGUE LIKE A SERPENT, etc.¹³¹

And so thusly did I make them in the same manner that I admonished¹³² the serpent:

DUST YOU WILL EAT, etc.¹³³”

(ד) מה יתן לך ומה יוסיף לך וגו'. לשון הרע קורין אותו שלישי ולמה שהורג ג'. הורג עצמו והמקבלו ומי שנאמר עליו. וכן אתה מוצא בדואג שהרג עצמו ואין לו חלק לעולם הבא. והרג לאחימלך הכהן שנאמר עליו (שמואל-א כב יט) ונוב עיר הכהנים שלו. והרג שאול ששמע וקבל ממנו שנאמר (שמואל-א לא ו) וימת שאול ושלושה בניו וגו'. וכן עכו"ם הרשעה הוא מכה כנחש שנאמר (ירמיה מו כב) קולה כנחש ילך וגו'.

נמשל הלשון לחץ ולמה שאם ישלוח האדם החרב שבידו להרוג את חבירו הוא מתחנן לו ומבקש הימנו רחמים מתנחם ההורג ומחזיר החרב לנרתיקו. אבל החץ כיון שירה אותו והלך אפילו מבקש להחזירה אינו יכול להחזיר. לכך נאמר (תהילים קב ד) חצי גבור שנונים וגו'. הרוותם הזה מי שמדליקו גחליו אינם כבות.

ומעשה היה בב' בני אדם שבאים במדבר וישבו תחת רותם א' לקטו עצים מרותם ובשלו להם מה שיאכלו ואכלו והלכו להם. לאחר שנה באו למדבר באותו מקום הרוותם ומצאו אפר ממה שהדליקו אמרו הרי י"ב חדש יש לנו משעברנו ואכלנו במקום הזה מששו באפר והלכו עליו ונכו רגליהם מן הגחלים שתחת האפר לפי שאין נכבות. לכך נמשל לשון הרע כגחלי רותמים שנאמר חצי גבור שנונים וגו'.

וכן הרשע הזה הורג בני אדם בלשון. כשם שהחץ הזה אינו יודע בו עד שהגיע אליו כך לשון הרע אינו יודע בו עד שחיצו של אדם רשע (מעשו) באין פתאום ואין אדם יודע עד שהן מוציאים אותה מלה להריגה או לאיסורין לפי שאדם הזה נתון במקומו וכותבין עליו להיכן שהוא והורגין אותו. לכך נאמר חצי גבור שנונים.

וכן משה אמר לישראל (תהלים צא ה) לא תירא מפחד לילה. מפחדה של עכו"ם. (תהלים צא ה) מחץ יעוף יומם. מן לבלרין שלהם. לכן נאמר חצי גבור שנונים.

¹³⁰ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1607; plural passive participle.

Interestingly, this entry also includes the following definitions:

- Transferred to mean to teach diligently (as compared with תדן)
- To speak distinctly (see Jerusalem Talmud, *Berakhot* III, 6b at the bottom {found via Sefaria, listed as 25b:6} – ר' יוסי ור' יודא בן פזי הוו מתיבין אמרו לא מסתברא בק"ש שיהא כל אחד ואחד משנן בפיו – Rabbi Yosi and Rabbi Yuda ben Pazi used to argue (Jastrow, 1648; *af'el*, definition 1, 'especially' section) saying 'Is it not evident that in reading the Shema, each and every one must recite it distinctly with his own mouth?')

¹³¹ Psalms 140:4.

¹³² Literally אמר, "said."

¹³³ Genesis 3:14.

WHAT CAN (GOD) GIVE YOU AND WHAT CAN (GOD) ADD TO YOU, etc.

The malicious tongue is called three. And why (is that)? (For the reason) that it kills three (people) – it kills itself¹³⁴, the one who receives¹³⁵ it, and the one who is spoken about. This you can understand¹³⁶ through Do‘eg, who killed himself, and as such did not receive a portion in the world to come. He also¹³⁷ killed Ahimelech the priest, as it is said about him: HE PUT NOB, CITY OF THE PRIESTS (TO THE EDGE OF A SWORD).¹³⁸ Furthermore¹³⁹, he killed Saul, who heard and received it from him, as it is said: SO¹⁴⁰ SAUL DIED, ALONG WITH HIS THREE SONS.¹⁴¹ Thus evil-doers strike like a serpent, as it is written: THE VOICE WILL GO OUT LIKE A SERPENT.¹⁴²

The point is that the tongues is as an arrow. Why? Because if a person draws¹⁴³ the sword which is in their hand to kill their fellow, they (the victim) can plead¹⁴⁴ with them and beg them for life and mercy, (at which point) the killer can reconsider¹⁴⁵ and return the sword to its sheath¹⁴⁶. But the arrow? Once they (the killer) releases¹⁴⁷ it and sends it off, even if they so desire to take it back, they are not able to do so. Therefore, it says: ARROWS OF THE MIGHTY ARE SHARP.¹⁴⁸

¹³⁴ Meaning the person who spoke it.

¹³⁵ “Receive” here also carries the weight of taking it in and accepting it as true.

¹³⁶ Literally מצא, “find.”

¹³⁷ Conjunctive ו translated here as “also.”

¹³⁸ I Samuel 22:19.

¹³⁹ Conjunctive ו translated here as “furthermore.”

¹⁴⁰ Conjunctive ו translated here as “so.”

¹⁴¹ I Samuel 22:19.

¹⁴² Jeremiah 46:22.

¹⁴³ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1587; *qal*, definition 2.

¹⁴⁴ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 484; *hitpa’el*.

¹⁴⁵ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 895; *hitpa’el*, definition 2.

¹⁴⁶ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 937.

¹⁴⁷ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 596.

¹⁴⁸ Psalms 120:4.

This (specific type of) broom (tree)¹⁴⁹, when someone ignites¹⁵⁰ it, its embers¹⁵¹ cannot be extinguished¹⁵². There was a story of two people who were coming to a wilderness, and they sat under a broom (tree). They gathered¹⁵³ branches from the broom (tree), cooked themselves something they could eat, ate it, and continued on their way. The following year, they came upon that same spot in the wilderness, and they found ashes from where they had lit it. They said “There have been twelve months since we came through and ate in this place.” They sifted through¹⁵⁴ the ashes and walked upon them, burning¹⁵⁵ their feet from the embers which were under the ashes, because they had not extinguished. Therefore, the point is that salacious speech is like embers of a broom (tree), as it is said: ARROWS OF THE MIGHTY ARE SHARP, etc.

Even more so, a certain evil person can kill multiple¹⁵⁶ people with their tongue. In the same manner that an arrow may unknowingly be shot towards someone until it reaches them, so too is a malicious tongue. Someone may be unaware of it until this evil-doer’s arrow comes upon them suddenly, out of nowhere. And this person is unaware until they—a proclamation¹⁵⁷ of death or imprisonment¹⁵⁸—come upon them (the victim), because (while) this person (the perpetrator) gives up their

¹⁴⁹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1502.

¹⁵⁰ Literally “lights.”

¹⁵¹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 233.

¹⁵² Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 607-608.

¹⁵³ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 717.

¹⁵⁴ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 858; cites משמש as origin, redirects to 856; literally “touch,” “handle,” or “examine.”

¹⁵⁵ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 910; *hifil*, definition 1; literally “injure” (and an injury from a hot ember would be a burn).

¹⁵⁶ The Hebrew is אדם בני, which indicates a plurality in the first part of the construct form. Therefore, it can be inferred that the text means at least two. I have chosen to keep the translation as open as possible by using the word “multiple.”

¹⁵⁷ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 787; see also מלל on 792; entry III.

¹⁵⁸ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 53.

status¹⁵⁹, still¹⁶⁰ they (others) write (libel) about them (the victim) in in the place where they are, and so kill him. Therefore, it is said: ARROWS OF THE MIGHTY ARE SHARP.

So¹⁶¹, Moses said to Israel DO NOT FEAR TERROR IN THE NIGHT,¹⁶² which is the terror of the night worshippers¹⁶³. (Moses continues) NOR BY AN ARROW FLYING DURING THE DAY,¹⁶⁴ which is from their scribes¹⁶⁵. Hence¹⁶⁶ it is said ARROWS OF THE MIGHTY ARE SHARP.

¹⁵⁹ Literally במקומו, “in their place.”

¹⁶⁰ Conjunctive ו translated here as “still.”

¹⁶¹ Conjunctive ו translated here as “so.”

¹⁶² Psalms 91:5.

¹⁶³ Idol worshippers, those who worship the stars in the night sky, known in Hebrew as עובדי כוכבים ומזלות, “worshippers of the stars and signs.”

¹⁶⁴ Psalms 91:5.

¹⁶⁵ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 689.

¹⁶⁶ לכן translated here as “hence.”

MUSSAR

ספר החינוך של"ח

שלא להונות אחד מישראל בדברים - שלא להונות אחד מישראל בדברים, כלומר, שלא נאמר לישראל דברים שיכאיבוהו ויצערוהו ואין בו כח להעזר מהם. ובפרוש אמרו זכרונם לברכה (ב"מ נח, ב) כיצד, אם היה בעל תשובה לא יאמר לו זכר מעשיך הראשונים, היו חללים באין עליו לא יאמר לו כדרך שאמרו חבריו לאיוב (ד ו) הלא יראתך כסלתך וגו'. ראה חמרים מבקשים תבואה לא יאמר להם לכו אצל פלוני והוא יודע שאין לו, ולא יאמר לתגר בכמה חפץ זה והוא אינו רוצה לקח, ועל זה נאמר (ויקרא כה יז) ולא תונו איש את עמיתו.

שרש מצוה זו ידוע כי הוא לתת שלום בין הבריות, וגדול השלום שבו הברכה מצויה בעולם, וקשה המחלקת כמה קללות וכמה תקלות תלויות בה.

מדיני המצוה. כמה אזהרות וכמה זרזין שהזהירונו זכרונם לברכה בענין זה שלא להכאיב הבריות בשום דבר ולא לבישם, והפליגו בדבר עד שאמרו (שם), שלא יתלה עיניו על המקח בשעה שאין לו דמים, וראוי להזהר שאפילו ברמז דבריו לא יהיה נשמע חרוף לבני אדם, כי התורה הקפידה הרבה באונאת הדברים, לפי שהוא דבר קשה מאד ללב הבריות, והרבה מבני אדם יקפידו עליהם יותר מעל הממון. וכמו שאמרו זכרונם לברכה (שם) גדולה אונאת דברים מאונאת ממון, שבאונאת דברים הוא אומר ויראת מאלהיך וגו. ולא יהיה באפשר לכתב פרט כל הדברים שיש בהן צער לבריות, אבל כל אחד צריך להזהר כפי מה שיראה, כי השם ברוך הוא יודע כל פסיעותיו וכל רמיזותיו, כי האדם יראה לעינים והוא יראה ללבב, וכמה מעשים כתבו לנו זכרונם לברכה במדרשים ללמד על זה מוסר, ועקר הענין בפרק רביעי ממציעא [שם].

ונוהגת מצוה זו בכל מקום ובכל זמן בזכרים ונקבות, ואפילו בקטנים, ראוי להזהר שלא להכאיב בדברים יותר מדאי, זולתי במה שצריכין הרבה כדי שיקחו מוסר, ואפילו בבני ובנותיו בני ביתו של אדם, והמקל בהם שלא לצערם בענינים אלה ימצא חיים ברכה וכבוד. והעובר על זה והכאיב את חברו בדברים באותן שפרשו חכמינו זכרונם לברכה בבעל תשובה ובחולה וכיוצא בהן עבר על לאו זה, אבל אין לוקין עליו, לפי שאין בו מעשה. וכמה מלקיות מבלי רצועה של עגל יש ביד האדון המצוה על זה, יתעלה ויתברך.

ואולם לפי הדומה, אין במשמע שאם בא ישראל אחד והתחיל והדשיע לצער חבריו בדבריו הרעים שלא יענהו השומע, שאי אפשר להיות האדם כאבן שאין לה הופכים, ועוד, שיהיה בשתיקתו כמודה על החרופין. ובאמת, לא תצוה התורה להיות האדם כאבן, שותק למחרפיו כמו למברכיו, אבל תצוה אותנו שנתרחק מן המדה הזאת ושלא נתחיל להתקוטט ולחרף בני אדם, ובכן ינצל כל אדם מכל זה, כי מי שאינו בעל קטטה לא יחרפוהו בני אדם, זולתי השוטים הגמורים, ואין לתת לב על השוטים. ואם אולי יכריחנו מחרף מבני אדם להשיב על דבריו ראוי לחכם שישב לו דרך סלסול ונעימות ולא יכעס הרבה כי כעס בחיק כסילים ינוח (קהלת ז ט). וינצל עצמו אל השומעים מחרפיו וישליך המשא על המחרף, זהו דרך הטובים שבבני אדם. ויש לנו ללמד דבר זה שמתר לנו לענות כסיל לפי הדומה מאשר התירה התורה הבא במחלתו להקדים ולהרגו (שמות כב א), שאין ספק שלא נתחייב האדם לסבל הנזקים מיד חבריו, כי יש לו רשות להנצל מידו וכמו כן מדברי פיהו אשר מלא מרמות ותוך, בכל דבר שהוא יכול להנצל ממנו. ואולם יש כת

מבני אדם שעולה חסידותם כל כך שלא ירצו להכניס עצמם בהוראה זו להשיב חורפיהם דבר, פן יגבר עליהם הכעס ויתפשטו בענין זה יותר מדאי, ועליהם אמרו זכרונם לברכה (שבת פח, ב) הנעלבין ואינם עולבים, שומעין חרפתם ואינם משיבין עליהם הכתוב אומר (שופטים ה לא) ואוהביו כצאת השמש בגבורתו.

Sefer Ha-hinukh 338

The prohibition not to oppress a (fellow) Jew with words —

Do not oppress a (fellow) Jew with words, as it is said: Do not say to any Israelite words which would hurt them, nor those which would distress¹⁶⁷ them, for they do not have the power to alleviate¹⁶⁸ themselves from them (the words). In an interpretation, they—may their memories be for blessing— said¹⁶⁹: “How? If they are repentant sinner, do not say to them ‘Remember your previous deeds.’ (If) people stricken with illness come upon them, do not say to them in the manner that Job’s friends spoke to him: IS YOUR FEAR (OF GOD) NOT YOUR CONFIDENCE¹⁷⁰? etc.¹⁷¹ (If) one sees a donkey-driver searching for grain¹⁷², do not say to them ‘Go to the place of so-and-so,’ if you know that this person does not have any. Do not say to a merchant¹⁷³ ‘How much is this object¹⁷⁴?’ if you do not wish to purchase it. Regarding this topic, it is said A PERSON SHOULD NOT WRONG¹⁷⁵ ANOTHER.¹⁷⁶”

¹⁶⁷ Literally “afflict.”

¹⁶⁸ Literally “help.”

¹⁶⁹ The rest of the paragraph, contained within quotation marks, can be found in the Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Metzi’a*, 58b.

¹⁷⁰ Brown, *Lexicon*, 492; definition 3.

¹⁷¹ Job 4:6.

¹⁷² Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1643.

¹⁷³ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1646-1647.

¹⁷⁴ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 492. The word used also means ‘desire.’

¹⁷⁵ ינה; Brown, *Lexicon*, 413; *hifil*.

¹⁷⁶ Leviticus 25:17.

The reason¹⁷⁷ for this commandment is obvious¹⁷⁸ because it promotes peace between people¹⁷⁹. Peace is incredible¹⁸⁰, for through it, blessing is found¹⁸¹ in the world; while¹⁸² dispute is harsh, many curses and many offenses¹⁸³ depend upon it.

Among¹⁸⁴ the laws of the commandments, many warnings and many urgings¹⁸⁵ that they—may their memories be for blessing—warn us about in this manner, not to inflict pain upon (other) people in any way at all, nor embarrass them. They exaggerated¹⁸⁶ this matter until (the point) when they said: “A person should not lay¹⁸⁷ their eyes upon a purchase¹⁸⁸ at a time¹⁸⁹ when they do not have money.”¹⁹⁰

It is appropriate to exercise caution even in the insinuations of their words, so that abusive¹⁹¹ (language) is not overheard by another person, because the Torah was excessively precise¹⁹² in matters of verbal maltreatment, since it is an extremely difficult matter upon the hearts of people, and the majority¹⁹³ of people are more sensitive about these (matters of verbal oppression) than (matters) of money. Likewise, they—may their memories be for blessing—said: “(Matters of) verbal

¹⁷⁷ Literally “root.”

¹⁷⁸ Literally “known.”

¹⁷⁹ Literally “creatures.”

¹⁸⁰ Literally גדול, “great.”

¹⁸¹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 825; *qal* passive participle.

¹⁸² Conjunctive I translated here as “while.”

¹⁸³ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1691.

¹⁸⁴ מן translated here as “among.”

¹⁸⁵ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 397.

¹⁸⁶ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1175; *hifil*, definition 8.

¹⁸⁷ Literally “hang.”

¹⁸⁸ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 830.

¹⁸⁹ Literally “hour.”

¹⁹⁰ *Baba Metzi’a* 58b.

¹⁹¹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 460, literally “blasphemy.”

¹⁹² Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1398; *hifil*, definition 3.

¹⁹³ הרבה, “many,” translated here as “majority.”

maltreatment are greater than (those of) monetary exploitation, because in (matters of) verbal maltreatment, it (the Torah) says YOU SHALL FEAR YOUR GOD, etc.¹⁹⁴ ¹⁹⁵

It is not possible to write (in) detail all the words that contain anguish for people. Instead¹⁹⁶, it is incumbent¹⁹⁷ upon every single person to exercise caution according to what they see, for God—blessed be (God)—knows all of one’s steps¹⁹⁸ and all of one’s insinuations, (since) WHILE¹⁹⁹ A PERSON SEES ONLY WHAT IS VISIBLE, GOD SEES INTO THE HEART.²⁰⁰ Furthermore²⁰¹, they—may their memories be for blessing—wrote for us many stories in the Midrashim to teach about this conduct²⁰². The gist of this issue (can be found) in chapter four of (tractate *Baba*) *Metzi’a*.

This commandment applies²⁰³ everywhere, at any time, for men and women (alike), even with children – it is appropriate to exercise even more caution not to wound them with words, other than²⁰⁴ that which is absolutely necessary, so that they learn²⁰⁵ the discipline, even one’s sons and daughters. The one who is lenient with these (their words), who does not inflict them (other people) with these pains, they will find life, blessing, and honor. The one who transgresses this and injures their fellow with words, these things which the Sages—may their memories be for blessing—interpreted regarding the repentant sinner, an ill person, and so forth; he

¹⁹⁴ Leviticus 25:17.

¹⁹⁵ *Baba Metzi’a* 58b.

¹⁹⁶ Literally “but.”

¹⁹⁷ Literally “need.”

¹⁹⁸ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1198-1199.

¹⁹⁹ כִּי translated here as “while.”

²⁰⁰ I Samuel 16:7.

²⁰¹ Conjunctive ו translated here as “furthermore.”

²⁰² Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 745.

²⁰³ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 880.

²⁰⁴ Translation found using Morfix online dictionary.

²⁰⁵ Literally “take.”

transgresses a negative one (commandment). But they do not receive lashes, because there is not a (physical) action in it. How many lashes without a whip of calf(-skin) is at the discretion²⁰⁶ of the Sovereign who commands about this (matter), may (God) be exalted and blessed.

Nevertheless²⁰⁷, as it would seem, the intention²⁰⁸ is not that if an Israelite comes and begins to maliciously antagonize another with evil words, the listener should not respond, since it is impossible for a human to be like a stone that does not have someone overturn it.²⁰⁹ Furthermore, to remain²¹⁰ in silence is to acquiesce²¹¹ with the blasphemies. And truth be told, the Torah does not command a human to be like a stone, silent with those who curse them as they are with those who bless them. Instead²¹², it commands us to distance ourselves from this condition²¹³ and not begin to quarrel²¹⁴ or argue (with other) people. If so, a person will be saved from all of this, for the one who is not quarrelsome—does not incite (anger in other) people, apart from the completely thoughtless, and it is not (prudent) to pay heed to the thoughtless. And if maybe an instigator compels²¹⁵ us to answer their words, it is appropriate for an intelligent person to answer him in a dignified²¹⁶ and pleasant manner, and not become exasperated, FOR VEXATION ABIDES AMIDST THE FOOLISH.²¹⁷

²⁰⁶ Literally “in the hand of.”

²⁰⁷ See note 204.

²⁰⁸ משמע

²⁰⁹ See Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin*, 14a.

²¹⁰ Literally “be.”

²¹¹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 564; *hifil*, definition 2.

²¹² אבל translated here as “instead.”

²¹³ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 732; definition 3.

²¹⁴ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1347.

²¹⁵ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 666.

²¹⁶ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 995.

²¹⁷ Ecclesiastes 7:9.

One should remove²¹⁸ themselves from among those who heed²¹⁹ the oppressor and (instead) pass the burden²²⁰ on to the instigator. This is the appropriate²²¹ way for people (to act).

We learn this thing, that it is permissible to answer a thoughtless person, it would seem, from that which the Torah permits (regarding) the one who comes in by breaking-and-entering²²², to confront²²³ and kill him.²²⁴ There is no doubt that a person is not obligated to endure²²⁵ the damages by the hand of a fellow, for they have the right to defend²²⁶ themselves from their actions²²⁷; likewise, from the words of their (the perpetrator) mouth which is completely full of deception²²⁸. By any means can one rescue themselves from them (the perpetrator).

Nevertheless, there is a sect²²⁹ of people that elevates their piety so much that they would not want to acquiesce²³⁰ to this decision²³¹, to answer their oppressor, lest their anger overpower them and they would unduly exert²³² themselves over this matter. About them, they—may their memories be for blessing—said: “those who are

²¹⁸ Literally “save.”

²¹⁹ Literally “hear.”

²²⁰ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 848.

²²¹ Literally “good.”

²²² Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 765.

²²³ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1316.

²²⁴ From Exodus 22:1. See Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin, 72a.

²²⁵ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 950.

²²⁶ Literally “save.”

²²⁷ Literally “hand.”

²²⁸ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 844.

²²⁹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 678.

²³⁰ Literally “enter themselves into.”

²³¹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 340; redirects to הוריה, 341.

²³² Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1235-1236

insulted and do not insult, who hear their shame and do not respond, the Writings say: THOSE WHO LOVE (GOD) ARE AS THE SUN GOING FORTH IN ITS MIGHT.²³³”²³⁴

²³³ Judges 5:31.

²³⁴ Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 88b.

בְּרִית תִּקְשׁוֹרֶת קְהִילָתִית – *BRIT TIKSHORET KEHILATIT* – A COMMUNAL COMMUNICATION COVENANT

**BY BEING A PART OF THIS COMMUNITY, WE COMMIT TO BRINGING THOUGHTFUL
AWARENESS TO OUR COMMUNICATION CHOICES.**

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this document is to enumerate the organizing principles and concepts regarding communication and to reflect upon the communication styles and platforms used in everyday life, with the end result being an agreement between the members of this group regarding the ways in which we communicate with each other. “If you don’t know where you’re going,” the Cheshire Cat tells Alice, “any road will take you there.”¹ Judaism is a religion of community; you cannot be Jewish alone.² As members of this Jewish community, we understand that our business is interacting with people.

DEFINITION:

Communication in this context is intended to be understood expansively.³

Communication includes, but is not limited to:

- Spoken words, including vocal intonation
- Written words
- Face-to-face interactions
- Speaking about another when they are not present
- Virtual communication, such as texting or messaging in apps
- Social media posts, including:
 - Pictures
 - Comments
- Speech acts:
 - Hand signals
 - Clothing
 - Physical interactions (hugs, high-fives, fist bumps)
 - Body language

ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES:

As such, our communal communication contract stems from the following Organizing principles:

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|---|
| • אַחֲרָיוּת | – <i>Aharayut</i> | – Responsibility |
| • אִמְצָל | – <i>Ometz Lev</i> | – Courage |
| • אֶמֶת | – <i>Emet</i> | – Honesty |
| • דּוּגְמָה אִישִׁית | – <i>Dugmah Ishit</i> | – Being a Personal Example, Role Modeling |
| • דִּין וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן | – <i>Din Ve-heshbon</i> | – Accountability |
| • דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ | – <i>Dereh Eretz</i> | – Proper Behavior |
| • הִגִּינוּת | – <i>Ha-ginut</i> | – Integrity |

¹ Brown, *Confronting Scandal*, 129.

² Brown, *Confronting Scandal*, 132.

³ Definition informed by Dorff, “Harmful Communication,” (unpublished, 2018), 3-4.

- חן וחסד ורחמים – *Hein Va-hesed Verahamim* – Grace, Kindness, and Compassion
- ידידות ורעות – *Yedidut Ve-rei'ut* – Friendship and Companionship
- קבֹוד – *Kavod* – Respect and Dignity
- כְּוָנָה – *Kavanah* – Intentionality
- סְבָלָנוּת – *Savlanut* – Patience
- קהילה – *Kehilah* – Community
- שְׁמִירַת הַלָּשׁוֹן – *Shemirat Ha-lashon* – Preserving the Sanctity of Language

A helpful mnemonic: before you communicate, THINK — is it?

- TTrue
- Helpful
- Intentional, Integrity-filled
- Necessary
- Kind

JEWISH CONNECTIONS:

God spoke the world into being. The act of Creation, as described in the first chapter of Genesis, begins with וַיֹּאמֶר יי, *Va-yomer Adonai*, God spoke.

In creating humanity, God made us בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים, *b'tzelem Elohim*, resembling God, a little less than divine.

A part of each one of us is Godly and we need to act accordingly. If God spoke so carefully and precisely in a way which created the whole world, should we not also emphasize that same care and concern in our own communication? We are all responsible for one another.⁴

We are empowered by our powers of communication to describe our feelings, express our thoughts, and relate to others.

Our Jewish tradition teaches us in Proverbs that “Death and Life are in the purview of the tongue.”⁵ The way we communicate with and about each other demonstrates the immense ability our communication has to affect other people, overtly or covertly, intentionally or unintentionally.

Our Jewish tradition also teaches that shaming others, causing them to blush or to pale, is tantamount to murder.⁶ Even more so, when one destroys a single human life, they destroy an entire world.⁷ Our communication is an action and our actions (or lack thereof in some cases) communicate things to others. The aim of our communication should be awareness of our intentional choices and consideration of the effect of it upon others.

⁴ Babylonian Talmud, *Shevuot* 39a.

⁵ Proverbs 27:6.

⁶ Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Metzi'a* 58b.

⁷ Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 4:5.

CONTEMPORARY IMPLICATIONS:

In today's day and age, we have become more aware of the power of the underlying and unspoken intimations of our words. Unfortunately, our choice of language can be laced unintentionally with latent aspects of ableism, ageism, classicism, racism, sexism, or xenophobia. The aim with these examples is to highlight how we can alter our speech to be descriptive, inclusive, and not alienating.

- I am meticulous (not OCD).
- That party was intense (not crazy).
- The movie was thrilling (not insane).
- The weather is fickle (not bi-polar).
- That joke was corny (not lame).
- The show's finale was dull (not dumb).
- You sound agitated or panicked (not hysterical).

Furthermore, today's digital age allows us unfettered access to information. Items we post on social media live on in infamy, since we do not know who is copying them, saving them, reposting them, or attributing our name to them. We must be aware of the fact that our digital imprint is beyond our control and exercise caution with how we conduct ourselves in the digital stratosphere.

While these notes may seem to focus on the negative or even destructive aspects of communication, communication can also be a powerful force for good and creativity. God spoke the world into being, and through our own communication, we can think, plan, create, share, bond, express, praise. Positive reinforcement of our actions is also paramount for an effective working relationship.

"Morality has no perks. It promises no reward other than the satisfaction of knowing that one has done the right thing."⁸

⁸ Brown, *Confronting Scandal*, 20.

בְּרִית תִּקְשׁוֹרֶת קְהִילָתִית – BRIT TIKSHORET KEHILATIT –
A COMMUNAL COMMUNICATION COVENANT

By being a part of this community, we commit to bringing thoughtful awareness to our communication choices.

- Humanity was created בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים, *b'tzelem Elohim*, resembling God. Our enterprise as members of this Jewish community is, in part, in the service of interacting with and respecting others, for by doing so, we also respect God.
- I commit to choosing words appropriately, purposefully, and intentionally.
- Only I know the intention I have. Therefore, transparency and the reliance on safe space practices (to be agreed upon by the group) is of great importance.
- I resolve to ask clarifying questions of others and to define my terms when they are not clear so that our communication can be conducted with a common understanding of terms and ideas.
- I understand that sometimes, the best thing to do is pause to help diffuse the tension in a situation. A response to an email within 24 hours is still considered “prompt,” and I aim to reply within this timeframe, but am allowed to take time in order to calm down as necessary before I respond.
- The only person I can be fully responsible for is myself. I promise to engage with continued self-development and self-reflection through my tenure in this group.
- I am open to receiving constructive redirection when my language proves offensive to others. In return, I opt to rebuke other members appropriately, with care and compassion. The aim of both of these pieces is twofold – accountability and enhancing our own commitment to each other to becoming better, more aware people. We must speak up when we observe wrongdoing, even (or especially) when it is within our own community or within ourselves.
- As a human being, I will make mistakes. This reality is inevitable. I will apologize when necessary. An apology is short, sincere, does not include excuses, and focuses on my actions.
- This covenant is only one part of an effective communal relationship. This agreement will be followed up with additional learning opportunities and/or addenda as necessary. We do not aim for perfection, but rather for progress.

Name	Signature	Date
Overseer	Educator	Rabbi

– בְּרִית תִּקְשׁוֹרֶת קְהִילָתִית – *BRIT TIKSHORET⁹ KEHILATIT –* A COMMUNAL COMMUNICATION COVENANT ANALYSIS¹⁰

1. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this document is to enumerate the organizing principles and concepts regarding communication and to reflect upon the communication styles and platforms used in everyday life, with the end result being an agreement between the members of this group regarding the ways in which we communicate with each other. “If you don’t know where you’re going,” the Cheshire Cat tells Alice, “any road will take you there.”¹¹ Judaism is a religion of community; you cannot be Jewish alone.¹² As members of this Jewish community, we understand that our business is interacting with people.¹³

The first three sections of the *brit* (Purpose, Definition, and Organizing Principles) help outline the necessary components for this document and the underlying big questions—why are we talking about this, what are we talking about, and why is this topic important? The intention of the Purpose section is to direct the focus of this document, for as the quote says, without the focus and direction of why this is important, it does not matter what else is said or done.

One could therefore think of this *brit* as an enactment of a mission statement. The original intention of this project is to implement this *brit* in a small group, such

⁹ I know that standard academic transliteration of Hebrew would have the ק transliterated with the equivalent letter of ‘q.’ However, since this document is intended for an English speaking and Jewishly literate but potentially not savvy, I felt using the letter ‘k’ would be less off putting to the intended audience. For this same reason, I chose to transliterate “*b’tzelem*” with an apostrophe, rather than the standard academic transliteration of using ‘e.’

¹⁰ In order to enhance the clarity of the analysis, I have chosen to repeat the elements of each section of the document, which is then followed by the analysis of each section.

¹¹ Brown, *Confronting Scandal*, 129.

¹² Brown, *Confronting Scandal*, 132.

¹³ Influenced by *Mishneh Torah, Sefer Maddah, Hilkhoh De’ot*, 5:13; This was my main take away from my engagement with that text in total.

as a board, committee, classroom, etc., and then as that small group becomes comfortable with the parameters, watch the results cascade into other areas of the organization.

We typically assume good will and intentions with the actions of others and also strive to be good people, to follow the rules we know. Our community has a responsibility to uphold the rules of this organization and dedication to its constituents. By creating a Mutual Purpose¹⁴ for why this is a necessary and relevant component of the organization, we can garner buy-in from the constituents that will lead to more effective implementation. At its core, as stated in the Purpose, the function of the organization implementing this *brit* is that of interacting with others, and the value of human dignity is an idea that should not and cannot be superseded by any other.¹⁵

“Doing good in Jewish law relies upon two distinct mechanisms to keep people on the straight and narrow: (1) having self-discipline¹⁶ and (2) being in a community in which others reinforce moral behaviors and police our actions.”¹⁷ The responsibility and accountability that comes with being a part of a community that is focused on decent and appropriate communication is that is emphasizes the relationship between individuals in a communal setting. Similar to the idea of community organizing or grassroots organizations, where the individual and one-on-one meetings make for the most influential outcomes, here too the intention is to affect change with a small group of individuals treating each other better and more

¹⁴ Patterson et al., *Crucial Conversations*, 90-96.

¹⁵ See Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 19a.

¹⁶ This is part of my understanding of the value of אֲחֻזָּה, responsibility, in section 3.

¹⁷ This is part of my understanding of the value of דִּין וְחֶשְׁבֹן, accountability, in section 3.

properly, experiencing a trickle-down effect to the rest of the population, which already has the promise of useful awareness and applicability from seeing how it has already been implemented.

2. DEFINITION:

Communication in this context is intended to be understood expansively.¹⁸

Communication includes, but is not limited to:

- Spoken words, including vocal intonation
- Written words
- Face-to-face interactions
- Speaking about another when they are not present
- Virtual communication, such as texting or messaging in apps
- Social media posts, including:
 - Pictures
 - Comments
- Speech acts:
 - Hand signals
 - Clothing
 - Physical interactions (hugs, high-fives, fist bumps)
 - Body language

A University of Pennsylvania study reports that only about 30% of our communication is found in the actual parts of our communication that comes out of our mouths—23% through vocal tone and intonation and a mere 7% from the words we speak.¹⁹ Our intonation, body language, and other components create a context for understanding language and the spoken word. It is therefore understandable, then, that when these pieces are taken away, as they are in virtual communication and on social media, our understanding of what was said becomes distorted and difficult to manage. Furthermore, for those in our communities who are blind, deaf,

¹⁸ This definition of communication and the components of it was informed by the contents of the currently unpublished CJS response “Harmful Communication,” shared with me by Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff. See below.

¹⁹ Aurora Employee Assistance Program. “The Art of Communication,” 2008.
See also Thompson, “Is Nonverbal Communication a Numbers Game?” 2011.

hard of hearing, or otherwise experience hearing or visually related disabilities, the spoken word or the context of our body language is lost upon them.

Therefore, establishing as broad a definition of the term ‘communication’ as possible was necessary. This idea was also highlighted in one of the introductory paragraphs of the currently unpublished Committee of Jewish Laws and Standards responsa titled “Harmful Communication,” which was shared with me for the purposes of this project by Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff.

In noting the different types of communication styles, I found the following quote to bring more awareness to my understanding of communication as well:

We often separate language from behavior without recognizing the causal impact, without treating language as an action, in and of itself. Chalmers Brothers, in his book *Language and the Pursuit of Happiness*, argues this very point: ‘that our language has to do with *Action* [sic], with *coordination of action*, with *creating* and *generation* (vs. merely communicating with others about how things are’²⁰ Using the work of others, he offers a universal set of possible speech acts:

1. Assertions
2. Assessments
3. Declarations
4. Requests
5. Offers
6. Promises²¹

... Mastering distinctions allow us to understand ourselves and others and the ethical implications of language. We talk ourselves into existence. We create our worlds with words.²²

From the interpretations of the first chapter of Genesis that I read for this text immersion, it would appear that the first step to assigning something a purpose and/or an identity is to name it.²³ When God names the different aspects of

²⁰ Brothers, *Language and the Pursuit of Happiness*, 153.

²¹ Ibid. 154.

²² Brown, *Confronting Scandal*, 123-124.

²³ See Rashi on Genesis 1:3; Rashi and Ibn Ezra on 1:4; Rambam, Sforno, and S. R. Hirsch on 1:5.

creation, God assigns them a purpose, a function, a mission, or a reason for being.²⁴

So too by labeling the components of communication and the different types of communication, we assign our communication purpose.

3. ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES:

As such, our communal communication contract stems from the following Organizing principles:

• אחריות	– <i>Aharayut</i>	– Responsibility
• אִמְץ לֵב	– <i>Ometz Lev</i>	– Courage
• אֶמֶת	– <i>Emet</i>	– Honesty
• דוגמה אישית	– <i>Dugmah Ishit</i>	– Being a Personal Example, Role Modeling
• דין וחשבון	– <i>Din Ve-heshbon</i>	– Accountability
• דרך ארץ	– <i>Dereh Eretz</i>	– Proper Behavior
• הגינות	– <i>Ha-ginut</i>	– Integrity
• חן וחסד ורחמים	– <i>Hein Va-hesed</i> <i>Verahamim</i>	– Grace, Kindness, and Compassion
• ידידות ורעות	– <i>Yedidut Ve-rei'ut</i>	– Friendship and Companionship
• קבֹוד	– <i>Kavod</i>	– Respect and Dignity
• כְּוָנָה	– <i>Kavanah</i>	– Intentionality
• סבָּלָנוּת	– <i>Savlanut</i>	– Patience
• קהילה	– <i>Kehilah</i>	– Community
• שמירת הלשון	– <i>Shemirat</i> <i>Ha-lashon</i>	– Preserving the Sanctity of Language

A helpful mnemonic: before you communicate, THINK — is it?

- TTrue
- Helpful
- Intentional, Integrity-filled
- Necessary
- Kind

My aim with this section was to give a comprehensive list of Jewish values that went into the creation of this document. I wanted to enhance the understanding of the purpose of this document by grounding it in these values. I knew that I would not be able to cover every possible value that might pertain to this document, but as

²⁴ This phrase was one of my big take away statements for my engagement with the text of Genesis 1.

with the overall text immersion project, there is no way to cover everything, but the intention and effort is contained within this list.

I hope the list covers the intention that we intend to treat people decently and respectfully, with sincerity and integrity, through kind and sensitive though honest words and deeds. To do so necessitates building relationships between people in community with each other and have the courage to sometimes do difficult things, say things that others may not agree with. However, if we have built up a space which honors and respects each other's emotional and intellectual safety in this space, these values will become a part of our everyday interactions, as I hope on some level they already are.

I wish to thank Amy Neiwirth at Columbus Torah Academy in Columbus, OH, for sharing with me the school's positive behavior intervention system, which is based on four values²⁵ that I incorporated into the list of values found here. Additionally, as I observed Dylan Abrams teaching his religious school class at Temple Chai in Phoenix, AZ, I was struck by the impact that simple usage of Jewish values and Hebrew words could have upon even our younger students²⁶. Finally, I engaged in a small amount of research through various lists of Jewish values I found online in order to help inform the final list of values.

Outside of the list of values, which I understood could be cumbersome, I wanted to give a shorter, more concrete way to remember the essence of this values-based statement. I encountered the mnemonic in a classroom at Temple Judea in

²⁵ The four values utilized in the CTA PBIS are כבוד (respect), אמת (honesty), סבלנות (patience), חברות (friendship).

²⁶ The four phrases he uses are שָׁקֵט (quiet), לְשָׁמוֹעַ (listen), כָּבוֹד (respect), חֶסֶד (kindness).

Tarzana, CA, which they lease to Oak Crest Academy. This educator's supply poster immediately struck me as a wonderful tool to include in the *brit*. I added the additional content with 'I' standing for 'Integrity-filled' as well.

4. JEWISH CONNECTIONS:

God spoke the world into being. The act of Creation, as described in the first chapter of Genesis, begins with וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ, *Va-yomer Adonai*, God spoke.

In creating humanity, God made us בְּצֵלֶם אֱלֹהִים, *b'tzelem Elohim*, resembling God, a little less than divine.

A part of each one of us is Godly and we need to act accordingly.²⁷ If God spoke so carefully and precisely in a way which created the whole world, should we not also emphasize that same care and concern in our own communication? We are all responsible for one another.²⁸

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Our Jewish tradition teaches us in Proverbs that "Death and Life are in the purview of the tongue."²⁹ The way we communicate with and about each other demonstrates the immense ability our communication has to affect other people, overtly or covertly, intentionally or unintentionally.

Our Jewish tradition also teaches that shaming others, causing them to blush and/or to pale, is tantamount to murder.³⁰ Even more so, when one destroys a single human life, they destroy an entire world.³¹ Our communication is an action and our actions (or lack thereof in some cases) communicate things to others. The aim of our communication should be awareness of our intentional choices and consideration of the effect of it upon others.

With the intention that this *brit* be implemented in Jewish organizations, it is not enough to merely spout off a list of Jewish values. Rather, we need to explore how this idea is deeply rooted in our Jewish tradition. First and foremost, humanity was created בְּצֵלֶם אֱלֹהִים, *b'tzelem Elohim*, resembling God, and with that comes a

²⁷ This phrase was my big take away statements for my engagement with the text of *Sefer Ha-hinukh* 338.

²⁸ Babylonian Talmud, *Shevuot* 39a.

²⁹ Proverbs 27:6, as found in Babylonian Talmud, *'Arakhin* 15b.

³⁰ Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Metzi'a* 58b.

³¹ Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 4:5.

specific obligation and responsibility to act in a Godly manner, specifically with the usage of our words, since that is how we were created by God. “Acting in the image of God as is our mandate in Genesis requires us to understand the meaning and power of articulation as part of creation. Language builds worlds. Language destroys worlds.”³²

Furthermore, each one of us holds a world in our hands (metaphorically speaking – see my notes on the next section), not just in the sense that we hold the fate of others by the things we do and say, with our actions and our communication, but even more so, anyone associated with them, whether currently living or those who are not yet realized in this world. Mishnah *Sanhedrin* teaches us that when we save a life, specifically regarding our words and speech, we save an entire world, the world of the other person, and all those not yet come to be from them. On the other side, when we destroy a life, we destroy that world and all of its possibilities.

“Any set of facts can be used to tell an infinite number of stories.”³³ Therefore, it is even more prudent for us to ensure that our actions and our words, speech, and communication are in alignment. Our Jewish texts stress the connection between communication and action, specifically as I found in:

- Genesis 1 – God speaks and creates in the world and then humanity begins to (inter)act in the world,
- Mishnah *Eduyot* 5:7 – Akavya ben Mahalel‘eil (on his deathbed) encourages his son not to merely follow the path and choices he had to make, but rather to pursue one’s own sense of right and wrong and purpose,

³² Brown, *Confronting Scandal*, 124.

³³ Patterson et al., *Crucial Conversations*, 111.

- Babylonian Talmud *Ta'anit* 20a-b – the interaction with the man morphs Rabbi El'azar's experience so that he shows his words and his deed can be congruent,
- *Mishneh Torah, Sefer Maddah, Hilkhhot De'ot* – Maimonides describes how to pursue a meaningful path between two extreme sides of traits within our personality, “how to be *benoni* (in between)” as Rabbi Dr. Garroway and I described it.
- and *Sefer Ha-hinukh* 338 – to live by what we teach and tell others.

Even more so, Judaism places a high priority on teaching our children. Specifically, *Sefer Ha-hinukh* 338 emphasizes the point of how one should help bring their children into this understanding of what being a good person is. As Steven Sondheim wrote in his musical *Into the Woods*, “Careful the things you say, children will listen.”³⁴ Furthermore, as a good educator, I was taught (and often repeat) that if one does not model what they are teaching, then they are teaching something else. These pieces of what feel like common knowledge to me therefore highlight the need for alignment between our words and our deeds, between our insides and our outsides³⁵, now more than ever. This is one reason I would advocate for using this *Brit Tikshoret Kehilatit* with a synagogue or community youth group, Hebrew high school program, or even with younger grades in a religious school.

5. CONTEMPORARY IMPLICATIONS:

In today's day and age, we have become more aware of the power of the underlying and unspoken intimations of our words. Unfortunately, our choice of language can be laced unintentionally with latent aspects of ableism, ageism, classicism, racism, sexism, or xenophobia. The aim with these examples is to highlight how we can alter our speech to be descriptive, inclusive, and not alienating.

³⁴ *Into the Woods*, 1997.

³⁵ See also Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 72b.

- I am meticulous (not OCD).
- That party was intense (not crazy).
- The movie was thrilling (not insane).
- The weather is fickle (not bi-polar).
- That joke was corny (not lame).
- The show's finale was dull (not dumb).³⁶
- You sound agitated or panicked (not hysterical).

Furthermore, today's digital age allows us unfettered access to information. Items we post on social media live on in infamy, since we do not know who is copying them, saving them, reposting them, or attributing our name to them. We must be aware of the fact that our digital imprint is beyond our control and exercise caution with how we conduct ourselves in the digital stratosphere.³⁷

While these notes may seem to focus on the negative or even destructive aspects of communication, communication can also be a powerful force for good and creativity. God spoke the world into being, and through our own communication, we can think, plan, create, share, bond, express, praise.³⁸ Positive reinforcement of our actions is also paramount for an effective working relationship.

"Morality has no perks. It promises no reward other than the satisfaction of knowing that one has done the right thing."³⁹

I encountered these examples of ableist and potentially demeaning language while perusing Facebook during a brain break amidst the creation of this project. The page which posted it, called End the Stigma⁴⁰, attempts to bring awareness to our language and the underlying ableist ideas contained within them, especially because of how often our bodies are used for metaphors. "These words and phrases aren't necessarily slurs but they can further the stigmas we are trying to end and we would encourage everyone to become more aware of the damage they can cause with

³⁶ These examples can be found in a photo album posted the group End the Stigma on Facebook. "Watch Your Language."

³⁷ I have been alerted on more than one occasion by more than one advisor or mentor that my own digital footprint could have a serious long-lasting impact or even ramifications upon my viability in the field, stemming from other experiences these people encountered (either their own or others). I found this an important point to emphasize in this piece.

³⁸ Dorff, "Harmful Communication," 2.

³⁹ Brown, *Confronting Scandal*, 20.

⁴⁰ "Watch Your Language."

this language. By just changing one or two words in our everyday lives we can make a huge difference.” More information about this phenomenon can be found in a blog post on *The Body is Not an Apology* titled “Doing Social Justice: Thoughts on Ableist Language and Why It Matters.”⁴¹ In today’s day and age, awareness of unseen illness and difficulties is necessary. “Everyone is fighting a battle you know nothing about,” the adage goes⁴²; it is not our role to make that journey any more difficult, but rather to alleviate that hardship when and where we can. This example is a clear and concerted way of understanding one of my big take away statements from studying Dorff’s responsa, which was that this is one way the ethics of speech meet social justice, as the blog post’s title describes.

“Language carries with it many pretexts, subtexts, and contexts. And language is used to shape, create, and evaluate our values. Without changing language it is very hard to change as people, since language is the receptacle for ideas and actions.”⁴³ To uphold the values listed above, it is absolutely necessary to be aware of the language we use to describe things and to understand that even with the best intentions, unintentionally, or merely through common parlance and usage, we could potentially be making others uncomfortable. When others are uncomfortable, they tend to do one of two things to avoid the conversation: they resort to silence or violence.⁴⁴ In order to assure that the group dynamic remains a safe space in which difficult topics can be discussed and crucial conversations can be conducted, we

⁴¹ Cohen-Rottenberg, “Doing Social Justice: Thoughts on Ableist Language and Why It Matters.”

⁴² “Maclaren.”

⁴³ Brown, *Confronting Scandal*, 123.

⁴⁴ Patterson et al., *Crucial Conversations*, 58-61.

Violence here does not mean physical violence, but rather abrasive language or encounters in communication that force themselves upon the other member(s) of the conversation.

must take every step possible not to disenfranchise others. The concerted effort may be difficult and take time to develop, but the more aware and inclusive community it will create is of benefit to all involved.

Even more so, with the advent of the #MeToo movement, speaking out against injustice and empowering others to do the same and own their personal stories is a hugely important aspect of this work. However, when our language demeans or dismisses the experiences of others, even unintentionally, we end up working antithetically to our explicit aims and goals. Speaking truth to power is sometimes harsh, scary, and difficult, but at the same time, necessary⁴⁵; and unless we know where our own faults lie, how can we hold others accountable in the same way? As I expressed earlier, the hope with the trickle-down effect is that once people are aware of this issue and comfortable with adjusting their own language in this way, they will help and encourage others to do the same. This is but one way in which we can act responsibly, be accountable, and be responsible for one another, as our text⁴⁶ teaches us.

Acting responsibly also means understanding the impact our communication has not just within our own circle of influence⁴⁷, but on how it can be utilized by others outside of our purview. Today's technological age means that statements made online can be copied, saved, and used out of context, without our knowledge or permission, almost ad infinitum. As such, these pieces of information, examples of how we communicate with the world, can follow us throughout our lives, cropping

⁴⁵ This phrase was my big take away statements from my engagement with the text of *Orhot Tzaddikim*. See also Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 54b-55a and Dorff, "Harmful Communication," 18-21, 25-27.

⁴⁶ Babylonian Talmud, *Shevuot* 39a, from the previous section.

⁴⁷ For more on circle of influence vs. circle of concern, see Covey, *Seven Habits*, 88-99.

up at potentially the most inconvenient time, proving themselves as useful examples most often of the type of individual we were previously in our lives (typically in a negative sense), as we hope mightily that we have changed in our present condition. Think about how often a celebrity or public figure's past comments on the internet come back around under the scrutiny of the public eye. Regardless of how carefully we make our privacy settings and personal boundaries, we must know that as we make a statement online of our opinion, there is every possibility that it will be seen by or shared with others we did not intend, potentially much later down the line. What would our parents or children think if they saw our statements now? Will we be able to face ourselves in the mirror next year or 10 years down the line looking at what we plan on communicating right now? How can we make the best choices regarding the impact we make upon others unless we are also aware of the impact we are having upon our own reputation?

With all of these concerns, it is easy to focus on the negative repercussions communication can have on us and the world. However, as noted earlier, communication is not all bad, not in the slightest. The way we can best understand how to make this positive impact on ourselves and each other is through the positive reinforcement of the successful moments we do encounter. The neuroscientific Hebbian Theory dictates that “neurons that fire together wire together,”⁴⁸ meaning when an action occurs, if it is reinforced, the connections made between the actions and the thought processes will strengthen the effect of the action, thereby ensuring

⁴⁸ For more information on this scientific theory, please refer to:
“Hebbian Theory.”
“Neurons that Fire...”, 2016.
Taibbi, “Wire Together Fire Together,” 2013.

the repetition will occur the more times it is reinforced. Having a positive mindset and outlook can lead to more positive outcomes and lifestyle changes.⁴⁹ A number of resources contained in the “Additional Resources” section can help elucidate some of these theories.

6. COMMUNAL COMMUNICATION COVENANT:

- Humanity was created בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים, *b'tzelem Elohim*, resembling God. Our enterprise as members of this Jewish community is, in part, in the service of interacting with and respecting others,⁵⁰ for by doing so, we also respect God.⁵¹
- I commit to choosing words appropriately, purposefully, and intentionally.⁵²
- Only I know the intention I have.⁵³ Therefore, transparency and the reliance on safe space practices (to be agreed upon by the group) are of great importance.
- I resolve to ask clarifying questions of others and to define my terms when they are not clear, so that our communication can be conducted with a common understanding of terms and ideas.
- I understand that sometimes, the best thing to do is pause to help diffuse the tension in a situation. A response to an email within 24 hours is still considered “prompt,” and I aim to reply within this timeframe, but am allowed to take time in order to calm down as necessary before I respond.
- The only person I can be fully responsible for is myself. I promise to engage with continued self-development and self-reflection through my tenure in this group.⁵⁴
- I am open to receiving constructive redirection when my language proves offensive to others. In return, I opt to rebuke other members appropriately, with care and compassion. The aim of both of these pieces is two-fold – accountability and enhancing our own commitment to each other to becoming better, more aware people. We must speak up when we observe wrong-doing, even (or especially) when it is within our own community or within ourselves.⁵⁵
- As a human being, I will make mistakes. This reality is inevitable. I will apologize when necessary. An apology is short, sincere, does not include excuses, and focuses on my actions.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Brody, “A Positive Outlook ...”, 2017.

Villarica, “How the Power of Positive Thinking...”, 2013.

Schesser, “The Extraordinary Scientific Proof ...”, 2015.

⁵⁰ As I noted earlier, this phrase was my big take away statement from my engagement with the texts of the *Mishneh Torah*, *Sefer Maddah*, *Hilkhot De’ot*.

⁵¹ This idea is described further in Dorff, “Harmful Communication,” 4-5.

⁵² *Sefer Ha-hinukh* 338.

⁵³ *Mishneh Torah*, *Sefer Maddah*, *Hilkhot De’ot*, 2:6; Babylonian Talmud, *Pesahim* 113b.

⁵⁴ This is part of my understanding of the value of תְּקִינָה, integrity, in section 3.

⁵⁵ Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 54b-55a; *Mishneh Torah*, *Sefer Maddah*, *Hilkhot De’ot*, 6:8.

⁵⁶ Lerner, *Why Won’t You Apologize?*, 13-18.

- This covenant is only one part of an effective communal relationship. This agreement will be followed up with additional learning opportunities and/or addenda as necessary. We do not aim for perfection, but rather for progress.⁵⁷

Signed by the participant, overseer⁵⁸, educator⁵⁹, and rabbi.

A note on the title: it is not merely a facet of alliteration that I chose the word “covenant.” It also was not even that a covenant is a part of our Jewish tradition and history, tracing its roots all the way back to Abraham. “A covenant is an agreement, a moral contract, a partnership of goodness and responsibility. We act ethically in relation to others because it is right and just also because it has utilitarian benefits to us individually and to society at large.”⁶⁰

The footnotes in the above section demonstrate where some of the other texts I engaged with for the purposes of this project come into play. As with other texts previously cited, much of the language comes from what I deemed were the big take away ideas and important facets of the texts, which in part is why I wanted to engage with them in the first place.

My hope with this section was to highlight a couple of things. Firstly, these statements are meant to be aspirational, as many of the ethical texts I studied in the course of this project are.⁶¹ Secondly, that as human beings, we are fallible and

⁵⁷ Patterson et al., *Crucial Conversations*, 99.

⁵⁸ I envision the overseer to be the person in charge of introducing and implementing the *brit*. This person could be the group leader, such as a board president or youth group advisor or committee chair.

⁵⁹ Since I view this agreement to be within the understanding of the leadership of a group, I would hope an educator, either a paid member of the staff or a volunteer who chooses to take on this additional responsibility, would be engaged in this process, in order to continue educating (as noted in the last piece of this section) the participants and follow up with other opportunities. Depending on the group dynamic, this could be a minimal investment of time. Additional education could be opening meetings with a short *d’var Torah*, all the way up to having a larger in-depth educational program. One could utilize the “Additional Resources” section found at the end of this project as a place to start garnering ideas.

⁶⁰ Brown, *Confronting Scandal*, 152.

⁶¹ Aspirational-focused texts include *Mishneh Torah*, *Sefer Ha-hinukh*, and *Orhot Tzaddikim*.

imperfect. We strive to be the best we can be, and we make the effort to do what is necessary and what we are able. However, we understand that lapses will occur. Therefore, we need to be prepared to question, investigate, own up to mistakes, take responsibility, and be considerate of our own needs as well as those of others. Thirdly, this process takes place on both an individual and on a communal level. The work we do on ourselves enhancing the work we do in our communities, and the work we do in our communities in turn becomes a point of reflection on how we are developing as a person. The action-reflection-action model of clinical education is an important item to infuse here as we attempt to make space for these practices to grow within the communities in which we participate.

Finally, in our interactions with each other, we are simultaneously interacting with God, with the piece of God that resides within each one of us as a human being and a member of humanity, recognizing and validating the fact that we are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, resembling God. God is multi-faceted, and so too are we. “Looking into the face of another is looking into the face of God. The word *panim* is plural, not singular. Rabbi David Wolpe writes, “The human face is capable of almost infinite shades of meaning—joy, sorrow, skepticism, laughter, love. The truest image of God in this world shines through each.”⁶² God’s power through speech, as noted previously, is one of our greatest assets as well as potentially one of our largest pitfalls. “With [this] great power [also] comes great responsibility,” as Uncle Ben taught Peter Parker in the Spider-Man series.⁶³

⁶² Wolfson, *Relational Judaism*, 82.

⁶³ *Spider-Man*, 2002.

The last statement of the *brit*, that it is not about perfection but rather a process, became a motto for my work on this text immersion process. At one point, I asked my advisor, Rabbi Dr. Garroway if I was overlooking anything which I should include in my project. He responded by telling me that I'm never going to get to or cover everything in a project like this; however, I have made a good foray into the topic. Similarly, Rabbi Joel Simonds encouraged me during the work of this project to remember that I will continue to engage with this work for a good part of my rabbinical career and I should set an intention to continue engaging with this work. Inspired by the words of the *Yotzeir Or* prayer⁶⁴, Rabbi Joe Black wrote a song called "Leave a Little Bit Undone"⁶⁵, and in *Pirkei Avot* we read "It is not up to us to finish the work, but neither are we free to desist from it"⁶⁶, so we do not aim for perfection, but rather progress. This last statement demonstrates that openness and willingness to continue engaging in the process, which I hope becomes a foundational aspect for any involved in the implementation of this *brit*.

⁶⁴ See Frishman, *Mishkan T'filah*, 60-61, 228-229, 454-455.

⁶⁵ Black, *Leave a Little Bit Undone*.

⁶⁶ *Pirkei Avot* 2:21. Angel, *Koren Pirkei Avot*, 54-55.

CONCLUSION:

There can be no doubt in my mind after more than a year of engaging with this topic in depth that the ways in which we communicate are bound up in our perceptions of ourselves, others, and God, albeit unconsciously. As Ron Wolfson describes in his book *Relational Judaism*, Judaism is predicated on a number of different types of relationships on a number of different levels, not the least of which include with ourselves, with our community, and with God. Even more so, given that humanity was created *b'tzelem Elohim*, these relationships also include within them aspects of God; each relationship at its core is also in essence a relationship with God.

One of the clearest pieces that came out of this endeavor is that intention plays a huge part in how we interpret and internalize the communication we receive and share. Intention in this way is intricately entwined with integrity, as both ensure that one's insides are congruent with their outsides¹, to say what you mean and mean what you say.² Another is that as Jews, we are intricately connected to each other and we thrive in relationship, in community. As good things happen, we celebrate unabashedly; when bad things happen, we feel it deeply. As we seek to involve ourselves in our communities, we must do so with integrity and alignment. It begins with each one of us and how we choose to conduct ourselves. Our actions speak volumes about the kind of person we are, the kind of person we hope to be, and the choices we make regarding how and what we communicate are some of the most

¹ See Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 72b.

² Carpenter, "Reduce Stigma," 2014.

personal and also most public choices about how we understand and relate to the world around us and others in it. Furthermore, it is a process in which we choose to engage over and over again; the aim is not perfection—for none of us are perfect—but the power lies in the process, in the growth, in the choice to continue engaging, and in these choices we make.

Contained within each of us is infinite possibilities and potential. We hold our power in the ways in which we refer to others and the ways we address them.³ An entire world, ours or another's, hinges on the edges of our tongues and lips and the tips of our fingers. "Death and life are in the purview of the tongue."⁴ This responsibility is heady and requires focus and determination, to conduct ourselves genuinely, with grace and integrity. Yet this is how we best honor the Godly piece found within each one of us. That starts at the beginning, with creation, with how we create our world, with how we speak our world into being and what we communicate to the world around us. Make good choices about it.

³ See Babylonian Talmud, *Ta'anit* 20a-b.

⁴ Proverbs 27:6.

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