



A Guide To Jewish Practice - Facilitator's Guide

Nathan Weiner

Everyday Living - Ethics of Speech (vol. 1, pp.99-104)

Essential Question: *What are the different types of speech that impact our lives and relationships?*

Objectives: Participants will be able to:

1. Name different forms of verbal and non-verbal communication governed by ethics of speech
2. Begin to think critically about how their speech affects others
3. Articulate that speech can be used both for good and evil

Materials Needed: Internet access, ability to effectively show a video from the internet, writing implements, paper.

Set Induction: (10 minutes) Explain that we are beginning discussions and activities about the Ethics of Speech. Ethics of Speech can be defined as consideration of the moral issues raised by the written, oral, and non-verbal power of speech in all its forms. David Teutsch writes that “through talking, writing, thinking, reading and listening, through books, conversations, radio, computers, television, lectures, discussions, plays and poetry, we not only shape our world, but are shaped by it.” (*A Guide to Jewish Practice, Vol. 1, pp. 100-101*) Ask: what does he mean? How are we shaped by it? Ask your participants if anyone can cite an example of how different languages reflect different cultures. Ask them to give examples from their own lives.

Exploring the Text:

- (10 minutes) Show the video “Bobby McFerrin Demonstrates the Power of the Pentatonic Scale” by clicking this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ne6tB2KiZuk> (3:04). After showing the video, invite a participant to read aloud the comment by Rabbi Darby Leigh (DJL) on page 102. Then ask your participants to share how they feel this video and this comment expand their view of the role of non-verbal communication when discussing the ethics of speech.
- (15 minutes) In Proverbs 18:21, we read, “Life and death lie in the power of the tongue.” Direct your participants to journal about an example of a memorable time in their lives that language was used for good, and an example of a memorable time in their lives that language was used for evil. Invite participants to share with the group. After hearing each story, ask the participant how it felt to have that experience. How has that experience affected you? After hearing a number of stories, invite participants to share how hearing these stories affected them. How has sharing the stories affected them?

Wrapping It Up: (10 minutes) Invite your participants to change seats and sit next to one person whom they do not know well, preferably at all. Ask them to sit together silently for 5 minutes, thinking about something they want to ask or say to the other person to create the best first impression. Explain that each speaker will have a maximum of 30 seconds to speak, followed by 2 minutes to debrief. How did that feel? Was the participant surprised by what the other person had to say or ask? What does this tell us about other people's perceptions of our speech?

Exploring the Sources:

“Life and death lie in the power of the tongue.” (Proverbs 18:21)

“And God said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light.” (Genesis 1:3)

“Rabban Gamaliel said to Tavi his servant: 'Go and get me good food from the market.' He went and bought him tongue. He said to him: 'Go and get me bad food from the market.' He went and bought him tongue. Said Gamaliel to Tavi: 'What is this? When I told you to get good food, you bought me tongue, and when I told you to get bad food, you also bought me tongue!' He replied: 'Good comes from it, and bad comes from it. When the tongue is good there is nothing better, and when it is bad there is nothing worse.' (*Vayikra Raba* 33:1)

“My God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully.” (Concluding meditation of the *Amida*)

“Moses climbed Mount Sinai not as mountaineers do, but to receive the Tablets of the Law.” (Yehuda Amichai, *Open Closed Open*, p.117)

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Everyday Living – Speech, Autonomy, and Community (vol. 1, pp.105-108)

Essential Question: How does Jewish thought influence the tension between freedom of speech and communal responsibility?

Objectives: Participants will be able to:

1. Recognize that Jewish tradition places a greater emphasis on the centrality of community over individual autonomy in determinations about ethical speech
2. Define the term “*tzelem Elohim*”
3. Think critically about the relationship between communal discussions about speech ethics and behavior in their own communities.

Materials Needed: Ability to play the song “*B'tzelem Elohim*” by Dan Nichols and Eighteen (can be downloaded from www.oysongs.com), and copies of the lyrics can be found here: <http://rabbiaronson.wikispaces.com/file/view/B'tzelem+Elohim+lyrics.pdf>.

Set Induction: (15 minutes) Explain that *b'tzelem Elohim* means “in the Divine image.” Genesis 1:27 reads: “And God created human in God's own image, in the Divine image (*b'tzelem Elohim*), God created human; male and female, God created them.” Distribute the lyrics to the song “*B'tzelem Elohim*” by Dan Nichols and Eighteen, and play the song. After the participants listen to the song, ask them to share what they think the message of the song is. (*Everyone plays a part in building a just society, we are all on a journey, we are all created in the Divine Image...*) How do these messages influence their thinking about the American tendency toward autonomy and free speech? When do they experience others as *b'tzelem Elohim*? When do they treat people as if they were not in the Divine image?

Exploring the Text:

- (10 minutes) Direct a volunteer to read the main text on page 107 of *A Guide to Jewish Practice: Volume 1 – Everyday Living*. Ask participants how, as David Teutsch writes, “the more one cares about emphasizing the infinite worth of each human being (*tzelem Elohim*), sustaining long-term relationships, and supporting a strong community, the more one will seek strong ethical guidelines about speech.”?
- (10 minutes) Explain that there is a tension between autonomy and communal responsibility with determinations about what is ethical speech. On page 108, both David Teutsch and Richard Hirsh write about the centrality of community in Jewish discussions about speech ethics. David Teutsch writes “...Jewish tradition carries strong moral limits on the use of speech. These limits stand in strong tension with contemporary individualism...” Richard Hirsh writes, “The tension between individual autonomy and communal consciousness is present in many areas of ethical and religious practice. Once the coercive power of a religious tradition is removed, the choice to accept the imperatives as well as the constraints of the tradition rests with the individual not as an independent agent, but within the context of a community.” Discuss how making these determinations in the context of a community, rather than as an individual, frames our thinking about them differently. How do speech ethics impact participants’ communities?

Wrapping It Up: (10 minutes) Remind participants that you have spent this session discussing Jewish tradition's emphasis on the centrality of community over individual autonomy in determinations about ethical speech. Invite participants to envision and share how engaging in communal discussions about ethical speech might influence their Jewish community. What would be the benefits? What would be the challenges?

Exploring the Sources:

1. "Then God said: 'Let us make humanity in Our Image, in Our Likeness'..." (Genesis 1:26)
2. Ben Zoma said: Who is wise? One who learns from all people, as it is written (Psalms 119:99), "I have gained understanding from all my teachers."
Who is mighty? He who subdues his passions, as it is written (Proverbs 16:32), "One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city."
Who is rich? He who rejoices in his portion, as it is written (Psalm 128:2), "You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you."
"You shall be" refers to this world; and "it shall be well with you" refers to the world to come.
Who is honored? He who honors his fellow men, as it is written (I Samuel 2:30), "For those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be treated with contempt." (*Pirkey Avot* 4.1)
3. "When someone accustoms himself to speaking *lashon hara*, he rationalizes it to the extent that he begins to view *lashon hara* as entirely permissible." (Chofetz Chaim)
4. "You shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among your people; neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor: I am God." (Leviticus 19:16)

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Everyday Living – Confidentiality, Privacy and the Need to Know

(vol. 1, pp.109-115)

Essential Question: What does Jewish tradition have to contribute to modern notions of confidentiality, and where are its limits?

Objectives: Participants will be able to:

1. Articulate some of the negative consequences of breaking confidentiality with privileged information
2. Define *Dina D'Malkhuta Dina*
3. Describe ways to protect themselves from receiving privileged information.

Materials Needed: Printouts of the laws for Mandated Reporters for your state, found here:

https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/state/.

Set Induction: (15 minutes) Break your participants into *hevrutot* (pairs), each pair facing one another. Direct each participant in the pair to share a three-minute story in which confidentiality was breached by a trusted confidante. What were the consequences? How did that make them feel? What happened as a result? Instruct the listener not to respond during the sharing. After the three minutes are up, the listener has two minutes to ask questions. At the five-minute mark, the partners switch roles. Upon completion of the sharing, invite participants to share some of the themes of their conversation without revealing information from their stories.

Exploring the Text:

- (5 minutes) Explain that in the previous discussion, we explored some of the potentially negative fall-out from a breach of confidentiality for privileged information. Tell your participants that Deuteronomy 24:10-11 states: “When you make a loan of any sort to your neighbor, you must not enter his house to seize his pledge. You must remain outside, while the person to whom you made the loan brings the pledge out to you.” What is this passage talking about? How is it relevant? What does this Torah passage teach us about our relationship to receiving privileged information? (*We are obligated to respect the privacy of others; we should incline ourselves not to seek out sensitive information that does not affect us; etc....*)
- (20 minutes) Explain that in Jewish practice, there is a concept called “*Dina d'Malkhuta Dina*,” (the law of the land is the law) in which there is a requirement to follow secular law as if it were Jewish law. It covers the areas of the law not covered by Jewish law. Then distribute copies of your state's laws for mandated reporters. Mandated reporters are those who, as a result of their profession, may gain access to privileged information, such as abuse or neglect, and are required to report it to the authorities. Direct participants to break into new *hevrutot*. Read aloud this case study, and ask your participants to use the material in *A Guide to Jewish Practice: Volume 1: Everyday Living*, pp.109-115, in conjunction with the laws for mandated reporters, to discuss what they would do, and the variables that contribute to their decision making. After 10 minutes, direct participants to return to the large group to share the results of their *hevruta* discussions.

CASE STUDY: “The 15 year-old daughter of a family friend asks to talk with you in confidence. She is very depressed, and you fear she might even be suicidal. She reports that her parents are emotionally abusive and privately drink to excess. When you suggest involving the counselor at her school, the teen says that she knows from experience that nothing told to the counselor remains confidential, and she does not want to leave home or be humiliated in front of her friends. Given the confidentiality you have promised, how can you help? Is there a difference between professional confidentiality and confidentiality between friends?”

Wrapping It Up: (5 minutes) Invite participants to share “best practices” for protecting confidentiality. What from the discussion will they take with them?

Exploring the Sources:

5. When you make a loan of any sort to your neighbor, you must not enter his house to seize his pledge. You must remain outside while the person to whom you made the loan brings the pledge out to you. (Deuteronomy 24:10-11)
6. No one shall open windows facing a jointly owned courtyard....No one may place an entrance in a courtyard opposite the entrance of another or a window opposite another's window (Mishna *Bava Batra* 3:7)
7. Every person is entitled to privacy and the confidentiality of information concerning his life. (Section 7 of the Basic Laws of the State of Israel)
8. You shall not curse the deaf, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God. I am ADONAY. (Leviticus 19:14)
9. You shall not go up and down as a talebearer among your people; neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor. I am ADONAY. (Leviticus 19:16)

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Everyday Living – Truth, Lies, and Advertising
(vol. 1, pp.116-121)

Essential Question: When, if at all, is lying ever appropriate?

Objectives: Participants will be able to:

1. Explain that Hillel and Shammai were rabbis whose debates are often recorded in the Talmud
2. Articulate some of the benefits and pitfalls of lying
3. Apply a debate from the Talmud to their own lived experience.

Materials Needed: A bowl or hat; equal numbers of folded slips of paper reading “School of Hillel” and “School of Shammai,” placed in the bowl or hat; chairs arranged in two separate circles, pens, paper

Set Induction: (5 minutes) As participants enter the room, ask them to reach into the bowl or hat and pull out a slip of paper. Direct those on the “School of Hillel” team to go to one circle of chairs, and those on the “School of Shammai” team to go to the other. Explain that we are beginning to today's discussion with a modern day re-enactment of a famous debate recorded in the Babylonian Talmud (ca. 700 CE) between Hillel and Shammai about lying and truth-telling. Each team selects a note-taker.

Exploring the Text:

Without revealing information from their stories (10 minutes) Once your participants are settled, explain that the Talmud records a debate between Hillel and Shammai, in which they are debating the honesty of a wedding song used at the time. It contains the words, “what a beautiful and graceful bride.” Explain that Hillel supports using this language for all brides, while Shammai objects, saying, “If she were lame or blind, would you say of her, 'what a beautiful and graceful bride?’” Does not the Torah command, 'Stay far away from falsehood?’” (Exodus 23:7) Explain that each team must argue the side of the rabbi whom they are representing. Using pp. 116-121 in our text, in conjunction with their collective experience, instruct participants to develop a 2 minute opening statement, along with other debate points. Allow teams 5 minutes to discuss and prepare.

(20 minutes) DEBATE! Each team makes its opening statement. After opening statements, invite teams to rebut the remarks of the other team. You may choose to limit comments to 1 minute. After 10 minutes of debate, allow the teams 2 minutes to prepare 1 minute closing statements. Present closing statements.

Wrapping It Up: (10 minutes) Explain that the tradition follows Hillel's opinion on this matter. Invite a participant to read Vivie Mayer's commentary on page 117, and then reflect on this activity. Who do they actually agree with? What are some potential pitfalls with each argument? What can this debate teach us about our own lived experience?

Exploring the Sources:

1. Our Rabbis taught: How does one dance before the bride? Beth Shammai say: The bride as she is. And Beth Hillel say: 'Beautiful and graceful bride!' Beth Shammai said to Beth Hillel: If she were lame or blind, would one say of her: 'Beautiful and graceful bride'? Whereas the Torah said, 'Keep thee far from a false matter.' Said Beth Hillel to Beth Shammai: According to your words, if someone has made a bad purchase in the market, should one praise it in his eyes or depreciate it? Surely, one should praise it in his eyes. Therefore, the Sages said: One should always be pleasant with people. (Babylonian Talmud, *Ketubot*, 16b-17a)
2. Two people had quarreled with one another. Aaron went and sat with one of them. He said to him: "My son, look what your friend has done; his heart is distraught, and he has torn his clothes (out of sorrow regarding the quarrel), and he is saying: 'Woe is to me, how will I raise up my head and look at my friend? I am embarrassed in his presence because I am the one who wronged him.'" And Aaron sat with him until he removed the jealousy from his heart. Aaron then went and sat with the other party and said to him: "My son, see what your friend has done; his heart is distraught, and he has torn his clothes and he is saying: 'Woe is to me, how will I raise up my head and look at my friend? I am embarrassed in his presence, because I am the one who wronged him.'" And Aaron sat with him until he removed the jealousy from his heart. And when the two quarrelers met, they embraced and kissed one another. (*Avot d'Rabbi Natan* 12.3)
3. R. Hanina said: The seal of the blessed Holy One is *emet* (truth). (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 55a)
4. Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her older son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. And she put the skins of young goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. She put the delicious food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob. So he went in to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me." But Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" He answered, "Because the Lord your God granted me success." Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not." So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands. So he blessed him. He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He answered, "I am." Then he said, "Bring it to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you." So he brought it near to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank. (Genesis 27:15-25)

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Everyday Living - Ethics of Speech (vol. 1, pp.121-131)

Essential Question: What does Jewish tradition teach us about various kinds of gossip?

Objectives: Participants will be able to:

1. Recognize trends in Jewish thought about *l'shon hara*
2. Articulate the difference between *l'shon hara* and *rekhilut*
3. Apply the criteria for both *l'shon hara* and *rekhilut* to a contemporary case

Materials Needed: Paper, writing utensils, a copy of the story “A Pillow Full of Feathers” (link below),

Set Induction: (10 minutes) Read them the story called “A Pillow Full of Feathers,” which is adapted from Midrash. A copy of the story can be found here:

http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/812861/jewish/A-Pillow-Full-of-Feathers.htm. After reading the story, ask participants: What can we learn about the impact of *l'shon hara* from this story? Do you agree that it is like murder? How so/why not? What do we learn about the role of the listener?

Exploring the Text:

- (20 minutes) Break participants into *hevrutot* and instruct them to read together the main text of this section. Direct them to take notes about the traditional do's and don'ts of *l'shon hara* while they are reading. After they finish, make a communal list of permitted and forbidden acts pertaining to *l'shon hara*.
- (5 minutes) Explain that there is even a stronger tradition of prohibiting *rekhilut*, tale-bearing that raises animosity between Jews. An example of the difference between *l'shon hara* and *rekhilut* is that if you tell Shlomo that you don't like the synagogue president, that is *l'shon hara*. If you tell the President that Shlomo does not like her, that is *rekhilut*.

Wrapping It Up: (10 minutes) Tell participants that many people would agree that both *l'shon hara* and *rekhilut* are inappropriate. Yet, in the moment, and especially during moments of intense emotion, it is difficult to remember to practice these values. While refraining from entering into debate about actual policies, we will discuss the nature of the public critique of Israel. Does critique of Israel qualify as *l'shon hara*? Does it meet the criteria of *rekhilut*? Does it matter? Does the forum where the critique takes place matter?

Exploring the Sources:

- The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau. (Genesis 27:22)
- 'Putting a stumbling block before the blind': What does this mean? Before one who is blind regarding a particular matter. If someone asks your advice, do not give inappropriate advice. Don't say, 'Leave early in the morning' when you know robbers will be waiting for him. Don't say, 'Leave at noon' if you know the hot sun will harm her. (*Sifre* on Leviticus 19:14, paraphrased)
- Joshua ben Perachyah said: Provide for yourself a teacher, get yourself a friend, and judge every person assuming merit. (*Pirkey Avot* 1:6)
- One who curses a friend (who is not present) violates the commandment that says 'You shall not curse the deaf.' (B. Talmud, *Shevuot* 26a)
- Why are the fingers pointed like pegs? If a man hears an unworthy thing, he shall plug his fingers into his ears. (A member) of the school of Rabbi Ishmael taught: Why is the whole ear hard and the earlobe soft? So that if a man hears an unworthy thing, he shall bend the ear-lap into it. (B. Talmud *Ketubot* 5b)
- If you were to say of your rabbi that he does not have a good voice and of your cantor that he is not a scholar – you are a gossip. But if you were to say of your rabbi that he is no scholar and of a cantor that he has no voice – you are a murderer. (Rabbi Israel Salanter)

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Everyday Living - Ethics of Speech (vol. 1, pp.132-135)

Essential Question: *What are the potential consequences of participating in l'shon hara and rekhilut?*

Objectives:

- To witness how stories change through hearsay
- To apply our learning on *l'shon hara* and *rekhilut*

Materials Needed: Copy of English version of 1 Kings 21

Set Induction: (Approximately 15 minutes – will vary depending on number of participants) Direct participants to sit or stand in a wide circle with at least three feet between each participant. Instruct them to take their copy of *A Guide to Jewish Practice: Volume 1* with them. Tell your participants that you will be playing “Whisper Down the Lane” using a story from 1 Kings. Whisper the story found in 1 Kings 21 to the first participant and instruct the participants to pass the story, from memory, to the next participant. While they are waiting to either hear or relay the story, instruct them to read the text on pages 132-135.

Exploring the Text:

2. (10 minutes) Ask the last participant in the chain of “Whisper Down the Lane” to share the story with the group, from memory, as best they can from what they heard. Ask your participants: Did the story change from what you heard? How? Are any of the changes significant to the story? Are there details missing that help you understand the story? Can we find where the changes happened? What does this teach us about speech ethics? (*Despite our best intentions, we sometimes err when transmitting a story, and should thus avoid being a gossip; incomplete stories can give a false impression of what actually happened.*)
3. (7 minutes) Explain that even though we were well intentioned when transmitting this Bible story in the previous activity, we sometimes make critical errors when doing so. These errors can have long-term consequences. As we read in the text during the activity, our tradition categorizes different types of speech. Instruct your participants to share definitions for: *l'shon hara*, *rekhilut*, and *motzi shem ra*.
4. (3 minutes) Invite a participant to read the comment by Richard Hirsh on the bottom of page 134 aloud and explain that to conclude this session, we will work together to create a “Torah of the Internet” based on our learning about *l'shon hara*, *rekhilut*, and *motzi shem ra*, in order to put our learning into practice.

Wrapping It Up: (15 minutes) Invite participants to raise their hands and share rules to place on a *Brit* (covenant) that they will agree to for a “Torah of the Internet.” Write your list on a giant piece of sticky note paper. Each suggestion should be discussed, augmented, changed, or discarded based on the feedback of the group. Once the list is complete, ask each participant to sign the *Brit*. (If you do not finish in time, the conversation may be continued via email list, to see the work in action.)

Exploring the Sources:

"Rabbi Shimon said: There are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of kingship. And the crown of a good name is superior to them all (lit., 'goes up above them')." (Pirkey Avot 4:17)

"Rav Yohanan, in the name of Rav Shammai ben Yohai, teaches that verbal *ona'a* (oppression) is a greater sin than monetary *ona'a*, since monetary damages can be corrected through compensation, but damages incurred by inappropriate speech cannot." (B. Talmud, *Bava Metzia* 58b)

"You destroy those who speak lies; God dooms murderous and deceitful persons." (Psalms 5:7)

"If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse someone of a crime, the two people involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of God before the priests and judges who are in office at the time. The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against a fellow Israelite, then do to the false witness as that witness intended to do to the other party. You must purge the evil from among you." (Deuteronomy 19:16-19)

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Everyday Living - Ethics of Speech (vol. 1, pp.136-141)

Essential Question: What is the Jewish imperative around offering *tokheha* (rebuke), and what are some of the potential consequences of offering it?

Objectives:

- To understand Jewish texts about *tokheha* (reproof)
- To explore how offering *tokheha* (reproof) can yield positive or negative results depending on how it is offered

Materials Needed: Paper lunch bags, paper, pens, 4-5 miscellaneous objects to put in the paper lunch bags (for example: a piece of tin foil, a matchbox car, a children's toy, etc...can be anything random)

Set Induction: (15 minutes) Distribute paper and pens to each participant. Break your participants into *hevrutot* and invite each *hevruta* to read the text of the section (pages 136-141). Ask each *hevruta* to make a list of strategies for properly offering *tokheha* (rebuke), and to make a list of potential pitfalls.

Exploring the Text:

1. (20 minutes) Combine two sets of *hevrutot* into one group. Distribute to each group a paper lunch bag filled with 4-5 miscellaneous objects. Explain that each group will be creating two skits of approximately one minute in length. One skit will display an offer of *tokheha* in a way that leads to a positive result, and one skit will display an offer *tokheha* in way that leads to a negative result. Explain that each of the items in the paper lunch bag must be used creatively in one of the skits. (This helps to provide some inspiration for developing the skits, as well as the potential for some humor.)
2. (10 minutes) Direct each group to present its skits to the group.

Wrapping It Up: (5 minutes) Ask your participants: What themes emerged from the skits for offering *tokheha* wisely? What are some of the risks? What precautions should be taken? What are some of the clearly inadvisable methods of offering *tokheha*?

Exploring the Sources:

“You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall surely rebuke your neighbor and not bear sin because of him.” (Leviticus 19:17)

“...Joshua the son of Perachia would say: Assume for yourself a master, acquire for yourself a friend, and judge every man on the side of merit.” (*Pirkey Avot* 1.6)

“It is a mitzvah for a person who sees that his fellow Jew has sinned or is following an improper path to correct his behavior and to inform him that he is causing himself a loss by his evil deeds, as The Torah [[Leviticus 19:17](#)] states: "You shall surely admonish your neighbor." A person who rebukes a colleague - whether because of a [wrong committed] against her or because of a matter between her colleague and God - should rebuke him privately. She should speak to him patiently and gently, informing him that she is only making these statements for her colleague's own welfare, to allow him to merit the life of the world to come. If he accepts [the rebuke], it is good; if not, she should rebuke him a second and third time. Indeed, one is obligated to rebuke a colleague who does wrong until the latter strikes him and tells him: "I will not listen." Whoever has the possibility of rebuking [sinners] and fails to do so is considered responsible for that sin, for he had the opportunity to rebuke the [sinners].” (Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Mada*, Ethics 6:7)

“At first, a person who admonishes a colleague should not speak to him harshly until he becomes embarrassed as [[Leviticus 19:17](#)] states: "[You should]... not bear a sin because of him." This is what our sages said: Should you rebuke him to the point that his face changes [color]? The Torah states: "[You should]... not bear a sin because of him." From this, [we learn that] it is forbidden for a person to embarrass a [fellow] Jew. How much more so [is it forbidden to embarrass him] in public. Even though one who embarrasses a colleague is not [liable for] lashes for that, embarrassing someone is a great sin. Our Sages said: "A person who embarrasses a colleague in public does not have a share in the world to come." Therefore, a person should be careful not to embarrass a colleague - whether of great or lesser stature - in public, and not to call him a name which embarrasses him or to relate a matter that brings him shame in his presence. When does the above apply? In regard to matters between one man and another. However, in regard to spiritual matters, if [a transgressor] does not repent [after being admonished] in private, he may be put to shame in public, and his sin may be publicized. He may be subjected to abuse, scorn, and curses until he repents, as was the practice of all the prophets of Israel.” (Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Mada*, Ethics 6:8)

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Everyday Living - Ethics of Speech (vol. 1, pp.142-146)

Essential Question: How can effectively apologizing and offering forgiveness be healing?

Objectives:

- To define the term *halbanat panim*: whitening the face, or shaming
- To practice effective apologizing and forgiveness

Materials Needed: Paper, pens, envelopes, ability to play a clip from the internet

Set Induction: (10 minutes) Explain that to begin our discussion of embarrassment, apologies, and reconciliation, we will be watching a scene from the television show “Friends.” In this scene, Joey attempts to apologize to Ross. (Watch video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIIm7yBdUG4>) Ask your participants: what went wrong? Was Joey genuine? Did the apology end up working in the end?

Exploring the Text:

1. (10 minutes) Tell your participants that they have now seen an example of an apology gone wrong. Invite a participant to read aloud the main text from page 142 through the top of page 144. Ask: what is *halbanat panim*? (whitening the face, or shaming) What are some strategies for avoiding *halbanat panim*?
2. (20 minutes) Distribute paper, pens, and envelopes. Explain that it is often helpful to practice effective apologizing, and effectively offering forgiveness for those who seek it from us. Instruct your participants to sit quietly and write two letters. The first letter is to someone whom they have wronged through speech, but to whom they have not yet apologized. The second is a letter of forgiveness for someone who has hurt them through their speech. Explain that these letters need not be shared with those to whom they are addressed, or to others in this group. The facilitator should take care to be sensitive to the emotions that may arise in the participants during their writing. Optional: play music in the background)

Wrapping It Up: (10 minutes) Ask participants to share what this process was like for them. Do they feel better? Do they feel worse? What emotions came up? Was it difficult to think of something to write about? Why? For which letter?

Exploring the Sources:

“A tanna recited before R. Nahman b. Isaac: One who publicly shames a neighbor is as though he shed blood.” (B. Talmud, *Bava Metzia* 58b)

“...As it is our duty to reprove when we are likely to be heeded, so it is our duty to withhold reproof when we are not likely to be heeded.” (B. Talmud, *Yevamot* 65b)

“Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind, but thou shalt fear your God: I am the Holy One.” (Leviticus 19:14)

“A soothing tongue is a tree of life; but perverseness therein is a wound to the spirit.” (Proverbs 15:4)

“Rabbi Abba said in the name of Shmuel, “For three years there were disputes between Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel. While Bet Shammai claimed, ‘The *halakha* follows our view,’ and Bet Hillel claimed, ‘The *halakha* follows our view’. Then a *bat kol* (voice from Heaven) declared, ‘Both are the words of the living God, but the law follows Bet Hillel’. Since, however, both are the words of the living God, why did Bet Hillel merit that the *halakha* was established following their opinion? Because they were kindly and patient, and they taught their own rulings and those of Bet Shammai, and, moreover, they positioned the teachings of Bet Shammai even before their own.” (B. Talmud, *Eruvin* 13b)

A Guide to Jewish Practice - Facilitator's Guide

Nathan Weiner

Everyday Living - Ethics of Speech (vol. 1, pp.147-152)

Essential Question: How do people speak in everyday conversations, and does deeply engaging with the content of that speech influence our thinking about our own speech patterns?

Objectives:

5. To consider the impact of speech in casual daily interactions
6. To apply the impact of overheard speech to our thinking about our own speech patterns

Special Lesson Notes - This session:

- takes place offsite in a shopping mall, Jewish Community Center (JCC), coffee house or deli
- runs one hour or longer, instead of the typical 45 minutes
- combines two sections of ethics of speech

Materials Needed: Meeting space in a local mall food court, JCC or another gathering place, preferably at a relatively busy time; participant copies of *A Guide to Jewish Practice Vol. 1*; notebooks; pens

Set Induction: (10 minutes) Meet at the mall food court or JCC lobby or another gathering place. Break participants into *hevrutot* and explain the agenda for the day. Tell participants that today they will practice listening to the conversations of others, and that we will reflect on what we learn. Instruct each pair to find a location (at a table in the food court, a bench, a bar, a coffee shop, etc...). Once settled, each pair sits quietly with their book, reading the text and commentary on pages 147-152. Explain that there is no rush, and that participants should also be focused on the speech of those around them, listening to their conversations, statements, arguments, promises, and so on. Participants are encouraged to take notes on what they hear and its relationship to their reading. Designate a location for participants to return to after time is up. Send them off!

Exploring the Text:

- (30 minutes or longer, depending on desires of the group) Participants travel to their locations to read and listen.

Wrapping It Up: (20 minutes or more) Facilitate a discussion about what the participants heard.

Below are some suggested questions to help spark conversation:

- Did you hear anyone making promises? A parent to a child, for instance
- Did you hear an argument? If so, what was the nature of it? Was it respectful? How so? If not, what could have been done differently?
- Did you hear any *l'shon hara*? How did it feel to hear it? What were the consequences for those engaged in the *l'shon hara*?
- Did you hear excessive vulgarity? Did it affect your thinking about the person speaking in that way?
- How did your simultaneous reading of the text influence your thinking about what you were hearing?
- How does the experience of listening more intently to speech habits affect your thinking about your own speech habits?

Exploring the Sources:

3. “And I will establish My covenant (*Brit*) with you....” (Genesis 9:11)
4. “And Jephthah vowed a vow to God, and said: 'If You will indeed deliver the children of Ammon into my hand, then whatsoever comes forth out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, it shall be God's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering.' So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and God delivered them into his hand.” (Judges 11:30-32)
5. “And God spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When either man or woman shall clearly utter a vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to consecrate himself to God, he shall abstain from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat fresh grapes or dried.’” (Numbers 6:1-3)

A Guide to Jewish Practice - Facilitator's Guide

Nathan Weiner

Everyday Living - Ethics of Speech (vol. 1, pp.153-158)

Essential Question: How does communicating through the medium of digital technology influence our interpersonal communication?

Special Lesson Notes: This session:

- Requires that each participant bring an internet-enabled device to class. Participants can bring a smartphone, laptop, or tablet.
- This lesson runs longer than the typical 45 minutes. Allot one hour and fifteen minutes.

Objectives:

7. To identify some of the potential pitfalls of digital communication
8. To apply Jewish textual sources to our thinking about digital communication

Materials Needed: Chalkboard or flipchart, source sheet (found below)

Set Induction: (15 minutes) Explain that today our topic covers issues related to speech and technology. Ask participants to raise their hands and share various types of digital communication to which speech ethics can be applied. Make a list on the board/flipchart. (*Text messages, web forums, emails, blogs, etc...*) Once your list is created, ask participants to share what they see as defining characteristics of digital communication. This will help your participants come to a working definition.

Exploring the Text:

3. (15 minutes) Break participants into *hevrotot*. Assign an item from the list on the flipchart to each *hevruta* and ask each group to consider the particular issues related to their communication medium. For example, the group assigned “blogs” will visit some blogs, find examples of unethical speech practices and consider how they might continue to utilize the medium of blogs while maintaining an ethical standard of speech.
4. (15 minutes) Direct each *hevruta* to share their findings with the group. After each group has shared, discuss some of the differences between the various media explored.
5. (20 minutes) Distribute the text sheet found below to each *hevruta*. Explain that, perhaps surprisingly, this section of *A Guide to Jewish Practice* is the only section of our unit on Ethics of Speech that does not contain any scriptural references or citations in either the main text or the commentary. Invite each *hevruta* to read together the text sheet and choose one or two texts that help shape their thinking about interpersonal online communication.

Wrapping It Up: (10 minutes) Instruct participants to share the name of the medium under their consideration, to read the text(s) they chose, and to explain why they chose it.

Exploring the Sources:

“Life and death lie in the power of the tongue.” (Proverbs 18:21)

“And God said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light.” (Genesis 1:3)

“Rabban Gamaliel said to Tavi his servant: 'Go and get me good food from the market.' He went and bought him tongue. Gamaliel said to him, 'Go and get me bad food from the market.' He went and bought him tongue. Said Gamaliel to him, 'What is this? When I told you to get good food, you bought me tongue, and when I told you to get bad food you also bought me tongue!' Tavi replied, 'Good comes from it, and bad comes from it. When the tongue is good, there is nothing better, and when it is bad, there is nothing worse.' (Vayikra Raba 33:1)

“My God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully.” (Concluding meditation of the *Amida*)

“Moses climbed Mount Sinai not as mountaineers do, but to receive the Tablets of the Law.” (Yehuda Amichai, *Open Closed Open*, p.117)

“Then God said: 'Let us make humanity in Our Image, in Our Likeness.'” (Genesis 1:26)

Ben Zoma said: Who is wise? One who learns from all people, as it is written, "I have gained understanding from all my teachers." (Psalms 119:99) Who is mighty? One who subdues his passions, as it is written, "One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city." (Proverbs 16:32) Who is rich? One who rejoices in her portion, as it is written, "You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you." (Psalm 128:2) "You shall be" refers to this world; and "it shall be well with you" refers to the world to come. Who is honored? One who honors other people, as it is written, "For those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be treated with contempt." (I Samuel 2:30) (*Pirkey Avot* 4.1)

“When someone gets used to speaking *l'shon hara*, he rationalizes it to such an extent that he begins to view *l'shon hara* as entirely permissible.” (Chofetz Chaim)

You shall not go up and down as a talebearer among your people; neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor: I am God. (Leviticus 19:16)

When you make a loan of any sort to your neighbors, you must not enter their house to seize their pledge. You must remain outside, while a person to whom you made the loan brings the pledge out to you. (Deuteronomy 24:10-11)

No one shall open windows facing a jointly owned courtyard. No one may place an entrance in a courtyard opposite the entrance of another or a window opposite another's window (Mishna *Bava Batra* 3.7)

Every person is entitled to privacy and the confidentiality of information concerning his life. (Section 7 of the Basic Laws of the State of Israel)

You shall not curse the deaf, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God. I am ADONAY. (Leviticus 19:14)

Our Rabbis taught: How does one dance before the bride? Bet Shammai say, "The bride as she is." And Bet Hillel say, "Beautiful and graceful bride!" Bet Shammai said to Bet Hillel, "If she were lame or blind, would one say of her: 'Beautiful and graceful bride?' Whereas the Torah said, 'Keep far from a false matter.'" Said Bet Hillel to Bet Shammai, "According to your words, if someone has made a bad purchase in the market, should you praise it to the purchaser or depreciate it? Surely, one should praise it to the purchaser. Therefore, the Sages said, 'One's disposition should always be pleasant with people.'" (Babylonian Talmud, *Ketubot* 16b-17a)

Two people had quarreled with one another. Aaron went and sat with one of them. Aaron said to him, "My son, look what your friend has done. His heart is distraught, he has torn his clothes (out of sorrow regarding the quarrel), and he is saying, 'Woe is me! How will I raise up my head and look at my friend? I am embarrassed in his presence because I am the one who wronged him.'" And Aaron sat with him until he removed the jealousy from his heart. Then Aaron went and sat with the other party and said to him, "My son, see what your friend has done. His heart is distraught, he has torn his clothes, and he is saying, 'Woe is me! How will I raise up my head and look at my friend? I am embarrassed in his presence because I am the one who wronged him.'" And Aaron sat with him until he removed the jealousy from his heart. And when the two disputants met, they embraced and kissed one another. (*Avot d'Rabi Natan* 12.3)

Rabbi Hanina said: The seal of the Blessed Holy One is *emet* (truth). (Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 55a)

Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her older son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob, her younger son. And she put the skins of the young goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. She put the delicious food and the bread that she had prepared into the hand of her son Jacob. He went in to his father and said, "My father." And Jacob said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me." But Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" He answered, "Because God granted me success." Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not." So Jacob approached Isaac his father, who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." And he did not recognize him because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands. So he blessed him. He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He answered, "I am." Then he said, "Bring me the food, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you." So Jacob brought it to him, and he ate; and Jacob brought him wine, and he drank. (Genesis 27:15-25)

The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau (Genesis 27:22)

'Putting a stumbling block before the blind': What does this mean? Before one who is blind regarding a particular matter. If someone asks your advice, do not give inappropriate advice. Don't say, 'Leave early in the morning' when you know robbers will be waiting for him. Don't say, 'Leave at noon' if you know the hot sun will harm her. (*Sifre* on Leviticus 19:14, paraphrased)

Joshua ben Perachyah said: Provide for yourself a teacher, get yourself a friend, and judge every person assuming merit. (*Pirkey Avot* 1:6)

One who curses a friend (who is not present) violates the commandment that says 'You shall not curse the deaf.' (B. Talmud, *Shevuot* 26a)

Why are the fingers pointed like pegs? If a man hears an unworthy thing, he shall plug his fingers into his ears. (A member) of the school of Rabbi Ishmael taught: Why is the whole ear hard and the earlobe soft? So that if a man hears an unworthy thing, he shall bend the ear-lap into it. (B. Talmud, *Ketubot* 5b)

If you were to say of your rabbi that he does not have a good voice and of your cantor that he is not a scholar – you are a gossip. But if you were to say of your rabbi that he is no scholar and of a cantor that he has no voice – you are a murderer. (Rabbi Israel Salanter)

Rabbi Shimon said: There are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of kingship. And the crown of a good name is superior to them all. (*Pirkey Avot* 4:17)

Rav Yohanan, in the name of Rav Shammai ben Yohai, teaches that verbal *ona'a* (oppression) is a greater sin than monetary *ona'a*, since monetary damages can be corrected through compensation, but damages incurred by inappropriate speech cannot. (B. Talmud, *Bava Metzia* 58b)

“You destroy those who speak lies; God dooms murderous and deceitful persons.” (Psalms 5:7)

If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse someone of a crime, the two people involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of God before the priests and judges who are in office at the time. The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against a fellow Israelite, then do to the false witness as that witness intended to do to the other party. You must purge the evil from among you. (Deuteronomy 19:16-19)

You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall surely rebuke your neighbor and not bear sin because of him. (Leviticus 19:17)

...Joshua ben Perachya would say, “Provide a teacher for yourself, acquire for yourself a friend, and judge every person on the side of merit.” (*Pirkey Avot* 1.6)

It is a mitzvah for a person who sees that a fellow Jew has sinned or is following an improper path to correct his behavior and to inform him that he is causing himself a loss by his evil deeds, as the Torah [Leviticus 19:17] states: "You shall surely admonish your neighbor." A person who rebukes a colleague — whether because of a wrong committed against her or because of a matter between her colleague and God — should rebuke him privately. She should speak to him patiently and gently, informing him that she is only making these statements for her colleague's own welfare, to allow him to merit the life of the world to come. If he accepts the rebuke, that is good; if not, she should rebuke him a second and third time. Indeed, one is obligated to rebuke a colleague who does wrong until the wrongdoer strikes him and tells him, "I will not listen." Whoever has the possibility of rebuking sinners and fails to do so is considered responsible for that sin, for he had the opportunity to rebuke the sinners. (Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Mada*, Ethics 6:7)

At first, a person who admonishes a colleague should not speak to him harshly until he becomes embarrassed, as the Torah [Leviticus 19:17] states: "[You should]... not bear a sin because of him." This is what our sages said: “Should you rebuke him to the point that his face changes [color]? The Torah states: ‘[You should]... not bear a sin because of him.’” From this, [we learn that] it is forbidden for a person to embarrass a [fellow] Jew. How much more so is it forbidden to embarrass someone in public. Even though one who embarrasses a colleague is not liable for lashes for that, embarrassing someone is a great sin. Our Sages said, "A person who embarrasses a colleague in public does not have a share in the world to come." Therefore, a person should be careful not to embarrass a colleague — whether of great or lesser stature — in public, and not to call him a name which embarrasses him or to relate a matter in his presence that brings him shame. When does the

above apply? In regard to matters between one person and another. However, in regard to spiritual matters, if a transgressor does not repent after being admonished in private, he may be put to shame in public, and his sin may be publicized. He may be subjected to abuse, scorn, and curses until he repents, as was the practice of all the prophets of Israel. (Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Mada*, Ethics 6:8)

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