

Covenants or *Britot* as a Tool for Building Safe, Respectful and Equitable Jewish Communities

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ברית – *Brit* - Covenant

A Covenant is a voluntary agreement between two or more parties in which there are obligations and expectations of all parties. In the Biblical tradition, covenants can be between God and individuals (Noah, Abraham); God and the entire Jewish people (Sinai); or two individuals (Abraham and Abimelech).

The covenant at Sinai

"And He said: God came from Sinai" (Deut 33:2) When God appeared to give Torah to Israel, it is not to Israel alone that God appeared, but to all of the nations.

First God went to the children of Esav, and He asked them: Will you accept the Torah? They asked: What is written in it? God answered: "You shall not kill" (Shemoth 20:13). They answered: The entire essence of our father is murder, as it is written (Bereshith 27:22) "And the hands are the hands of Esav." And it is with this that his father assured him (*Ibid.* 27:40) "And by your sword shall you live."

God then went to the children of Ammon and Moav and asked them: Will you accept the Torah? They asked: What is written in it? God answered, "You shall not commit adultery." They answered: God of the Universe, *ervah* (illicit relations) is our entire essence, as it is written (*Ibid.* 19:36) "And the two daughters of Lot conceived by their father."

God then went and found the children of Yishmael and asked them: Will you accept the Torah? They asked: What is written in it? God answered: "You shall not steal" (Shemoth, *Ibid.*) They answered: God of the Universe, our father's entire essence is stealing, viz. (Bereshith 16:12) "And he (Yishmael) shall be a wild man, his hand against all."

There was none among all of the nations to whom God did not go and speak and knock at their door, asking if they would accept the Torah.

At long last, God came to Israel. They said, "We will do and we will hearken." (Exodus 24:7)

Sifrei Devarim 343

Sample Behavioral Covenants

1. Congregational Covenant (Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation, Evanston, IL)
2. Congregational Board Covenant (Great Barrington, MA)
3. Synagogue Policy on Ethical Behavior (Temple Sini, Atlanta, GA)
4. Synagogue Board Covenant (Beth El Zedeck, Indianapolis, IN)
5. A Sure Foundation, United Church of Christ samples of Behavioral Covenants for Congregations
6. Camp Behavioral Brit, Camp Havayah, (Poconos, PA)
7. Network Norms (Jewish Social Justice Roundtable)
8. Learning Community Commitments (RRC, Wyncote, PA)
9. Welcoming Guide (Minyan Dorshei Derech, Philadelphia, PA)
10. Synagogue Covid Brit (Congregation Bet Haverim, Atlanta, GA)
11. Communications Policy (RRA, 2022)

JRC Community Covenant: 2000

Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation is more than the total of individuals who belong to an institution. At JRC we deeply value our relationships with one another and with our community. As Jewish tradition teaches, with any sacred relationship there is a sense of *brit* or covenant--a shared understanding of our mutual commitment to one another.

Thus, our JRC Community Covenant is a document that will help us explore the specific nature of our congregation's responsibilities to its members, and in turn, our own responsibilities to the community that is JRC. Characteristically, we consider this to be a work in progress, realizing that we will continue to study, modify and interpret our Covenant in ways we deem appropriate to meet the ever-changing needs of our community.

Our Community Covenant is not intended as a set of enforceable requirements or standards with which to judge our individual members. Rather, it is a general expression of our own communal and personal expectations. We recognize and cherish the diversity of our membership and understand that each member will interpret and express the terms of our Covenant in different ways and at different times. It is our hope that this *brit* will help us to understand the true meaning of community and especially to understand what JRC truly means to us.

1. Members can expect JRC to help the members understand and feel an attachment to the Jewish People as a whole, around the world and across time.

JRC expects its members to acknowledge their attachment to the Jewish People with pride and personal commitment.

2. Members can expect JRC to teach and practice the values and virtues of Reconstructionist Judaism.

JRC expects its members to learn, uphold, and model those values and virtues.

3. Members can expect JRC to provide spiritual guidance through our Rabbi, Cantor, and lay leadership.

JRC expects its members to make Jewish spirituality a personal priority.

4. Members can expect JRC to provide a warm, welcoming, and inclusive community.

JRC expects its members to respect our diversity and welcome newcomers to our community with a spirit of acceptance.

5. Members can expect JRC to provide a diverse array of congregational activities.

JRC expects its members to participate and become involved in congregational activities as much as possible.

6. Members can expect JRC to provide quality Jewish educational opportunities to children and adults alike.

JRC expects its members to take Jewish learning seriously.

7. Members can expect JRC to provide serious and challenging B'nai Mitzvah training.

JRC expects its members to take their children's education seriously and to participate in it.

8. Members can expect JRC to provide spiritually moving and meaningful religious services.

JRC expects its members to enhance our worship by offering their presence, participation, skills, and willingness to learn.

9. Members can expect JRC to provide them with a Jewish communal outlet for Tikkun Olam/Social Action involvement.

JRC expects its members to lend their experience, knowledge, and energy to help us in our efforts to transform and heal the world.

10. Members can expect JRC to maintain the highest level of financial responsibility.

JRC expects its members to meet their financial obligations fully and generously.

11. Members can expect JRC to welcome and respect their input and concerns about JRC.

JRC expects its members to be forthcoming with their concerns and advice.

12. Members can expect JRC to provide opportunities for congregational leadership.

JRC expects its members to be generous with their time and energy to help our community become the best it can be.

Behavioral Covenants

In working together we are guided by norms—unwritten and often unspoken rules. Our family life, our employment, and our time together in our congregation are guided by norms that tell people that there are acceptable and unacceptable ways of doing things. Some norms are very healthy and appropriate and some are less healthy and can be damaging.

(Behavioral Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Differences published by The Alban Institute)

Below is a behavioral covenant written by the board of Congregation Ahavat Shalom in Great Barrington, Ma. This document was written at a board retreat/training during August 2000. The intention of this document is that it will be part of the board manual and within ready vision of board members during all board meetings. Some of the language of this behavioral covenant was taken from a sample document in the book cited above.

For our work together today there are some norms, or guidelines that can be helpful and healthy if we follow them. Our promises to our synagogue family and to each other on the governing board are:

- ❖ We will remember that our work here today is a part of our spiritual leadership of our congregation. We will treat this work and one another with respect.
- ❖ In our conversations we will focus on issues and behavior. We will not talk about people.
- ❖ We will share information with the full group appropriately so that everyone has the information that they need, and we will not reserve our comments for after the meeting or to be shared only with people who agree with us.
- ❖ We will support the rabbi and staff so that their efforts can be most productive.
- ❖ We will respect and care for each other.
- ❖ We will discuss, debate, and disagree openly in the board meeting, expressing ourselves as clearly and honestly as possible, so that we are certain that the board understands our point of view.
- ❖ We will support the final decision of the board whether it reflects our view or not.
- ❖ We will treat our time on the board as an opportunity to make an important gift to our synagogue.
- ❖ We will support each other in the use of process.
- ❖ We will work on behalf of the community within the framework of Reconstructionist Jewish values.
- ❖ We will be responsive to issues raised by our fellow board members.

Temple Sinai Policy on Ethical Behavior of Members

Background

Temple Sinai's Bylaws, Article III. Section 5, ("Bylaws") provide that the Board of Trustees maintain written policies which may include the right to suspend or terminate membership for disruption of the Temple Sinai community in ways that threaten our educational, spiritual, or community-based missions. This Policy on Ethical Behavior, adopted by Temple Sinai's Board of Trustees on _____ 2022, ("Policy") specifies certain actions or behaviors which could result in the suspension of a member's rights and privileges and/or termination of synagogue membership.

Introduction

As members of the Temple Sinai family, we hold ourselves to the highest standards of personal integrity, moral conscience, and social responsibility. This congregational Policy articulates expectations for ethical behavior for all Temple Sinai members in all membership categories. This Policy is in effect for all Temple Sinai programs, classes, services, and functions, whether on Temple Sinai's campus or offsite, as well as for all communications, including or directed at Temple Sinai lay leaders, fellow members, clergy, and professional and support staff. By delineating expectations and holding one another accountable for maintaining the highest ethical standards of behavior, we strengthen our sacred partnerships with one another and with our holy community.

This Policy will, as deemed appropriate or necessary, be updated.

I. Inclusivity and Respect

Every individual who enters Temple Sinai's facilities and participates in congregational events, whether in person or virtually, is valued. Thus, Temple Sinai members are expected to treat everyone with respect, dignity, and fairness. To this end, members must:

- Conduct themselves and treat others with common courtesy.
- Refrain from gossip and slander.
- Refrain from abusive and derogatory speech.

II. Adhering to Temple Sinai's Policy on Ethical Behavior of Members

Any member(s) unable to adhere to this Policy will be subject to possible suspension or termination of their congregational membership pursuant to Temple Sinai's Bylaws.

III. Refrainment of Inappropriate Behavior

The following are examples of behaviors that Temple Sinai members must avoid at all times and in all congregational settings and communications.

A. Bullying

Members must refrain from any abusive, harassing, or bullying behavior.

For purposes of this Policy, abusive, harassing, or bullying behavior is defined as unwanted, aggressive behavior perpetrated against another individual or individuals, whether it be a single occurrence or a series of repeated incidents.

Such behavior can take the form of verbal misconduct (e.g., making threats, inappropriate sexual or other comments, insults, and taunting), social misconduct (e.g., spreading hurtful or malicious rumors), physical misconduct (e.g., harming another person's body or possessions), or cyber misconduct (similar conduct using electronic media).

B. Sexual Harassment and Misconduct

Members must refrain from any form of sexual harassment or abuse, including unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal, physical, or visual conduct of a sexual nature.

C. Other Harmful Behaviors

Members must refrain from any other behavior that is harmful to the safety and wellbeing of our clergy, staff, fellow members, lay leaders, and others in the community.

D. Reporting Inappropriate Behavior

As partners in a Jewish community, we have an ethical obligation to protect victims of Bullying, Sexual Harassment and Misconduct and other Harmful Behaviors when made aware of such circumstances, no matter where they occur. Any member is urged to report all reasonable concerns of abusive or harmful behavior to the President-Elect of the synagogue. After review and potential investigation following a report, the Temple Sinai Executive Committee will determine what, if any, next steps are in order.

Any and all members unable to adhere to standards articulated above can, by a vote of the Temple Sinai Executive Committee, be suspended or removed from Temple Sinai membership and, when applicable, no longer be welcome at Temple Sinai or any Temple Sinai functions. In accordance with the Temple Sinai Bylaws, members may contest a decision of the Executive Committee to the Board of Trustees, which reserves sole discretion in the final determination of membership.

IV. Confidentiality

Complaints and investigations regarding alleged or suspected violations of this Policy and related information will, to the extent possible, be kept confidential, consistent with the need to conduct an adequate and timely investigation and to avoid potential or imminent harm.

V. Review and Revision of the Policy on Ethical Behavior of Members

Review and revision of this Policy is an ongoing responsibility of Temple Sinai's Board of Trustees and is essential to ensuring the Policy remains current, accurate, comprehensive, and relevant. Modifications to the Policy may be proposed to the President-Elect by any member or individual associated with Temple Sinai. Revisions to the Policy shall be approved by Temple Sinai's Board of Trustees.

BETH-EL ZEDECK BOARD OF DIRECTORS
STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

As we have been entrusted with the privilege of helping to guide and conduct the affairs of our congregation, we the Board of Directors of Congregation Beth-EL Zedek have unanimously and enthusiastically affirmed this statement of commitment in our endeavor to further enrich the physical and spiritual life of our synagogue.

1. We enthusiastically affirm the philosophy and purposes of Congregation Beth-El Zedek as stated in our bylaws:

Beth-El Zedek shall be dedicated to the cultivation and enhancement of Judaism as the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people. (Article II)

The purpose of the congregation are
To foster and develop the spiritual, educational and social welfare of its members in the best tradition of Jewish study, prayer, and community service:... (Article II)
This congregation exemplifies and shall follow the principles, ideas, practices, and philosophy of the Conservative and Reconstructionist movements of Judaism ... (Article III)

2. We look forward to participating in the planning and implementation of goals and objectives for our congregation by attending Board meetings regularly. We are aware that our attendance and input are valued and that it is important for us to share our interests, views, and expertise with our colleagues on the

Board and with the Rabbis, Cantor and synagogue professionals.

3. We look forward to serving on at least one committee to help enrich congregational life.
4. Since the commitment of Board members sets the tone for the financial support of the congregation by the membership-at-large, we pledge to be generous in accord with our abilities in establishing our fair-share level of membership dues and through our gifts to the Foundation and other appropriate expressions of Tzedakah.
5. In accepting this assignment and honor, we regard ourselves as ambassadors of the Board to the congregation and of the congregation to the Board and to the community, and we are conscious that we serve as spokesperson and representative of the best interest of our congregation.
6. We realize and gladly accept the responsibility that it is important for Board members to model participation in the religious, cultural, social, and educational activities of our congregation.
7. We value the privilege and opportunity afforded us to be yet more informed and committed Jews through this expression of service to our synagogue.

Bruce M. Jacobson
President

Sample 4: United Church of Christ**behavioral covenants for congregations**

United Church of Christ, Samples

The Discernment Travelogue's "Rules of the Road" provide a faithful roadmap for the creation of such a document, as well as some excellent samples of what to include in a Behavioral Covenant:

- Be fully present, extending and presuming welcome to and from others.
- Listen generously and suspend judgment about another's story. Hold stories with care and respect.
- Author your own story and share your gifts.
- Wonder. Welcome discomfort. Love the questions.
- Be mindful and respectful of time.
- Practice hospitality and inclusion, especially when diverse cultures meet. There are many excellent methods for discernment but not all of them model intercultural awareness; therefore, be discerning about discernment together: appreciate many ways of hearing God together.
- Believe that it is possible to emerge from our time together refreshed, surprised, and less burdened than when we came.

Some congregations use Eric Law's Respectful Communications Guidelines as a model:

- R – take Responsibility for what you say and feel without blaming others
- E – use empathetic listening
- S – be Sensitive to differences in communication/cultural styles
- P – Ponder what you hear and feel before you speak
- E – Examine your own assumptions and perceptions
- C – keep Confidentiality
- T – Tolerate ambiguity because we are not here to debate. There are no "winners" or "losers."

One congregation modeled its Behavioral Covenant on scripture; it is shared here with permission:

"Love your neighbor as you love yourself" (Matthew 22:39). As we walk together in all God's ways made known or to be made known to us, we seek to discern and do what is best for our church as a whole, not what may be best for individuals or factions (Philippians 2:4). We recognize that conflict and disagreement are normal and natural. We welcome a wide variety of voices and ideas when they are expressed in a way that reflects God's love.

- As followers of Jesus Christ we promise to respect each other at all times in the following ways:
- We will approach all things in prayer. (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- We will speak from our own personal experience. (1 Corinthians 3:16)
- We will speak face-to-face, honestly and without rancor when there is disagreement.

Sample 4: United Church of Christ

(Ephesians 4:15)

- We will listen with an open and non-judgmental mind and try as hard to understand as to be understood. (Proverbs 4:7)
- If we are unable to effectively communicate with each other, we will ask a third party to be present to assist us. (Matthew 18:16)
- We will support the final outcome of the decision-making process. (1 Corinthians 1:10) ○ As forgiven people, we will choose to forgive one another. (Luke 11:4)

In the spirit of Jesus, and with God's help, we will show respect and love in all we do as we journey together.

Another congregation calls its Behavioral Covenant a "Covenant for Christian Communication." It too is shared with permission:

As people called to follow our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we acknowledge His teaching in Matthew 18:15-17, 21-22 and the Holy Spirit's leadership in Ephesians 4:15 concerning communication. As a Christian congregation in covenant with Christ as the Head of the Church, we accept responsibility to make God's teaching our watchwords.

- When we hear something that raises concerns for us, we shall first make every effort to
- speak directly, one-to-one with the person involved. A deacon or the pastor(s) may be asked to coach us in advance, or to be present to witness communication as Jesus specifies at step two of the Matthew 18 process. If talking one-to-one or with one or two others fails, then concerns may be referred to the relevant group in the church or as a last resort to the whole congregation.
- In order to speak truth in love, we shall speak for ourselves using "I" statements, not claim to represent others or use accusatory "you" statements.
- When complex subjects need to be named, we shall pray for all concerned and seek the guidance of the diaconate and/or pastor(s) for help in speaking the truth in love. ○ We accept that understanding and respecting each other does *not* necessarily mean agreeing with each other.
- We affirm that the Holy Spirit may speak through any of us, so that all of us deserve a respectful hearing, even though congregational decisions are made by majority vote.
- While all people are welcome in Christian communities, unchristian behavior (for example: threatening, taunting, demeaning, harassing, or attacking) conflicts with Christ's teaching and will not be tolerated.



COVENANT OF BEHAVIOR

Havaya Summer Programs strive to build *kehillot kedoshot* – holy communities. Based on a central *Brit Kehillah* (Community Covenant of Behavior) created by our pioneer campers, our campers since then have helped expand this document to guide us in reaching this goal. We expect all campers to abide by this covenant in order to build and strengthen our community.

Be forgiving. • Keep the environment clean. • Be supportive and courteous. • Keep your body and space clean. • Be open-minded and kind. • Be honest. • Try to make friends. • Don't be judgmental. • Be mature. • Be fair. • Be understanding and mindful of others. • Be encouraging. • Make the best of your experiences. • Be hopeful and optimistic. • Participate and be active in all activities. • Be organized as a group or individual. • Be your unique self. • Be appreciative of others. • Be a united community. • Appreciate diversity. • Be flexible. • Be accepting. • Take initiative. • Be faithful. • Cooperate. • Be aware of your surroundings. • Respect confidentiality and honesty. • Be loyal. • Support teamwork.



COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS

Each of the Havaya Summer Programs is an intentional community. The well-being of your children, both physically as well as emotionally, is of the utmost importance.

The success of each of the Havaya Summer Programs is based, in part, on:

- High standards of care for your children;
- High expectations of ourselves and our staff;
- A values system explained to staff, campers, and families; and
- Boundaries clearly defined for campers and staff.

One can see by our *Brit Kehillah* (Covenant of Behavior) that we are most thoughtful about the behavior of all members of our community.

Havaya Summer Programs attempt to teach our campers:

- To recognize that they have responsibilities for themselves and those around them;
- To learn to make choices that are good for themselves and others, and to take responsibility for the choices they make;
- To respect themselves and others; and
- To accept that they are accountable for their actions and the consequences, both positive and negative, of their behavior.

We expect all campers to be able to follow directions, participate in group activities, and adjust to daily schedule changes. While we happily provide additional support and supervision for kids who need it, our expectation is that all campers will participate fully in the Camp program. Please be in touch, in advance of the summer, if you have any questions or concerns about this requirement.

It is essential that you communicate to your child(ren) that we will not accept behaviors such as:

- Bullying;
- Violence;

- Repeated profanity;
- Disrespect;
- Bigotry (including, but not limited to, racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia);
- Sexual behavior (as defined by Havaya Summer Programs);
- Smoking, chewing tobacco, drugs, vaping, or alcohol use;
- Possession of weapons; or
- Any other unsafe behaviors that are potentially harmful to themselves or others.

They must understand that a consequence of their behavior may be removal from Camp.

We're serious about being our best selves—it's How We Be! We expect our campers to stand up for themselves and their friends, take responsibility for their actions, and understand the part each of us plays in creating a joyful and welcoming community. Children are most successful when their parents and family members discuss, and fully commit to, these expectations in advance of the summer – and when you reach out to Camp with any questions or concerns that may arise before, during, or after the summer. Thank you for being our partners in creating these incredibly lively, welcoming, and diverse communities every summer.



SHARING INFORMATION

Providing honest and accurate information is crucial to ensuring the physical and emotional safety of your child and other campers. Please know how invaluable such information can be in assisting us to help make your child's transition to Camp as smooth, and their time in Camp as rewarding, as possible. Knowing about a learning difficulty, ADD, frequent bedwetting, recent changes in (or exploration of) gender identity, or a recent loss or major change in the family or child's life makes a tremendous difference in helping us to be sensitive to your child's needs, especially in the first few days of Camp.

Many parents fear that Camp will not accept their child if they are completely forthcoming about these situations. We encourage you to make us a full partner in planning for your child's summer by sharing any relevant information now, and again (as needed) before Camp begins. If new concerns arise, please let us know so we can work to ensure a successful and happy experience.

It is possible that in some situations we may discover that a child might be a risk to themselves or the community. In these situations, we must reserve the right to remove this child from the Camp program immediately. There may be a circumstance where we have agreed to accept a child with full knowledge of their particular needs and have attempted to take all the necessary steps of making the experience successful, but find that we are ultimately unable to do so. For the good of this child and/or the community, the child may have to leave. In all of these situations, we strive to work closely with the parents in our decision-making process. With your help, we know that we will continue to maintain this caring and safe community together for many years to come.

Jewish Social Justice Roundtable

Roundtable Norms

Roundtable affiliates agree that the following norms represent our good-hearted intentions, our best aspirations and will be applied when appropriate and relevant. We will strive to adhere to them in good faith. In the event of a perceived failure to follow them, we are committed to giving and receiving feedback and engaging in further conversation respectfully.

I will operate out of the belief that I accomplish my goals best when my Roundtable partners accomplish their goals.

I will be supportive of efforts to increase the total resources available for the Jewish social justice field.

I will be generous with sharing information, resources, and opportunities for collaboration with Roundtable members.

I will always be direct in seeking to resolve conflict and will encourage others to do the same.

I will make efforts to acknowledge and promote the work of other members of the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable.

I will commit time to being in relationship with others in the Jewish social justice community in order to lay the groundwork for collaboration.

RRC Community Commitments

We are gathering together as a learning community committed to practicing deep respect for one another. We are all created *b'tselem Elohim* (in the image of God). We know that every one of us has inherent value and deserves to be treated with *kavod* (respect).

אם אין תורה, אין דרך ארץ. אם אין דרך ארץ, אין תורה.
Where there is no Torah there is no kind behavior; where there is no kind behavior, there is no Torah. Pirkei Avot 3:17

1. We commit to cultivating awareness of our own presence in community conversation and dialogue, to striving to be active listeners as well as active participants. We will thoughtfully receive feedback about our participation.

אִיזוֹהוּ חָכָם, הַלּוֹמֵד מִכָּל אָדָם... אִיזוֹהוּ גִבּוֹר, הַכּוֹבֵשׁ אֶת יִצְרוֹ.
Who is wise? One who learns from everyone. Who is mighty? One who subdues one's inclinations. Pirkei Avot 4:1

אָמַר מְעַט וַעֲשֵׂה הרַבֵּה, וְהוּי מְקַבֵּל אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם בְּסִבָּר פְּנִים יְפוֹת.
Say little and do much; and receive everyone in a positive manner. Pirkei Avot 1:15

2. We commit to taking risks. There is no learning without both striving and making mistakes along the way.

וְלֹא הַבִּישָׁן לָמַד, וְלֹא הַקַּפְדָּן מִלָּמַד.
One who is overly timid cannot learn and one who is overly impatient cannot teach. Pirkei Avot 2:5

3. We assume that everyone in our community has positive intentions.

יְהִי כְבוֹד חֲבֵרְךָ חֲבִיב עֲלֶיךָ כְּשֶׁלְּךָ.

Let the honor of those in your community be as dear to you as your own honor.

Pirkei Avot 2:10

וְהָיִי דֵן אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת.

Judge everyone according to the scale of merit. Pirkei Avot 1:6

4. We recognize the difference between intent and impact. It is possible to have positive intentions and still cause harm. We commit to finding ways to repair harm when we cause it. We are accountable for our mistakes and for their repair.

הָיִי מִתַּלְמִידָיו שֶׁל אַהֲרֹן, אוֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם.

Be like the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace.

Pirkei Avot 4:2

5. We expect and accept a lack of closure. We will strive for as much safety as possible for every person in our community. Community is messy and we will not be perfect, but we commit to calling upon our resilience and staying in relationship.

לֹא עָלֶיךָ הַמְּלָאכָה לְגַמְרָהּ, וְלֹא אַתָּה בֶּן חוּרִין לְבַטֵּל מִמֶּנָּה.

It is not up to you to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.

Pirkei Avot 2:1

This is a draft document presented to Dorshei Derekh on April 9, 2021. Feedback and comments are encouraged. Please send feedback to any member of the subcommittee: Elyse Wechterman (ewechterman@gmail.org); Andrea Jacobs (adreamj09@gmail.com); Beth Janus (bannejanus@me.com); Atenea Rosado (atenea.rosado@gmail.com) or David Mosenkis (dmosenkis@gmail.com)

Creating a Welcoming Community

Minyan Dorshei Derekh, Germantown Jewish Centre, Philadelphia, PA

Meeting each other and creating community with an open heart and mind

Human beings are social animals and cannot survive very long without community. We all seek belonging and connection. Community building lies at the heart of our identity as Jews, as Reconstructionists and as members of this minyan. And yet, we recognize that at this moment in our communal development, as we seek to build an anti-racist community and grow in our awareness of and embrace of the full diversity of the Jewish community, we are imperfect at creating the welcoming, inclusive, embracing space we desire.

In an effort toward teshuvah (repentance for past wrongs), haknassat orchim (welcoming guests); kavod habriot (honoring all of God's creation) and building what Martin Luther King Jr. called Beloved Community, we offer this guide for welcoming each other with open hearts and minds.

This guide is offered as a set of suggestions for meeting people you do not know well or for the first time. It is intended to help us all raise our awareness and begin to adopt better ways of being together, not to inhibit community building and interactions.

Engaging with a person whose name you don't remember, or you don't recognize...

Avoid saying...	Say instead...	Why?
Nothing. "Is this your first time here?" "Are you new?"	"I forget names sometimes - I'm ____." "Sorry, I don't remember your name - my name is ____." "How was this service/event/activity for you?" "How was your day?" Later in the conversation: "It's good to be with you here" (if	It is alienating to be ignored. Assuming someone is new, when they may not be, sends the message that they were not important enough to be noticed before. This person might come to Dorshei Derekh frequently; just not at the same time that you do. Offering your name and pronoun first models

	<p>you mean it!)</p> <p>Hello, my name is _____.</p> <p>And my pronouns are _____.</p>	welcoming behavior and normalizes this practice.
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Engaging with a person you don't know who may not appear white...

Avoid saying...	Say instead...	Why?
<p>"Are you Jewish?" or... "When did you convert?" or ... "Did you grow up Jewish?"</p> <p>"Let me introduce you to [insert name of another person of color]..."</p> <p>Are you related to (other person of color...)?</p> <p>Where are you from?</p> <p>You must be Ethiopian (or any other limiting prescriptive designation that assumes anything about a person.)</p> <p>Your English is so good? Or Where did you learn to speak English?</p> <p>Where did you learn to (davven, read Torah, speak Hebrew)?</p>	<p>"Sorry I don't remember your name - my name is ____" (or anything above!)</p> <p>Shabbat Shalom! I'm _____. Have you met _____(person standing next to you).</p> <p>Offer a prayer book, assume they are Jewish and Jewishly knowledgeable.</p> <p>I enjoyed your (davvening, Torah chanting, etc.) Thank you.</p>	<p>There are Jews of any and all races and ethnicities.</p> <p>It is alienating to make assumptions about people based on race.</p> <p>Many Black and brown congregants have experienced racism in Jewish communities, especially being treated like they "don't belong."</p> <p>Pigeonholing people based on skin-color, appearance, accent, or anything reduces people to stereotypes and doesn't recognize the diversity and complexity of each individual's identity and persona.</p> <p>Making assumptions about race, for example, assuming a Black person is African American when they could be African, Caribbean, European, and/or many identities is rude. (Same goes for all races, ethnicities, abilities, genders, etc).</p>

Engaging a person you don't know with a visible disability...

Avoid saying...	Say instead...	Why?
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<p>“How can I help you?”</p>	<p>“Sorry if we’ve met before - my name is ___ “ and schmooze away without assuming they need your help, trusting they will ask if they do.</p> <p>(Use any of the above suggestions)</p>	<p>The initial question focuses on a disability. The other focuses on the person.</p>
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Making announcements about a social justice issue...

Avoid saying...	Say instead...	Why?
<p>“I know we all agree it’s vital that ___ happen...”</p> <p>“If you care about this, you’ll ...”</p> <p>This may be too political, but....</p>	<p>“Some minyan members are doing ___, please join us...”</p> <p>“This is important to me because...”</p> <p>Find another place and time to mention it to personal friends</p>	<p>While we share common community values, the way we interpret those values varies.</p> <p>If you have to preface something with a concern that something is too political, it probably is. There are plenty of ways to engage people outside of formal minyan platforms.</p>

Connecting without classist assumptions.....

Avoid saying...	Say instead...	Why?
<p>“What do you do for a living?”</p> <p>“What is your major?” or...</p> <p>“Where did you go to college?”</p> <p>What do your parents do?</p> <p>What college are your kids attending?</p>	<p>“What are you interested in at Dorshei Derekh?”</p> <p>“How are you today?”</p> <p>“What interests/excites you/makes you curious these days?”</p> <p>What is something that you are enjoying doing these days?</p>	<p>Not all life trajectories are the same!</p> <p>Only 30% of Americans have a college degree, many are unemployed.</p> <p>People are more than their work life.</p>

Connecting without familial assumptions.....

Avoid saying...	Say instead...	Why?

<p>Where's your husband/wife/partner?</p> <p>How old are your kids?</p> <p>Which kids are yours?</p> <p>Are you married?</p>	<p>Anything from above.</p> <p>How are you today?</p>	<p>Not all life trajectories are the same!</p> <p>Making assumptions about people's marital status/family situation sends the message that the only way to be a Jewish adult is to be partnered and parenting, which is not the case for many members of our community.</p>
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When you don't know what pronoun to use for someone...

Avoid saying...	Instead...	Why?
<p>"Are you a boy or a girl?"</p> <p>"He's doing ____" (when you are unsure if the person uses "he").</p> <p>"What are you?"</p>	<p>Consider if it's important for you to know at all.</p> <p>Ask, "By the way, what pronouns do you use? I use ____ (she/her, they/them, etc)." If the pronoun is unfamiliar to you, google it later!</p> <p>Hi, I'm _____ and my pronouns are _____.</p> <p>Shabbat Shalom!</p>	<p>Do you need to use a pronoun for them, or is it your own discomfort with not knowing someone's gender identity? If you do need to use a pronoun, ask which ones without making it a big deal.</p> <p>Introducing yourself with your name and pronouns normalizes this practice for everyone.</p> <p>A sincere greeting and a smile are almost always welcome!</p>

When you use the wrong gender pronoun...

Avoid saying...	Say instead...	Why?
<p>"She is leading services...oh my goodness, HE. HE is leading services - Oh I am so sorry, I am really trying, it's</p>	<p>"She is leading services, I'm sorry, he is leading services..." and go on using the person's correct pronoun.</p>	<p>Drawing attention to your error makes it about you, when it's really about respecting the other person.</p>

just so hard for me..."		Try to work on it in private with someone who has agreed to help.
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Connecting with physical touch...

Avoid...	Say instead...	Why?
<p>Expecting a hug or a handshake or just "going for it" (when you are greeting adults OR kids).</p> <p>Insisting on hugs or kisses from young children.</p>	<p>"Are you in the mood for a hug?"</p> <p>"Can I offer you a hug?"</p> <p>It's reasonable for anyone to say "I'm good" or "No thank you!"</p> <p>Respect boundaries and personal space with your posture and proximity to others.</p>	<p>Asking before physically touching is part of consent culture; it's more respectful, and it feels good, too!</p> <p>We all have different comfort levels (and in some cases, religious practices) around physical touch.</p> <p>Children are also individuals with the right to bodily integrity.</p>

DO: Introduce yourself, Make friends, Be interested, Reach out, Respect boundaries

Adapted from Friends General Conference; Unitarian Universalist Association;
and Congregation Kol Tzedek

Drafted for Dorshei Derekh by Andrea Jacobs, Beth Janus, David Mosenkis, Atenea Rosado and Elyse Wechterman, February 2021

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Brit Briyut: Covenant Of Mutual Well-Being

Rabbi Yochanan, a renowned healer, fell ill. When his colleague, Rabbi Hanina came to visit, he asked if Rabbi Yochanan wished to be healed. Rabbi Yochanan said, "Yes." Rabbi Hanina said, "Give me your hand." When Rabbi Yochanan gave him his hand, he was uplifted (healed). Why was Rabbi Yochanan, who was so powerful at healing others, unable to simply heal himself? The rabbis explained: "Prisoners cannot free themselves from prison."

-Adapted from Talmud Berachot 5b

This teaching points to a fundamental and timely truth: **our health and well-being depend on our taking care of one another**. As our congregation prepares to resume gathering in-person in this new phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, we will be guided by this wisdom.

We ask that every CBH member enter into a *Brit Briyut*, a covenant for mutual well-being. A covenant is a sacred and solemn mutual agreement. *Brit Briyut* is based on these Jewish values:

- *Pikuah Nefesh*/ Preserving Life
- *Kol Yisrael Aravim Zeh Lah Zeh*/ Mutual Responsibility
- *Shivyon*/ Equity
- *Shalom Bayit*/ Communal Harmony

We affirm our obligation to:

- Protect one another by promoting public health policy and encouraging vaccination
- Act responsibly for our own well-being and that of our fellow congregants, guests, and staff
- Ensure that connection and participation are accessible to members of our community who are not able to join in-person

We therefore covenant with one another to ensure our mutual health and well-being.

Congregation Bet Haverim's board and staff commit to:

1. Continually solicit expert advice on measures to protect life and minimize risk to the health of our community.
2. Implement that advice through congregational Health and Well-Being Protocols that will be updated as needed in response to changing health conditions and scientific understanding. These protocols will be accessible on the CBH website.
3. Do what is necessary to make our physical spaces safe, and to facilitate multi-access experiences in which members can participate fully either on-site or online.

As a congregant, I shall:

1. Keep myself and others safe by following CBH Health and Well-Being Protocols.
2. Hold myself and others accountable for following Health and Well-Being Protocols.
3. Strive to maintain positive attitudes and speech regarding CBH's Health and Well-being Protocols, even when they pose an inconvenience.
4. Voluntarily assume all risks related to potential exposure to COVID-19 at CBH, holding the congregation harmless.

RRA Communication Guidelines and Standards for RRAnet and Social Media

Adopted by the RRA Board, August 6, 2020

Amended by the RRA Board, May 23, 2022

Background:

Universal agreement has never been a touchstone of Jewish life. Abraham and Moses argued with God, Nathan reprimanded David, the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai were known for their rivalry and the mystics disagreed with the rationalists. We have differences in theology and practice that go back millennia. Jewish life has not only survived internal disagreement but has often thrived on it.

Our tradition teaches that a dispute based on ego and self-interest is considered *lo lesheim shamayim*, “not for the sake of heaven,” and often bears bitter and divisive fruit. But a dispute based on moral principle in the pursuit of the common good is seen as *leshem shamayim*, “for the sake of heaven,” and bears sweet fruit in its time and beyond.

The RRAnet and the closed “RRA Members” Facebook group are tools for professionally, intellectually, and personally enriching the lives of Reconstructionist rabbis through supportive sharing of our questions, knowledge, and experience. Although the Internet can feel anonymous, many people read what you write and the digital record of your words cannot be easily erased. As Rav Israel Salanter wrote, “Be vigilant in protecting the honor of all people, especially those with whom you disagree.”

Following the model of our professional code of ethics, we agree to uphold these standards and guidelines in our electronic communications. Guidelines are strongly suggested collegial best practices. Standards are subject to action in accordance with the enforcement procedures detailed below.

Guidelines

- Sign your posts with your full name and your year/program of graduation.
- The online forums are for dialogue among RRA members. For RRA business and information, contact RRA staff members directly.
- Consider the frequency of your posts and practice *tzimtzum* to make space for other voices to join the conversation.
- Assume the good intention and integrity of our RRA colleagues; treat your colleagues and their remarks according to the teaching of *dan le-khaf zekhut*, even when we disagree.

- Partisan or overtly political speech should contain a disclaimer identifying the speech as representing the poster's personal opinions and not that of the RRA as an association. Posters of such speech should maintain an awareness that there is diversity among the RRA and not all members agree on all political issues.
- Concerns about a colleague's post should be dealt with directly offline to prevent *halbanat panim*.

Standards

- The RRAnet and Facebook group are confidential, and postings may not be forwarded without the poster's permission.
- Do not make *ad hominem* attacks. Restrict your comments to the topic and points of disagreement.

Enforcement Procedure:

1. Three monitors will be appointed by the executive committee to monitor the RRAnet and our closed Facebook group.
2. When a member of the monitor team identifies or is made aware of a post they deem to violate the guidelines and standards, the monitor will reach out to the rest of their team for a consultation. If there is consensus that the post is in violation, a member of the monitor team will reach out privately to the RRA member whose post violates the standard. If the offensive post was directly addressed to a person or group of individuals, the moderator will encourage the poster to initiate a teshuvah process.
3. In addition, when the monitor team determines that a violation has occurred, the monitors will repost this document to remind the group of our collective commitment to treating each other with *kavod*. The reposting of this document also serves as a signal to our regular readers that the transgressions of speech are being addressed.
4. A repeat or even egregious one-time offender will be referred to the RRA Executive Committee, which may decide to suspend this person from RRAnet and/or the Facebook group or remove them permanently from our online forums. The RRA Executive Committee (and others) retain the right to forward significant complaints to the Ethics Committee.
5. This document will be posted at least twice a year on all online forums and social media platforms.