

Civilly Speaking

A Curriculum on Civil Discourse

Curriculum by Joel Lurie Grishaver and Ira J. Wise

UNIT 1

Civil Discourse



The Covenant Foundation

UNIT 1: Civil Discourse

Learner's Handout for Grades 6 and 7



The human being was placed in the Garden of Eden to till it and to tend it.

Genesis 2:15

This is what the Holy One said to Israel: "My children, I have lacked for you nothing - what do I seek from you? I seek no more than that you love one another and honor one another and fear one another and that there should not be any sin, thievery, or harmful actions among you so that you do not come to invalidate the world."

Eliyahu Rabbah 26 [AJWS translation]

One must be careful not to embarrass another person in public, whether of greater or lesser stature, and not to call them by a name that they are ashamed of, and not to say in front of them something that they are embarrassed about. When does this apply? In regard to issues between one person and another.

Maimonides, Laws of Character 6:8

In 2016, two Chicago-area sportswriters, Julie DiCaro and Sarah Spain, decided to produce a video in response to the many vile comments – many through Twitter – that they had each received. For the video, they invited a group of men – who had not seen the tweets before – to read those tweets aloud to either DiCaro or Spain. Here are a few of the tweets that can be printed:

“One of the players should beat you to death with their hockey stick.”

“I hope your dog gets hit by a car, [expletive].”

“Hopefully this [expletive] Julie DiCaro is Bill Cosby’s next victim. That would be classic.”

“Why bring up your own rape in the story? Is it your way of firing back at critics who said you can’t get any?”

“You need to be hit in the head with a hockey puck and killed.”

“What is civil discourse? A 2011 conversation among national leaders from many fields, held at the U.S. Supreme Court, defined civil discourse as ‘robust, honest, frank and constructive dialogue and deliberation that seeks to advance the public interest’ (Brosseau 2011).

James Calvin Davis, in his book *In Defense of Civility*, proposes ‘the exercise of patience, integrity, humility, and mutual respect in civil conversation, even (or especially) with those with whom we disagree’ (2010, 159).

National Public Radio journalist Diane Rehm, during an event at Oberlin College, said simply: our ability to have conversation about topics about which we disagree, and our ability to listen to each other’s perspectives (Choby 2011).”

A Plea for Civil Discourse: Needed, the Academy’s Leadership by Andrea Leskes

UNIT 1: Civil Discourse

Leader's Guide for Grades 6 and 7

BIG IDEA

Learners will develop a working definition of civil discourse.

SET INDUCTION: 15 Minutes

1. Print out the following script and ask two participants to act it out:

Participant 1: (*surprised*) Hey! What do you think you are doing? I was here!

Participant 2: (*arrogant*) Too bad. You snooze, you lose.

Participant 1: (*angry*) I can't believe you are being a complete and total jerk about this. You have to wait your turn like everyone else!

Participant 2: (*dismissive*) You are a complete tool. You should have been paying attention. Now get lost!

Participant 1: (*angrier, but not louder*) You suck. You are a complete and total...

Participant 2: (*dismissive*) Loser.

2. Discussion:

- a. What did we just see? Was it a debate? An exchange of opposing views? Something else?
- b. What was positive about the interaction between these two people? What was troubling about it?
- c. Who started the name calling? Who went low first?
- d. Does it matter who started it?

TEXT STUDY: 20 Minutes

Distribute the Learner's Handout and tell the class that you will spend some time exploring the meaning of civil discourse through some Jewish texts. As the teacher, you will likely want to ask your own questions. However, here are a few questions to help get you started.

1. Cameron Kasky
This quote is provided as more of an introduction and a guiding principle, and less for initial discussion. We suggest returning to it when you summarize the entire session.
2. Genesis 2:15
 - a. What are the two jobs given to humans?
 - b. Is there a distinction between the two jobs?
 - c. Why do you think the distinction between creation (tilling) and maintenance (tending) is important?
 - d. How do these ideas help us begin to unpack how we can and should interact with one another?
 - e. How would you restate the purpose of human beings in modern terms?
3. *Eliyahu Rabbah* 26
 - a. Based on this text, what are the responsibilities of human beings?
 - b. What does this text add to your understanding of humanity's purpose?
 - c. What do you think the text means when it suggests that certain actions could invalidate the world? (Perhaps it suggests that a certain level of sin and incivility might make God regret the promise made to Noah through the rainbow or revisit the events of Sodom and Gomorrah.)
4. Maimonides, Laws of Character 6:8
 - a. Maimonides (RaMBaM) is narrowing our field of misbehavior. What concerns him in this text?
 - b. Why is he concerned about embarrassment or humiliation?

FORTY YEARS OF (UN)CIVIL DISCOURSE: 30 Minutes

1. Share the following story with your students: In 1978, Melissa Ludtke, a writer for *Sports Illustrated*, won a lawsuit against Bowie Kuhn, the commissioner of Major League Baseball. She had been prohibited from entering team locker rooms to interview players because she was a woman. At the time, the locker room was the only place teams made the players available for interviews immediately before and after games.

While Ludtke endured a great deal of verbal abuse from athletes, fans, and even fellow writers, the worst comments were condescending or sarcastic.

- a. What can you say about how people spoke and behaved 40 years ago?
 - b. Ludtke gave several interviews the last week of September 2018. In those interviews, she described having felt a lot of frustration and experienced a fair amount of meanness. But she did say her situation did not reach some of the lows of today.
2. Ludtke often refers people to DiCaro and Spain's video to get an idea of what things are like today. Although female reporters have greater access to athletes, civility in the larger society has not improved.
- a. The video is pretty rough for this age group. We recommend discussing the tweets on the student handout rather than showing the video. (We recommend showing the final minute of the video after the discussion of the tweets. See below.)
 - b. Some of the tweets are on the handout.
 - i. Are you surprised by the nature of the tweets?
 - ii. Could these same things have been said to Melissa Ludtke in 1978? Why or why not? (If the students answer yes, by whom could these things have been said?)
 - iii. What has changed in 40 years?
 - iv. One possibility that has been suggested is that the prevalence of social media has caused some changes. What do you think? (By giving us the opportunity to say what we think without looking anyone in the eye, we feel freer to say things that might otherwise embarrass us. Without the sense of others watching or listening, we might feel less pressure to fight our *yetzer ha-ra* – our evil impulse. Consequences may seem less real or apparent. Social media also lets us say things without the opportunity to proofread ourselves and think about what we sound like to others. Finally, sometimes we post or tweet when our judgment is impaired by lack of sleep or other factors.)
 - v. Do you think that the authors of the tweets would say those things to the faces of the women they sent them to?
 - vi. Show the last portion of the video produced from having men (not the authors of the tweets) read them to the two sports writers (3:25 to the end). Please preview it first!! It can be found at <https://youtu.be/9tU-D-m2JY8>.
 - vii. How did the men in the video (who had never seen the tweets before) seem to react to what they were reading?
 - viii. Discuss the difference between what you say online and what you would say face-to-face again.

CONCLUSION: A DEFINITION OF CIVIL DISCOURSE: 20 Minutes

1. Andrea Leskes presents us with three quotes. Read each quote and use the following questions as discussion prompts:
 - a. How does this quote help us define “civil discourse”?
 - b. How is every instance of “civil discourse” a statement of people’s purpose?
2. Return to Cameron Kasky’s quote in the tweet at the beginning of Unit 1. What do we need to remember in order to move forward as a society? (Note: Cameron is one of the students who survived the shootings at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School in February 2018. He currently works as an activist.)

UNIT 1: Civil Discourse

Learner's Handout for Grades 8 to 10



Cameron Kasky  @cameron_kasky · Sep 6

"Say what you believe, respect each other, and remember that everybody's opinion deserves listening to."

My Uber driver speaks more truth than many.

 29  215  1.9K 

The human being was placed in the Garden of Eden to till it and to tend it.

Genesis 2:15

This is what the Holy One said to Israel: "My children, I have lacked for you nothing - what do I seek from you? I seek no more than that you love one another and honor one another and fear one another and that there should not be any sin, thievery, or harmful actions among you so that you do not come to invalidate the world."

Eliyahu Rabbah 26 [AJWS translation]

One must be careful not to embarrass another person in public, whether of greater or lesser stature, and not to call them by a name that they are ashamed of, and not to say in front of them something that they are embarrassed about. When does this apply? In regard to issues between one person and another.

Maimonides, Laws of Character 6:8

In 2016, two Chicago-area sportswriters, Julie DiCaro and Sarah Spain, decided to produce a video in response to the many vile comments – many through Twitter – that they had each received. For the video, they invited a group of men – who had not seen the tweets before – to read those tweets aloud to either DiCaro or Spain. Here are a few of the tweets that can be printed:

“One of the players should beat you to death with their hockey stick.”

“I hope your dog gets hit by a car, [expletive].”

“Hopefully this [expletive] Julie DiCaro is Bill Cosby’s next victim. That would be classic.”

“Why bring up your own rape in the story? Is it your way of firing back at critics who said you can’t get any?”

“You need to be hit in the head with a hockey puck and killed.”

“What is civil discourse? A 2011 conversation among national leaders from many fields, held at the U.S. Supreme Court, defined civil discourse as ‘robust, honest, frank and constructive dialogue and deliberation that seeks to advance the public interest’ (Brosseau 2011).

James Calvin Davis, in his book *In Defense of Civility*, proposes ‘the exercise of patience, integrity, humility and mutual respect in civil conversation, even (or especially) with those with whom we disagree’ (2010, 159).

National Public Radio journalist Diane Rehm, during an event at Oberlin College, said simply: our ability to have conversation about topics about which we disagree, and our ability to listen to each other’s perspectives (Choby 2011).”

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UNIT 1: Civil Discourse

Leader's Guide for Grades 8 to 10

BIG IDEA

Learners will develop a working definition of civil discourse.

SET INDUCTION: 15 Minutes

1. Show the YouTube video of Dan Akroyd and Jane Curtin's Point/CounterPoint sketch. You can find it at <https://youtu.be/c91XUyg9iWM>. Depending on the age of your group, you may need to tell them that this clip ran on network television in 1979, the fourth season of *Saturday Night Live*.

Needless to say, each classroom, youth group, or setting is unique. In some settings, this clip will be deemed inappropriate. If so, go to the alternate set induction.

Alternate SET INDUCTION

Print out the following script and ask two participants to act it out:

Participant 1: (*surprised*) Hey! What do you think you are doing? I was here!

Participant 2: (*arrogant*) Too bad. You snooze, you lose.

Participant 1: (*angry*) I can't believe you are being a complete and total jerk about this. You have to wait your turn like everyone else!

Participant 2: (*dismissive*) You are a complete tool. You should have been paying attention. Now get lost!

Participant 1: (*angrier, but not louder*) You suck. You are a complete and total...

Participant 2: (*dismissive*) Loser.

2. Discussion:
 - a. What did we just see? Was it a debate? An exchange of opposing views? Something else?
 - b. What was positive about the interaction between these two people? What was troubling about it?
 - c. Who started the name calling? Who went low first?
 - d. Does it matter who started it?
 - e. (If you showed the SNL clip) How should Akroyd have responded (if he weren't a comedian

trying to get a laugh)?

TEXT STUDY: 20 Minutes

Distribute the handout and tell the students that you will spend some time exploring the meaning of civil discourse through some Jewish texts. As the teacher, you will likely want to ask your own questions. However, here are a few questions to help get you started.

Cameron Kasky

This quote is provided as more of an introduction and a guiding principle, and less for initial discussion. We suggest returning to it when you summarize the entire session.

1. Genesis 2:15
 - a. What are the two jobs given to humans?
 - b. Is there a distinction between the two jobs?
 - c. Why do you think the distinction between creation (tilling) and maintenance (tending) is important?
 - d. How do these ideas help us begin to unpack how we can and should interact with one another?
 - e. How would you restate the purpose of human beings in modern terms?
2. *Eliyahu Rabbah* 26
 - a. Based on this text, what are the responsibilities of human beings?
 - b. What does this text add to your understanding of humanity's purpose?
 - c. What do you think the text means when it suggests that certain actions could invalidate the world? (Perhaps it suggests that a certain level of sin and incivility might make God regret the promise made to Noah through the rainbow or revisit the events of Sodom and Gomorrah.)
3. Maimonides, Laws of Character 6:8
 - a. Maimonides (RaMBaM) is narrowing our field of misbehavior. What concerns him in this text?
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FORTY YEARS OF (UN)CIVIL DISCOURSE: 30 Minutes

1. Share the following story with your students: In 1978, Melissa Ludtke, a writer for *Sports Illustrated*, won a lawsuit against Bowie Kuhn, the commissioner of Major League Baseball. She had been prohibited from entering team locker rooms to interview players because she was a woman. At the time, the locker room was the only place teams made the players available for interviews immediately before and after games.

While Ludtke endured a great deal of verbal abuse from athletes, fans, and even fellow writers, the worst comments were condescending or sarcastic.

- a. What can you say about how people spoke and behaved 40 years ago?
 - b. (If you showed the SNL video) Was the language used by Dan Aykroyd and Jane Curtin normal speech, or was it considered funny because it was so outrageous? Did people talk that way normally? (You may have to be the voice of the past, and make it clear that this language was pretty outrageous. “Jane, You Ignorant Slut” may have been the first time the word “slut” was ever used on television. There were rules in place, both official and societal. This was jarring. And it was live.)
 - c. Ludtke gave several interviews the last week of September 2018. In those interviews, she described having felt a lot of frustration and experienced a fair amount of meanness. But she did say her situation did not reach some of the lows of today.
2. Ludtke often refers people to DiCaro and Spain’s video to get an idea of what things are like today. Although female reporters have greater access to athletes, civility in the larger society has not improved.
- a. Show the video. The whole thing is kind of rough. We recommend showing either from 1:43 to 2:33, or from 3:25 to the end. Please preview it first!! You can find the video at <https://youtu.be/9tU-D-m2JY8>. If you do not care to show either section of the video, just use the printed tweets.
 - b. Some of the tweets are on the Learner’s Handout.
 - i. (If you showed the video) How did the men in the video (who had never seen the tweets before) seem to react to what they were reading?
 - ii. Are you surprised by the nature of the tweets?
 - iii. Could these same things have been said to Melissa Ludtke in 1978? Why or why not? (If the students answer yes, by whom could these things have been said?)
 - iv. What has changed in 40 years?
 - v. One possibility that has been suggested is that the prevalence of social media has caused some changes. What do you think? (By giving us the opportunity to say what we think without looking anyone in the eye, we feel freer to say things that might otherwise embarrass us. Without the sense of others watching or listening, we might feel less pressure to fight our *yetzer ha-ra* – our evil impulse. Consequences may seem less real or apparent. Social media also lets us say things without the opportunity to proofread ourselves and think about what we sound like to others. Finally, sometimes we post or tweet when our judgment is impaired by lack of sleep or other factors.)

- vi. Do you think that the authors of the tweets would say those things to the faces of the women they sent them to?

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UNIT 1: Civil Discourse

Learner's Handout for Grade 11 to Adult

Our differences need not pull us apart. Disagreements and divides can be an opportunity to find common ground if we engage with respect and civility.

Rabbi Asher Lopatin

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Genesis 2:15

This is what the Holy One said to Israel: "My children, I have lacked for you nothing - what do I seek from you? I seek no more than that you love one another and honor one another and fear one another and that there should not be any sin, thievery, or harmful actions among you so that you do not come to invalidate the world."

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Maimonides, Laws of Character 6:8

Oh, to be in the desert,
At an encampment for wayfarers!
Oh, to leave my people,
To go away from them—
For they are all adulterers,
A band of rogues.

They bend their tongues like bows;
They are valorous in the land
For treachery, not for honesty;
They advance from evil to evil.
And they do not heed Me
—declares Adonai.

Beware, every man of his friend!
Trust not even a brother!
For every brother takes advantage,
Every friend is base in his dealings.

One man cheats the other,
They will not speak truth;
They have trained their tongues to speak falsely;
They wear themselves out committing sin.

Jeremiah 9:1-4

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- a. Maimonides (RaMBaM) is narrowing our field of misbehavior. What concerns him in this text?
 - b. Why is he concerned about embarrassment or humiliation?
4. Jeremiah 9:1-4
- a. Jeremiah presents a dark picture of humanity. (Remember that he prophesied the exile to Babylon (586 BCE)!) What does he add to our understanding of how we should treat one another?
 - b. What have we learned about the power of our words?

FORTY YEARS OF (UN)CIVIL DISCOURSE: 30 Minutes

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