

# Civilly Speaking

## A Curriculum on Civil Discourse

Curriculum by Joel Lurie Grishaver and Ira J. Wise

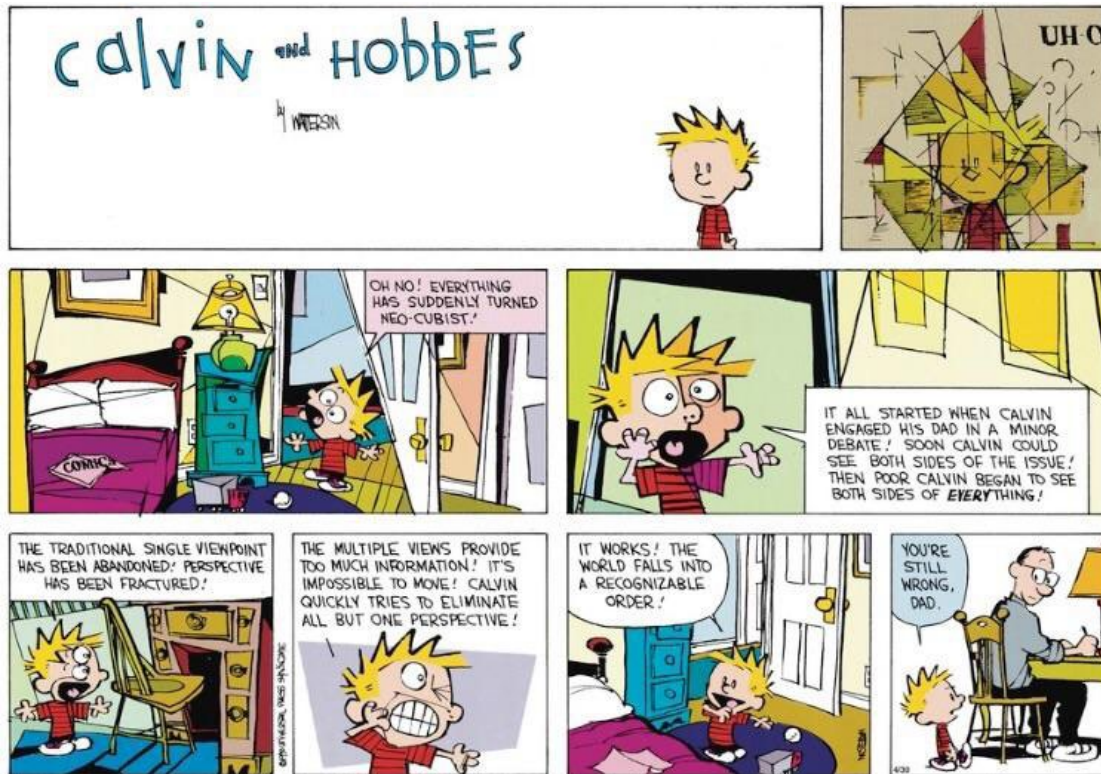
### UNIT 4

# Both are the Words of the Living God



The Covenant Foundation

## UNIT 4: Both are the Words of the Living God Learner's Handout for Grades 6 and 7



### *Fiddler on the Roof*

- Mendel: What's the matter with you? Why don't you ever bring us some good news?
- Avram: It's not my fault. I only read it. "An edict from the authorities."
- Innkeeper: May the authorities grow like onions, their heads in the ground.
- ALL: Amen!
- Perchik: What good will your cursing do? You stand around, you curse and you chatter, and you don't do anything. You'll all chatter your way into the grave.
- Mendel: Excuse me. You're not from this village.

Perchik: No.

Mendel: Where are you from?

Perchik: Kiev. I was a student in the university there.

Innkeeper: Tell me. Is that the place where you learned how not to respect your elders?

Perchik: That is where I learned there is more to life than talk. You should know about events in the outside world!

Avram: Careful, my paper.

Innkeeper: Why should I break my head about the outside world? Let the outside world break its own head.

Mendel: Well put!

Tevye: He is right. As the Good Book says, "If you spit in the air, it lands in your face."

Perchik: Nonsense. You can't close your eyes to what's happening in the world.

Tevye: He is right.

Avram: He's right and he's right? They can't both be right.

Tevye: You know, you are also right.

### ***Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 13b***

R. Abba stated in the name of Samuel: "Rabbi Abba said that Shmuel said: For three years *Beit Shammai* and *Beit Hillel* disagreed. These said: 'The *halakhah* is in accordance with our opinion,' and these said: 'The *halakhah* is in accordance with our opinion.' Ultimately, a Divine Voice emerged and proclaimed: 'Both these and those are the words of the living God. However, the *halakhah* is in accordance with the opinion of *Beit Hillel*.'

For three years there was an argument between *Beit Shammai* and *Beit Hillel*. These (*Beit Shammai*) said: 'The *halakhah* (law) is with us (it agrees with our opinion),' and these (*Beit Hillel*) said: 'The *halakhah* is with us (it agrees with our opinion).'

Finally, a *bat kol* (a heavenly voice) was heard to say: 'Both these AND these (*eilu v'eilu*) are the words of the living God, but the *halakhah* is in agreement with the rulings of *Beit Hillel*.'

Since, however, both are the words of the living God, what was it that entitled *Beit Hillel* to have the *halakhah* fixed in agreement with their rulings?

Because they were kindly and modest, they studied their own rulings and those of *Beit Shammai*, and were even so [humble] as to mention the actions of *Beit Shammai* before theirs."

1. Who were *Beit Hillel* and *Beit Shammai*? Based on this text, how would you describe each group?
2. What does “Both these AND these (*eilu v’eilu*) are the words of the living God” mean?
3. Why do you believe “the *halakhah* is in agreement with the rulings of *Beit Hillel*”?
4. What can you learn about civil discourse from this text?

## In Congress

The United States Constitution gives the House of Representatives the power to expel any member by a two-thirds vote. The House has other less severe measures with which to discipline members. Censure and reprimand are procedures in which the House may vote to express formal disapproval of a member’s conduct. Only a simple majority vote is required for a censure or a reprimand. Members who are censured must stand in the well of the House chamber to receive a reading of the censure resolution.

- William Stanbery was a U.S. Representative from Ohio. On July 11, 1832, he was censured for saying of Speaker Andrew Stevenson that his eye might be “too frequently turned from the chair you occupy toward the White House.”
- John Wood Hunter was a U.S. Representative from New York. On January 26, 1867, he was censured because he “insulted another member during debate.”
- Fernando Wood was a U.S. Representative from New York. On January 15, 1868, during debate on the floor of the House, Wood referred to a piece of legislation as “a monstrosity, a measure the most infamous of the many infamous acts of this infamous Congress.” An uproar immediately followed this utterance, and Wood was not permitted to continue and was censured.
- William Dallas Bynum was a U.S. Representative from Indiana. In 1890, he was censured for calling a Republican foe “a tyrant and despot.”

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## UNIT 4: Both are the Words of the Living God

### Leader's Guide for Grades 6 and 7

#### BIG IDEA

Civil discourse begins with the understanding that all people involved in a conversation must recognize that those with whom they disagree are also created in the divine image. Participants must also accept that those with whom they disagree have their own perspective and an honest belief in their position. For our discourse to be civil, we must believe that there may be more than one path to an acceptable outcome.

#### SET INDUCTION: 20 Minutes

Show the clip from *Fiddler on the Roof* in which the character Perchik is introduced. Depending on the learners in the room, you might prefer to have them act out part of the scene. If so, you will need to set up the scene to provide context.

Before you show the clip, ask the learners how many of them have seen the film or the play. If few have, you might want to explain that Perchik brings a new and different worldview into the *shtetl* of Anatevka. The men of the town are discussing news from the outside world, a place that they would prefer to avoid even though the events out there continue to impact their small community and the Jews of the world.

You can find the video on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/ZexzMtIaJck>.

After showing the clip, ask the following questions:

1. The men of Anatevka are hearing news of the world from a newspaper read by the resident intellectual, Avram. What is the attitude of the men toward the outside world?
2. What do you think about their attitude of preferring to ignore outside influences such as the government?
3. Are there people with similar attitudes in our world/country today? Do you agree or disagree with them?
4. Perchik is an outsider. He says: "What good will your cursing do? You stand around, you curse and you chatter, and you don't do anything. You'll all chatter your way into the grave." What is he trying to say? Do you agree with him?
5. Perchik also says "...I learned there is more to life than talk. You should know about events in the outside world!" Do you agree or disagree with him? What do you do to make sure you know about such events?
6. What does Perchik think this group of people should do?
7. Why does Tevye say that both the innkeeper and Perchik are right? Can they both be right? Why or why not?

## TEXT STUDY: 30 Minutes

### *Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 13b*

Divide the class into pairs or triads and ask them to read the text together.

Have each group discuss their answers to the questions that appear on the Learner's Handout (repeated below for the leader/teacher). Ask each group to write the answers they come up with on the handout.

1. Who were *Beit Hillel* and *Beit Shammai*? Based on this text, how would you describe each group?
2. What does "Both these AND these (*eilu v'eilu*) are the words of the living God" mean?
3. Why do you believe "The *halakhah* is in agreement with the rulings of *Beit Hillel*"?
4. What can you learn about civil discourse from this text?

Bring the group back together and discuss their answers. The following text may inform how you lead that conversation.

*Netivot Olam* is a book that outlines the way to live an ethical life. It is composed of 33 *netivot* (pathways) that include topics such as humility, the proper use of speech, and love of God. It was written by the Maharal of Prague (Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel) sometime between 1575 and 1595 CE.

For what reason did *Beit Hillel* deserve that the *halakhah* be established according to their opinion? **Because they were calm, and even when they were insulted, and they would teach both their teachings and the teachings of the *Beit Shammai*...**

...And don't say that *Beit Shammai* weren't wise; on the contrary, they were very wise and intellectually sharp. Only in the area of *halakhah*, which is the straight path, does it follow the view of *Beit Hillel*, because they were masters of calmness who never wavered from that disposition. Even when they were insulted, they still taught their words and the words of their friends. And all of this refers to being completely calm, for in the case of other people, when someone says something to him, he is quick to become angry and insult the person who insulted him. But in the case of *Beit Hillel*, they were masters of calmness and did not insult even someone who insulted them.

...And so too when they taught their teachings and the teachings of *Beit Shammai*. Furthermore, they would put *Beit Shammai's* teachings before their own. In all of these matters, they were disciplined in their actions; they were not from the group of the highly competitive against their friends, but they were from the group that succeeds.

*Netivot Olam, Netiv HaKaas, Chapter 1*

## CASE STUDY: 30 Minutes

### In Congress

We have made a deliberate effort to avoid current political speech in this curriculum, even though the overall tenor of our times is what prompted us to create it in the first place. Our goal is to avoid any appearance of partisanship that might lead schools or teachers to decide not to implement these lessons. Examples of *uncivil* discourse can certainly be found on all sides of most issues today. Each institution must provide appropriate guidelines on how to look at and present those issues. Our hope is that you will be able to apply the learning here to current events easily and successfully.

This activity digs deep into American political history to find issues with civil discourse that might help us engage in the conversation without partisanship. Feel free to adapt it to the current day!

1. Describe the idea and process of censure in the Congress of the United States. Tell the learners that only 28 Representatives and 10 Senators have ever been censured. Only a few were chastised in this way for violations of the standards of civil discourse of either house of Congress; most were censured for criminal acts or abuse of power.

“The United States Constitution gives the House of Representatives the power to expel any member by a two-thirds vote. The House has other less severe measures with which to discipline members. Censure and reprimand are procedures in which the House may vote to express formal disapproval of a member’s conduct. Only a simple majority vote is required for a censure or reprimand. Members who are censured must stand in the well of the House chamber to receive a reading of the censure resolution.”

2. Share the following Rules of Decorum & Debate in the House (which only apply when on the floor of the House).

#### **Members must:**

- o Address themselves solely and directly to the Chair. They may not address other Members, individuals in the gallery, or persons who might be observing through the media.
- o Refer to Members by state, not by name (as in the Representative from Iowa).
- o Avoid characterizing another Member’s personal intent or motives and discussing personalities.
- o Refrain from speaking disrespectfully of the Speaker, other Members, the President, or Vice President.
- o Refrain from referring to the official conduct of other Members where such conduct is not under consideration by way of a report of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct or as a question of the privilege of the House.
- o Refrain from referring to the specific votes of individual Senators.
- o Refrain from using profane or vulgar language.

- o Avoid walking in the well when a Member is speaking.
  - o Ensure that all handouts distributed on the floor or in adjacent rooms comport with the rules of propriety for spoken words, and that all handouts bear the name of the authorizing Member.
  - o Refrain from eating, smoking, or using electronic equipment, including cellular phones or laptop computers, on the floor.
  - o Wear appropriate business attire.
3. Invite four students to each read one of the descriptions of the censured representatives.
  4. After each one is read, ask the following questions:
    - a. What did the censured representative say?
    - b. Why do you think he said it?
    - c. Why do you think he was censured for saying what he said?
    - d. What principle do you think is at stake?
  5. After the final case is read, ask the following questions about these Congressional standards of discourse:
    - a. Why do you think Congress felt the need to create rules of debate?
    - b. Should we have rules about speech in public?
    - c. What about the First Amendment?  
(Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or **abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.**)



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## UNIT 4: Both are the Words of the Living God

### Learner's Handout for Grades 8 to 10



### *Fiddler on the Roof*

- Mendel: What's the matter with you? Why don't you ever bring us some good news?
- Avram: It's not my fault. I only read it. "An edict from the authorities."
- Innkeeper: May the authorities grow like onions, their heads in the ground.
- ALL: Amen!
- Perchik: What good will your cursing do? You stand around, you curse and you chatter, and you don't do anything. You'll all chatter your way into the grave.
- Mendel: Excuse me. You're not from this village.
- Perchik: No.
- Mendel: Where are you from?
- Perchik: Kiev. I was a student in the university there.
- Innkeeper: Tell me. Is that the place where you learned how not to respect your elders?
- Perchik: That is where I learned there is more to life than talk. You should know about events in the outside world!
- Avram: Careful, my paper.
- Innkeeper: Why should I break my head about the outside world? Let the outside world break its own head.
- Mendel: Well put!
- Teveye: He is right. As the Good Book says, "If you spit in the air, it lands in your face."

Perchik: Nonsense. You can't close your eyes to what's happening in the world.  
Teveye: He is right.  
Avram: He's right and he's right? They can't both be right.  
Teveye: You know, you are also right.

### ***Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 13b***

R. Abba stated in the name of Samuel: "Rabbi Abba said that Shmuel said: For three years *Beit Shammai* and *Beit Hillel* disagreed. These said: 'The *halakhah* is in accordance with our opinion,' and these said: 'The *halakhah* is in accordance with our opinion.' Ultimately, a Divine Voice emerged and proclaimed: 'Both these and those are the words of the living God. However, the *halakhah* is in accordance with the opinion of *Beit Hillel*.'

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Finally, a *bat kol* (a heavenly voice) was heard to say: 'Both these AND these (*eilu v'eilu*) are the words of the living God, but the *halakhah* is in agreement with the rulings of *Beit Hillel*.'

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2. What does "Both these AND these (*eilu v'eilu*) are the words of the living God" mean?
3. Why do you believe "the *halakhah* is in agreement with the rulings of *Beit Hillel*"?
4. What can you learn about civil discourse from this text?

### ***Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, The Dignity of Difference, pp. 64-65***

Truth on earth is not, nor can be, the whole truth. It is limited, not comprehensive; particular, not universal. When two propositions conflict, it is not necessarily because one is true the other false. It may be, and often is, that each represents a different perspective on reality, an alternative way of structuring order, no more and no less commensurable than a Shakespeare sonnet, a Michelangelo painting, or a Schubert sonata. In heaven there is truth; on earth there are truths.

Therefore, each culture has something to contribute. Each person knows something no one else does. The sages said: "Who is wise? One who learns from all men." The wisest is not one who knows himself wiser

than others: he is one who knows all men have some share of the truth, and is willing to learn from them, for none of us knows all the truth and each of us knows some of it.

## **In Congress**

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## UNIT 4: Both are the Words of the Living God

### Leader's Guide for Grades 8 to 10

#### BIG IDEA

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Before you show the clip, ask the learners how many of them have seen the film or the play. If few have, you might want to explain that Perchik brings a new and different worldview into the *shtetl* of Anatevka. The men of the town are discussing news from the outside world, a place that they would prefer to avoid even though the events out there continue to impact their small community and the Jews of the world.

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4. Perchik is an outsider. He says: "What good will your cursing do? You stand around, you curse and you chatter, and you don't do anything. You'll all chatter your way into the grave." What is he trying to say? Do you agree with him?
5. Perchik also says "...I learned there is more to life than talk. You should know about events in the outside world!" Do you agree or disagree with him? What do you do to make sure you know about such events?
6. What does Perchik think this group of people ought to do?
7. Why does Tevye say that both the innkeeper and Perchik are right? Can they both be right? Why or why not?

## TEXT STUDY: 45 Minutes

### *Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 13b*

Divide the class into pairs or triads and ask them to read the text together.

Have each group discuss their answers to the questions that appear on the Learner's Handout (repeated below for the leader/teacher). Ask each group to write the answers they come up with on the handout.

1. Who were *Beit Hillel* and *Beit Shammai*? Based on this text, how would you describe each group?
2. What does "Both these AND these (*eilu v'eilu*) are the words of the living God" mean?
3. Why do you believe "The *halakhah* is in agreement with the rulings of *Beit Hillel*"?
4. What can you learn about civil discourse from this text?

Bring the group back together and discuss their answers. The following text may inform how you lead that conversation.

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*Netivot Olam, Netiv HaKaas, Chapter 1*

## Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, pp. 64-65

Ask the learners to read the text by Rabbi Sacks that appears on the Learner's Handout. They can do so individually, in pairs, or with one person reading the text out loud.

(Note: For many years, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks was the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain. As such, he is a member of the House of Lords. He is also an extremely highly regarded theologian. Rabbi Sacks self-identifies as Modern Orthodox.)

Then ask the learners to answer the following questions:

1. What do you think Rabbi Sacks is trying to say about truth?
2. Is he saying that there is no right or wrong? Correct or incorrect?
3. How can two seemingly opposed ideas both be true in some way?
4. What can we learn about wisdom from this passage by Rabbi Sacks? What is he trying to say by quoting the sages?

## CASE STUDY: 30 Minutes

### In Congress

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## UNIT 4: Both are the Words of the Living God

### Learner's Handout for Grade 11 to Adult



### *Fiddler on the Roof*

- Mendel: What's the matter with you? Why don't you ever bring us some good news?
- Avram: It's not my fault. I only read it. "An edict from the authorities."
- Innkeeper: May the authorities grow like onions, their heads in the ground.
- ALL: Amen!
- Perchik: What good will your cursing do? You stand around, you curse and you chatter, and you don't do anything. You'll all chatter your way into the grave.
- Mendel: Excuse me. You're not from this village.
- Perchik: No.
- Mendel: Where are you from?
- Perchik: Kiev. I was a student in the university there.
- Innkeeper: Tell me. Is that the place where you learned how not to respect your elders?
- Perchik: That is where I learned there is more to life than talk. You should know about events in the outside world!
- Avram: Careful, my paper.
- Innkeeper: Why should I break my head about the outside world? Let the outside world break its own head.
- Mendel: Well put!
- Tevye: He is right. As the Good Book says, "If you spit in the air, it lands in your face."
- Perchik: Nonsense. You can't close your eyes to what's happening in the world.



Teveye: He is right.  
Avram: He's right and he's right? They can't both be right.  
Teveye: You know, you are also right.

### **Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 13b**

R. Abba stated in the name of Samuel: "Rabbi Abba said that Shmuel said: For three years *Beit Shammai* and *Beit Hillel* disagreed. These said: 'The *halakhah* is in accordance with our opinion,' and these said: 'The *halakhah* is in accordance with our opinion.' Ultimately, a Divine Voice emerged and proclaimed: 'Both these and those are the words of the living God. However, the *halakhah* is in accordance with the opinion of *Beit Hillel*.'

For three years there was an argument between *Beit Shammai* and *Beit Hillel*. These (*Beit Shammai*) said: 'The *halakhah* (law) is with us (it agrees with our opinion),' and these (*Beit Hillel*) said: 'The *halakhah* is with us (it agrees with our opinion).'

Finally, a *bat kol* (a heavenly voice) was heard to say: 'Both these AND these (*eilu v'eilu*) are the words of the living God, but the *halakhah* is in agreement with the rulings of *Beit Hillel*.'

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1. Who were *Beit Hillel* and *Beit Shammai*? Based on this text, how would you describe each group?
2. What does "Both these AND these (*eilu v'eilu*) are the words of the living God" mean?
3. Why do you believe "the *halakhah* is in agreement with the rulings of *Beit Hillel*"?
4. What can you learn about civil discourse from this text?

### **Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, *The Book of Jewish Values: A Day-By-Day Guide to Jewish Living*, pp. 186-187**

Significantly, the heavenly voice ruled in favor of Hillel and his disciples, even in areas of ritual dispute, for moral reasons: he and his followers were "kindly and humble."

The wording of the passage suggests that Shammai's followers had grown somewhat arrogant. Certain that they possessed the truth, they no longer bothered to listen to, or discuss the arguments of, their opponents. Their overbearing self-confidence led them to become morally less impressive (the language of the *Talmud* suggests by implication that they were not "kindly and humble") and probably led them to become intellectually less insightful (after all, how insightful can you be if you are studying only one side of the issue?)

Because the School of Hillel studied their opponent's arguments, when they issued a ruling, they were fully cognizant of all the arguments to be offered against their own position. Thus, their humility not only led to their being more pleasant people, but also likely caused them to have greater intellectual depth.

We can all learn a lesson from the behavior of Hillel and his followers: Don't read only books and publications that agree with and reinforce your point of view. If you do so, and many people do, you will never learn what those who disagree with you believe (at best, you will hear a caricature of their position, presented by people who, like you, disagree with it). It would be a good thing in Jewish life if Jews in the different denominations, or in different political camps, started reading newspapers and magazines of the groups with which they disagree, on a regular basis.

If you seldom hear, read, or listen to views that oppose your own, and if almost everyone you talk to sees the world just as you do, your thinking will grow flabby and intolerant. That is often the case with ideologies on the right and left, both in religion and in politics.

As this text teaches us, humble people are not only more pleasant human beings, but in the final analysis, they may well be the only ones who will have something eternally important to teach.

### **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, pp. 64-65**

Truth on earth is not, nor can be, the whole truth. It is limited, not comprehensive; particular, not universal. When two propositions conflict it is not necessarily because one is true the other false. It may be, and often is, that each represents a different perspective on reality, an alternative way of structuring order, no more and no less commensurable than a Shakespeare sonnet, a Michelangelo painting, or a Schubert sonata. In heaven there is truth; on earth there are truths.

Therefore, each culture has something to contribute. Each person knows something no one else does. The sages said: "Who is wise? One who learns from all men." The wisest is not one who knows himself wiser than others: he is one who knows all men have some share of the truth, and is willing to learn from them, for none of us knows all the truth and each of us knows some of it.

### **In Congress**

The United States Constitution gives the House of Representatives the power to expel any member by a two-thirds vote. The House has other less severe measures with which to discipline members. Censure and reprimand are procedures in which the House may vote to express formal disapproval of a member's conduct. Only a simple majority vote is required for a censure or reprimand. Members who are censured must stand in the well of the House chamber to receive a reading of the censure resolution.

- William Stanbery was a U.S. Representative from Ohio. On July 11, 1832, he was censured for saying of Speaker Andrew Stevenson that his eye might be "too frequently turned from the chair you occupy toward the White House."
- John Wood Hunter was a U.S. Representative from New York. On January 26, 1867, he was censured because he "insulted another member during debate."
- Fernando Wood was a U.S. Representative from New York. On January 15, 1868, during debate on the

floor of the House, Wood referred to a piece of legislation as “a monstrosity, a measure the most infamous of the many infamous acts of this infamous Congress.” An uproar immediately followed this utterance, and Wood was not permitted to continue and was censured.

- William Dallas Bynum was a U.S. Representative from Indiana. In 1890, he was censured for calling a Republican foe “a tyrant and despot.”

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## UNIT 4: Both are the Words of the Living God

### Leader's Guide for Grade 11 to Adult

#### BIG IDEA

Civil discourse begins with the understanding that all people involved in the conversation must recognize that those with whom they disagree are also created in the divine image. Participants must also accept that those with whom they disagree have their own perspective and an honest belief in their position. For our discourse to be civil, we must believe that there may be more than one path to an acceptable outcome.

#### SET INDUCTION: 20 Minutes

Show the clip from *Fiddler on the Roof* in which the character Perchik is introduced. Before you show it, ask the learners how many of them have seen the film or the play. If few have, you might want to explain that Perchik brings a new and different world view into the *shtetl* of Anatevka. The men of the town are discussing news from the outside world, a place that they would prefer to avoid even though the events out there continue to impact their small community and the Jews of the world.

You can find the video on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/ZexzMtIaJck>.

After showing the clip, ask the following questions:

1. The men of Anatevka are hearing news of the world from a newspaper read by the resident intellectual, Avram. What is the attitude of the men toward the outside world?
2. What do you think about their attitude of preferring to ignore outside influences such as the government?
3. Are there people with similar attitudes in our world/country today? Do you agree or disagree with them?
4. Perchik is an outsider. He says: "What good will your cursing do? You stand around, you curse and you chatter, and you don't do anything. You'll all chatter your way into the grave." What is he trying to say? Do you agree with him?
5. Perchik also says "...I learned there is more to life than talk. You should know about events in the outside world!" Do you agree or disagree with him? What do you do to make sure you know about such events?
6. What does Perchik think this group of people should do?
7. Why does Tevye say that both the innkeeper and Perchik are right? Can they both be right? Why or why not?

## TEXT STUDY: 50 Minutes

### *Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 13b*

Divide the class into pairs or triads and ask them to read the text together.

Have each group discuss their answers to the questions that appear on the Learner's Handout (repeated below for the leader/teacher).

1. Who were *Beit Hillel* and *Beit Shammai*? Based on this text, how would you describe each group?
2. What does "Both these AND these (*eilu v'eilu*) are the words of the living God" mean?
3. Why do you believe "the *halakhah* is in agreement with the rulings of *Beit Hillel*"?
4. What can you learn about civil discourse from this text?

Bring the full group back together and discuss their answers. The following text may inform how you lead that conversation.

*Netivot Olam* is a book that outlines the way to live an ethical life. It is composed of 33 *netivot* (paths) that include topics such as humility, the proper use of speech, and love of God. It was written by the Maharal of Prague (Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel) sometime between 1575 and 1595 CE.

For what reason did *Beit Hillel* deserve that the *halakhah* be established according to their opinion? **Because they were calm, and even when they were insulted, and they would teach both their teachings and the teachings of the *Beit Shammai*...**

...And don't say that *Beit Shammai* weren't wise; on the contrary, they were very wise and intellectually sharp. Only in the area of *halakhah*, which is the straight path, does it follow the view of *Beit Hillel*, because they were masters of calmness who never wavered from that disposition. Even when they were insulted, they still taught their words and the words of their friends. And all of this refers to being completely calm, for in the case of other people, when someone says something to him, he is quick to become angry and insult the person who insulted him. But in the case of *Beit Hillel*, they were masters of calmness and did not insult even someone who insulted them.

...And so too when they taught their teachings and the teachings of *Beit Shammai*. Furthermore, they would put *Beit Shammai's* teachings before their own. In all of these matters, they were disciplined in their actions; they were not from the group of the highly competitive against their friends, but they were from the group that succeeds.

*Netivot Olam, Netiv HaKaas, Chapter 1*

### **Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, *The Book of Jewish Values: A Day-By-Day Guide to Jewish Living*, pp. 186-187**

Once you have completed the group discussion of the preceding text, ask participants to read the commentary of Rabbi Telushkin that appears on the Learner's Handout. Select learners to each read two paragraphs aloud. Before the next reader begins, ask the group to comment on whether anything Rabbi Telushkin says resonates with them or leads them to a new or clearer understanding of the *Talmud* passage. If the answer is yes, ask them to share how it does so.

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, pp. 64-65**

Ask the learners to read the text by Rabbi Sacks that appears on the Learner’s Handout. They can do so individually, in pairs, or with one person reading the text aloud.

(Note: For many years, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks was the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain. As such, he is a member of the House of Lords. He is also an extremely highly regarded theologian. Rabbi Sacks self-identifies as Modern Orthodox.)

Then ask the learners to answer the following questions:

1. What do you think Rabbi Sacks is trying to say about truth?
2. Is he saying that there is no right or wrong? Correct or incorrect?
3. How can two seemingly opposed ideas both be true in some way?
4. What can we learn about wisdom from this passage by Rabbi Sacks? What is he trying to say by quoting the sages?

**CASE STUDY: 30 Minutes**

**In Congress**

We have made a deliberate effort to avoid current political speech in this curriculum, even though the overall tenor of our times is what prompted us to create it in the first place. Our goal is to avoid any appearance of partisanship that might lead schools or teachers to decide not to implement these lessons. Examples of *uncivil* discourse can certainly be found on all sides of most issues today. Each institution must provide appropriate guidelines on how to look at and present those issues. Our hope is that you will be able to apply the learning here to current events easily and successfully.

This activity digs deep into American political history to find issues with civil discourse that might help us engage in the conversation without partisanship. Feel free to adapt it to the current day!

1. Describe the idea and process of censure in the Congress of the United States. Tell the learners that only 28 Representatives and 10 Senators have ever been censured. Only a few were chastised in this way for violations of the standards of civil discourse of either house of Congress; most were censured for criminal acts or abuse of power.

“The United States Constitution gives the House of Representatives the power to expel any member by a two-thirds vote. The House has other less severe measures with which to discipline members. Censure and reprimand are procedures in which the House may vote to express formal disapproval of a member’s conduct. Only a simple majority vote is required for a censure or reprimand. Members who are censured must stand in the well of the House chamber to receive a reading of the censure resolution.”

2. Share the following Rules of Decorum & Debate in the House (which only apply when on the floor of the House).

**Members must:**

- o Address themselves solely and directly to the Chair. They may not address other Members, individuals in the gallery, or persons who might be observing through the media.
  - o Refer to Members by state, not by name (as in the Representative from Iowa).
  - o Avoid characterizing another Member's personal intent or motives and discussing personalities.
  - o Refrain from speaking disrespectfully of the Speaker, other Members, the President, or the Vice President.
  - o Refrain from referring to the official conduct of other Members where such conduct is not under consideration by way of a report of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct or as a question of the privilege of the House.
  - o Refrain from referring to the specific votes of individual Senators.
  - o Refrain from using profane or vulgar language.
  - o Avoid walking in the well when a Member is speaking.
  - o Ensure that all handouts distributed on the floor or in adjacent rooms comport with the rules of propriety for spoken words, and that all handouts bear the name of the authorizing Member.
  - o Refrain from eating, smoking, or using electronic equipment, including cellular phones or laptop computers, on the floor.
  - o Wear appropriate business attire.
2. Invite four students to each read one of the descriptions of the censured Representatives.
3. After each one is read, ask the following questions:
- a. What did the censured representative say?
  - b. Why do you think he said it?
  - c. Why do you think he was censured for saying what he said?
  - d. What principle do you think is at stake?
4. After the final case is read, ask the following questions about these Congressional standards of discourse.
- a. Why do you think Congress felt the need to create rules of debate?
  - b. Should we have rules about speech in public?
  - c. What about the First Amendment?  
(Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; **or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.**)

## ***Bamidbar Rabbah 21:2***

The following *midrash* might be a nice way to end the session. If you have several visual learners, we suggest that you either project it or write it on a board.

The law is: If one sees many thousands of people, one should say: Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Wise One who knows secrets, just as their faces are different from one another's, so too their understandings are different, for each one has a different understanding...and so too Moses requested from God, when he died. He said: Master of the Universe! Every person's thoughts are known and revealed before you, and none of your children's thoughts are similar to another's. When I die, please appoint a leader who can sustain them all according to their own understanding...

We expect the *midrash* to lead to a great deal more conversation....





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