

Civilly Speaking

A Curriculum on Civil Discourse

Curriculum by Joel Lurie Grishaver and Ira J. Wise

UNIT 6

It's NOT Just HOW You Say It (Truth Matters)



The Covenant Foundation

UNIT 6: It's NOT Just HOW You Say It (Truth Matters) Learner's Handout for Grade 6 to Adult



You must not carry false rumors; you shall not join hands with the guilty to act as a malicious witness:

Exodus 23:1

“You must not carry false rumors” – Take it as the Targum renders it: You shalt not accept (listen to) a false report. This is a prohibition addressed to one who is about to accept a slanderous statement, and it is addressed also to a judge – that he should not hear the pleadings of one party to a suit before the other appears (*Mekhilta d’Rabbi Yishmael 23:1:1; Sanhedrin 7b*).

Rashi on Exodus 23:1:1

(א) לא תשא שמע שוא אל-תִּשָׂא יָדְךָ עִם-רָשָׁע לְהִיט עַד הַמָּס:
שמות כ”ג:א’

לא תשא שמע שוא: בתרגומו לא תקבל שמע דשקר, אזהרה
למקבל לשון הרע, ולדיין, שלא ישמע דברי בעל דין עד שיבא
בעל דין חבירו:

רש”י על שמות כ”ג:א’:

Wikipedia

Lyrics by Hanan Ben Ari and Keren Peles, Music by Hanan Ben Ari

How easy it is to go along with your brain on automatic –
a condition that doesn't demand effort
Just to tag and bark¹, to distract and to sacrifice as much
as you can to the rating² gods
Everything is already arranged in our heads,
drawer upon drawer.
We cannot be bothered by reality to see that every leftist
is a traitor; every Arab is a suicide bomber,
Every Haredi is a thief and all settlers murdered Rabin,
All Tel-Aviv is vegan, All Netivot³ is a folk traditional,
All the orthodox are primitives in tzitzit and
deleted Darwin along the way.

Don't lock me up in a cage
Don't sum me up in Wikipedia
I am everything, I am nothing at all
Eternal⁴ light dressed in a body
So don't lock me up in no cage

Call me a Don Quixote that dares to challenge,
Put a price on my head and guillotine me in the square
The time of the demons is past and the king is naked
Erase everything you knew about me up to now
No, I am not the settler; I am not God's representative,
Not a frummer⁵ who excludes women,
not a bridge between the sectors
The sectors can burn, burn up all prejudice
May everyone have a chance to write their own story
Because if everything is already known And revealed
cliché by cliché.
Let's not allow reality to disturb us from seeing
That every Mizrahi⁶ is discriminated against, Every
secular person is a dirty blasphemer,
All the women should go to the kitchen and All the
Russians – the Russians love Stalin!
All the extremes have already been, All members of
Knesset are bribe-accepting vermin,
All the Ethiopians are runners And those that don't sing
with (Idan) Reichel

Don't lock me up in a cage
Don't sum me up in Wikipedia
I am everything, I am nothing at all
Eternal⁴ light dressed in a body
So don't lock me up in no cage

The day will yet come...

The day will come
when you won't lock me up in any cage
You won't summarize me on Wikipedia
I am everything, I am nothing at all
I came naked and so I will return
So don't lock me in any cage
You will not lock me in any cage

כמה נוח לזרום עם המוח בהתניות אוטומטיות שלא דורשות
לטרוד
רק לתייג ולנבוח, להסית ולזבוח לאילי הרייטינג אייטמים בכל
הכוח
הכול כבר מסודר לנו בראש מגירות-מגירות
לא ניתן למציאות להפריע לנו לראות
שכל שמאלני הוא בוגד, כל ערבי מחבל מתאבד
כל חרדי הוא שודד וכל המתנחלים רצחו את רבין
כל תל אביב טבעונית, כל נתיבות מסורתית עממית,
כל הדתיים פרימיטיביים עם ציצית ועל הדרך מחקו את דארווין.

אל תכלאוני בשום כלוב
אל תסכמו אותי בויקיפדיה
אני הכול, אני לא-כלום
אור אינסוף לבוש בגוף
אז אל תכלאוני בשום כלוב

תקראו לי דון קישוט שמעז לקרוא תיגר
שימו לי פרס על הראש וגילויטינה בכיכר
השדים זמנם עבר והמלך הוא עירום
תמחקו את כל מה שידעתם עליי עד היום
לא אני לא המתנחל, לא נציג של אלוהים
לא דוס שמדיר נשים, לא גשר בין המגזרים
יישרפו המגזרים, תשרפו דעות קדומות
לכל אחד יהיה סיכוי לכתוב את הסיפור שלו
כי אם הכול גלוי וידוע מראש קלישאות-קלישאות
לא ניתן למציאות להפריע לנו לראות
שכל מזרחי מקופה, כל חילוני הוא כופר מלוכלך
כל הנשים למטבח וכל הרוסים הרוסים על סטאלין
כלו כבר כל הקיצים, כל חבר כנסת קופה של שרצים
כל האתיופים רצים ואלו שלא שרים עם רייכל

אל תכלאוני בשום כלוב
אל תסכמו אותי בויקיפדיה
אני הכול, אני לא-כלום
אור אינסוף לבוש בגוף
אז אל תכלאוני בשום כלוב

עוד יבוא יום...

יום יבוא ולא תכלאוני בשום כלוב
לא תסכמו אותי בויקיפדיה
אני הכול, אני לא-כלום
עירום באתי ואשוב
אז אל תכלאוני בשום כלוב
לא תכלאוני בשום כלוב

- 1 **tag and bark** – add a hashtag or tag an image and use all caps to make a point
- 2 **item ratings** – Likes and emojis
- 3 **Netivot** – a town in southern Israel that was initially a refugee and absorption camp for immigrants from Morocco and Tunisia. For many years, Netivot suffered from high unemployment. It was also home to the tomb of the Baba Sali, a Moroccan-born kabbalist.
- 4 **Eternal** – The Hebrew here is *Ein Sof*, the name of the highest sphere of the Kabbalistic tree of life.
- 5 **frummer** – an Orthodox Jew, possibly Haredi (ultra-Orthodox)
- 6 **Mizrahi** – a Sephardic Jew, descended from Jews who lived in Spain, across North Africa, or throughout the Middle East. As a group, their history in the modern State of Israel is worth learning, as it sometimes differs from those descended from European origins. (We are attempting to remain neutral here to avoid influencing the conversation.)

UNIT 6: It's NOT Just HOW You Say It (Truth Matters) Leader's Guide for Grade 6 to Adult

NOTE TO THE LEADER/TEACHER

We believe this lesson will work with all three age groups, so we have only provided one Learner's Handout and one Leader's Guide. The source material should be accessible to all. While the conversations will be different – each informed by the maturity and experience of the individual learners – each group should be able to have an interesting and engaging exploration. Throughout the Leader's Guide, we provide suggestions that are intended to work better with one or two of the levels more than the third. We rely on you to select the ideas and conversations you feel will move and engage your learners best. After you complete the Unit, please let us know what worked best for you!

BIG IDEA

If we are serious about entering into civil discourse – in debating multiple perspectives and ideas with open minds and in a manner that respects all participants (and bystanders) – then **the truth matters**. Unfortunately, due to the unregulated nature of the internet, civil laws against libel and slander have made it easier than ever for anyone to make a public statement with no reference to actual facts. And to make matters worse, broadcast and cable media then report those postings as news.

In this lesson, we conclude our series by exploring the ideas of honesty and truth telling. We are not referring to the meta-Truths that people in a society might view as self-evident (e.g. life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness). Instead, we are talking about accurate statements of accepted facts. In today's society, we see many examples of the Big Lie – individuals saying that something false is true loudly and often until at least some people begin to accept it as truth.

SET INDUCTION: 20 Minutes

Two Truths and a Lie

Begin by playing a party game that is quite popular in some circles to get us used to shading the truth.

1. Ask each person in the room to tell the group three things about themselves. Two should be true, and the third should be a lie. The more outrageous the items are, the more interesting and fun the game will be. Here is an example from one of the authors of this curriculum (Ira J. Wise):
 - I was in a Diet Pepsi commercial that aired during the Super Bowl featuring Ray Charles and Joe Montana. I received royalties for it.
 - My son and I went skydiving last summer. It was terrifying.
 - I danced in a performance of the Twyla Tharp Dance Company. People paid to attend.

2. Once everyone confirms they have thought of two truths and a lie, ask one person to share their three items. Explain that the order is unimportant.
3. After the first person has shared, ask the group to come to a consensus on which answer was the lie. The person who shared now reveals the truths and the lie. (As of this writing, Ira has never skydived.)
4. Repeat the process until every learner has shared. Have fun.
5. When every learner has had a turn, ask the students whether or not they think the truth is important. Why or why not?
6. Ask them if the truth matters in other contexts. Why or why not?

TEXT STUDY: 25 Minutes

Exodus 23:1

The first page of the Learner’s Handout contains both the text of Exodus 23:1 and Rashi’s commentary on it. Following the game, you might find it difficult to get the learners – particularly the younger ones – to work in *chavruta* pairs. We suggest that the whole group study and discuss the text and commentary, using the following questions:

1. Ask one learner to read the quote from Exodus.
2. What are the two commands here?
3. What do these commands have to do with each other?
4. Give one or two examples that we might recognize of someone violating these *mitzvot*. Give an example of someone who is clearly making an effort to observe either or both of them.
5. Today, social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and others spread people’s words further and faster than ever before. Does your understanding of the quote from Exodus suggest how we should behave on the internet? Are things different there?
6. (NOTE: If you have the time and interest, we recommend <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/06/technology/section-230-hate-speech.html>. It is an article that discusses a specific loophole in U.S. law that says that websites are not subject to the same slander and libel laws as publishers of print media.)
7. Ask a different learner to read the quote from Rashi.
8. In his comment on the first text, Rashi suggests that we should read it as “listen” to one or accept it as true rather than as “carry” a false rumor. How does that change our role in fulfilling this *mitzvah*?
9. What is our responsibility now?
10. Give one or two examples that we might recognize of someone violating this understanding of the *mitzvah*. Give an example of someone who is clearly making an effort to observe it.
11. Does Rashi give us any more guidance on how we should act online?

ACTIVITY: 45 Minutes

Music Video Exploration

1. Introduce the video “Wikipedia” by Hanan ben Ari by providing the following information to the group:
 - a. Explain that Hanan Ben Ari is an Israeli music superstar. Born in the religious village of Karnei Shomron and having studied in several Religious Zionist yeshivas, he still managed to become a crossover hit among Israel’s secular public.
 - b. Tell the students that there are subtitles on the screen to help them understand the words. In addition, let them know that you will provide the lyrics in Hebrew and in English on the Learner’s Handouts to assist your conversation after you have watched the video.
2. Show the video. You can find it at <http://bit.ly/BenAriWikipedia>. Because of the subtitles, make the image as large as possible. Of course, sound quality is important as well.
3. Divide the learners into *chavruta* for the last time. Ask the pairs or triads to discuss the questions and the lyrics, both of which are on the Learner’s Handout. They should be prepared to share their answers.

The questions are repeated below for the leader/teacher:

- a. What is Ben Ari trying to say with this song?
 - b. What cage is he trying to avoid?
 - c. Ben Ari describes several people as either being or not being a certain way. What does he want us to do with that information?
 - d. Why is the composer afraid of Wikipedia?
 - e. Ben Ari appears to be critical of internet culture. Explain why you either agree or disagree with that statement.
 - f. Why does he call himself Don Quixote? What battle is he fighting?
 - g. In an interview, Ben Ari explained that the sectors refer to the many different sectors of Israeli society. They are defined by economics, by type of Judaism, by national origin, by race, by religion in general, and even by the accent in one’s Hebrew. He states that he is not a “bridge between the sectors” and that the sectors can burn. What does this mean? Why do you think he is saying it?
 - h. The song begins, “How easy it is to go along with your brain on automatic – a condition that doesn’t demand effort.” How does this line connect to our conversation about honesty and the truth?
 - i. Read the lyrics. Which phrases recall aspects of our conversation about honesty and the truth?
4. Following are a few excerpts from a 2017 interview with Hanan Ben Ari. You may want to share some of this information with your students during your conversation.

- a. Ben Ari cemented his position in the Israeli music scene this past year, when one of his songs, 'Tutim' (strawberries) was named 'song of the year' in the Israeli annual Hebrew song chart which aired on *Army Radio*.
 - b. The single we are about to hear, 'Wikipedia,' caused a storm among the religious public when it was released in 2017. In the song, he begs the public not to look at him as a representative of the larger religious community and implores the public not to believe in stereotypes.
 - c. "Erase everything you knew about me up to this point," Ben Ari sings. "No, I am not a settler, not a representative of God, not someone who segregates women, not a bridge between the societal sectors."
 - d. The song caused a storm in the religious community. Many thought that Ben Ari was trying to hide his affiliation with the Religious Zionist community, criticism that he rebuffed.
 - e. "'Stop putting people in a cage and saying, 'He's religious, he makes music for the religious and he does music that deals only with religious issues,'" Ben Ari said.
5. After 20 minutes (or if the conversation dies down), bring the group back together. Ask the learners to discuss their answers, inviting people to share insights they learned from their partners. If it does not flow from the last few questions, bring the learners back to the original issue of honesty and truth telling from Exodus.

FINAL ACTIVITY: 30 Minutes

Sacha Baron Cohen

If you wish, and if there is time, show the speech that Sacha Baron Cohen gave at the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) *Never is Now Conference* (<http://bit.ly/SachaADL>). We have provided the transcript for the final 16 minutes of the nearly 25-minute speech on the next four pages. **We strongly suggest that you choose no more than a five- to eight-minute clip.** Our experience with using video is that more than that amount of time leads to eyes glazing over, loss of focus, and occasionally snoring. When you are showing a video with amazing comedy or action and adventure, a little more time can be fine. However, although Cohen is occasionally funny in this speech, it is still a speech.

The following two excerpts from the speech can enhance the conversation we have had so far. Copy the relevant sections of the transcript and distribute it to your students. Go to the speech online to cut and paste your own copy, as the .pdf or printed version of this lesson may not be as simple to maneuver. You can find it on the ADL website at <http://bit.ly/SachaTranscript>.

Option 1 – Internet trolls and free speech. This excerpt is an even five minutes and runs from 8:35 to 13:35. In this part of the speech, Cohen begins to lay out his case for limiting what may be allowed on internet platforms. He points out that the principle of free speech means that there are no limits on what people post. Although this segment goes a bit afield from the topics we have discussed thus far, it raises some interesting points.

Option 2 – Is there objective truth? This excerpt runs from 13:35 to 19:51, a length of six minutes and 16 seconds. In this segment, Cohen gets into the idea of whose truth is acceptable. He makes it clear that there are indeed facts in evidence that can be accepted as truth and others that are clearly falsehoods and can be rejected. Cohen does not address the grey area.

Both sections should generate a great deal of conversation.

We hope that you have found these lessons helpful. We would love to hear how they worked (or failed) with your learners. Please send feedback to us at ijw8212@gmail.com.

Sacha Baron Cohen, Keynote Address
ADL *Never is Now* Conference, November 21, 2019

8:35 I'm speaking up today because I believe that our pluralistic democracies are on a precipice and that the next twelve months, and the role of social media, could be determinant. British voters will go to the polls while online conspiracists promote the despicable theory of "great replacement" that white Christians are being deliberately replaced by Muslim immigrants. Americans will vote for president while trolls and bots perpetuate the disgusting lie of a "Hispanic invasion." And after years of YouTube videos calling climate change a "hoax," the United States is on track, a year from now, to formally withdraw from the Paris Accords. A sewer of bigotry and vile conspiracy theories that threaten democracy and our planet—this cannot possibly be what the creators of the internet had in mind.

9:35 I believe it's time for a fundamental rethink of social media and how it spreads hate, conspiracies, and lies. Last month, however, Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook delivered a major speech that, not surprisingly, warned against new laws and regulations on companies like his. Well, some of these arguments are simply absurd. Let's count the ways.

First, Zuckerberg tried to portray this whole issue as "choices...around free expression." That is ludicrous. This is not about limiting anyone's free speech. This is about giving people, including some of the most reprehensible people on earth, the biggest platform in history to reach a third of the planet. Freedom of speech is not freedom of reach. Sadly, there will always be racists, misogynists, anti-Semites, and child abusers. But I think we could all agree that we should not be giving bigots and pedophiles a free platform to amplify their views and target their victims.

10:54 Second, Zuckerberg claimed that new limits on what's posted on social media would be to "pull back on free expression." This is utter nonsense. The First Amendment says that "Congress shall make no law" abridging freedom of speech; however, this does not apply to private businesses like Facebook. We're not asking these companies to determine the boundaries of free speech across society. We just want them to be responsible on their platforms.

11:32 If a neo-Nazi comes goose-stepping into a restaurant and starts threatening other customers and saying he wants to kill Jews, would the owner of the restaurant be required to serve him an elegant eight-course meal? Of course not! The restaurant owner has every legal right and a moral obligation to kick the Nazi out, and so do these internet companies.

11:58 Third, Zuckerberg seemed to equate regulation of companies like his to the actions of "the most repressive societies." Incredible. This, from one of the six people who decide what information so much of the world sees. Zuckerberg at Facebook, Sundar Pichai at Google, at its parent company Alphabet, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, Brin's ex-sister-in-law Susan Wojcicki at YouTube, and Jack Dorsey at Twitter.

The Silicon Six—all billionaires, all Americans—who care more about boosting their share price than about protecting democracy. This is ideological imperialism—six unelected individuals in Silicon Valley imposing their vision on the rest of the world, unaccountable to any government and acting like they're above the reach of law. It's like we're living in the Roman Empire, and Mark Zuckerberg is Caesar. At least that would explain his haircut.

Here's an idea. Instead of letting the Silicon Six decide the fate of the world, let our elected representatives, voted for by the people, of every democracy in the world, have at least some say.

13:35 Fourth, Zuckerberg speaks of welcoming a “diversity of ideas,” and last year he gave us an example. He said that he found posts denying the Holocaust “deeply offensive,” but he didn’t think Facebook should take them down, “because I think there are things that different people get wrong.” At this very moment, there are still Holocaust deniers on Facebook, and Google still takes you to the most repulsive Holocaust denial sites with a simple click. One of the heads of Google once told me, incredibly, that these sites just show “both sides” of the issue. This is madness.

To quote Edward R. Murrow, one “cannot accept that there are, on every story, two equal and logical sides to an argument.” We have millions of pieces of evidence for the Holocaust—it is an historical fact. And denying it is not some random opinion. Those who deny the Holocaust aim to encourage another one.

Still, Zuckerberg says that “people should decide what is credible, not tech companies.” But at a time when two-thirds of millennials say they haven’t even heard of Auschwitz, how are they supposed to know what’s “credible?” How are they supposed to know that the lie is a lie?

There is such a thing as objective truth. Facts do exist. And if these internet companies really want to make a difference, they should hire enough monitors to actually monitor, work closely with groups like the ADL, insist on facts, and purge these lies and conspiracies from their platforms.

15:34 Fifth, when discussing the difficulty of removing content, Zuckerberg asked “where do you draw the line?” Yes, drawing the line can be difficult. But here’s what he’s really saying: removing more of these lies and conspiracies is just too expensive.

These are the richest companies in the world, and they have the best engineers in the world. They could fix these problems if they wanted to. Twitter could deploy an algorithm to remove more white supremacist hate speech, but they reportedly haven’t because it would eject some very prominent politicians from their platform. Maybe that’s not a bad thing! The truth is, these companies won’t fundamentally change because their entire business model relies on generating more engagement, and nothing generates more engagement than lies, fear, and outrage.

16:52 It’s time to finally call these companies what they really are—the largest publishers in history. And here’s an idea for them: abide by basic standards and practices just like newspapers, magazines, and TV news do every day. We have standards and practices in television and the movies; there are certain things we cannot say or do. In England, I was told that Ali G could not curse when he appeared before 9:00 pm. Here in the U.S., the Motion Picture Association of America regulates and rates what we see. I’ve had scenes in my movies cut or reduced to abide by those standards. If there are standards and practices for what cinemas and television channels can show, then surely companies that publish material to billions of people should have to abide by basic standards and practices too.

17:44 Take the issue of political ads. Fortunately, Twitter finally banned them, and Google is making changes, too. But if you pay them, Facebook will run any “political” ad you want, even if it’s a lie. And they’ll even help you micro-target those lies to their users for maximum effect. Under this twisted logic, if Facebook were around in the 1930s, it would have allowed Hitler to post 30-sec-

ond ads on his “solution” to the “Jewish problem.” So here’s a good standard and practice: Facebook, start fact-checking political ads before you run them, stop micro-targeted lies immediately, and when the ads are false, give back the money and don’t publish them.

18:47 Here’s another good practice: slow down. Every single post doesn’t need to be published immediately. Oscar Wilde once said that “we live in an age when unnecessary things are our only necessities.” But is having every thought or video posted instantly online, even if it is racist or criminal or murderous, really a necessity? Of course not!

The shooter who massacred Muslims in New Zealand live streamed his atrocity on Facebook where it then spread across the internet and was viewed likely millions of times. It was a snuff film, brought to you by social media. Why can’t we have more of a delay so this trauma-inducing filth can be caught and stopped before it’s posted in the first place?

19:51 Finally, Zuckerberg said that social media companies should “live up to their responsibilities,” but he’s totally silent about what should happen when they don’t. By now it’s pretty clear, they cannot be trusted to regulate themselves. As with the Industrial Revolution, it’s time for regulation and legislation to curb the greed of these high-tech robber barons.

In every other industry, a company can be held liable when their product is defective. When engines explode or seatbelts malfunction, car companies recall tens of thousands of vehicles, at a cost of billions of dollars. It only seems fair to say to Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter: your product is defective, you are obliged to fix it, no matter how much it costs and no matter how many moderators you need to employ.

21:04 In every other industry, you can be sued for the harm you cause. Publishers can be sued for libel; people can be sued for defamation. I’ve been sued many times! I’m being sued right now by someone whose name I won’t mention, because he might sue me again! But social media companies are largely protected from liability for the content their users post—no matter how indecent it is—by Section 230 of, get ready for it, the Communications Decency Act. Absurd!

Fortunately, internet companies can now be held responsible for pedophiles who use their sites to target children. I say, let’s also hold these companies responsible for those who use their sites to advocate for the mass murder of children because of their race or religion. And maybe fines are not enough. Maybe it’s time to tell Mark Zuckerberg and the CEOs of these companies: you already allowed one foreign power to interfere in our elections, you already facilitated one genocide in Myanmar; do it again and you go to jail.

22:37 In the end, it all comes down to what kind of world we want. In his speech, Zuckerberg said that one of his main goals is to “uphold as wide a definition of freedom of expression as possible.” Yet our freedoms are not only an end in themselves, they’re also the means to another end—as you say here in the U.S., the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But today these rights are threatened by hate, conspiracies, and lies.

Allow me to leave you with a suggestion for a different aim for society. The ultimate aim of society should be to make sure that people are not targeted, not harassed, and not murdered because of who they are, where they come from, who they love, or how they pray.

If we make that our aim—if we prioritize truth over lies, tolerance over prejudice, empathy over

indifference, and experts over ignoramuses—then maybe, just maybe, we can stop the greatest propaganda machine in history, we can save democracy, we can still have a place for free speech and free expression, and, most importantly, my jokes will still work.

24:43 Thank you all very much.



The Covenant Foundation