

Respect and Responsibility Educator Cohort Curriculum



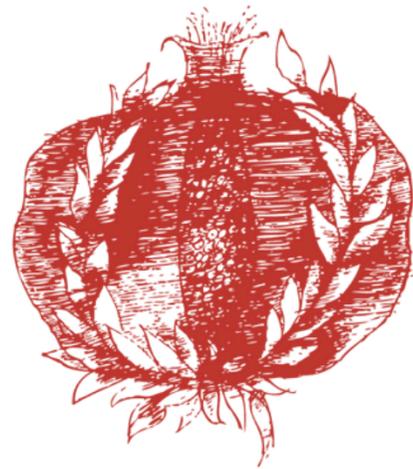
SACRED SPACES

Power, Consent, and Tools for Self-Awareness

— Hazzan Diana Brewer, ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal

About This Curriculum

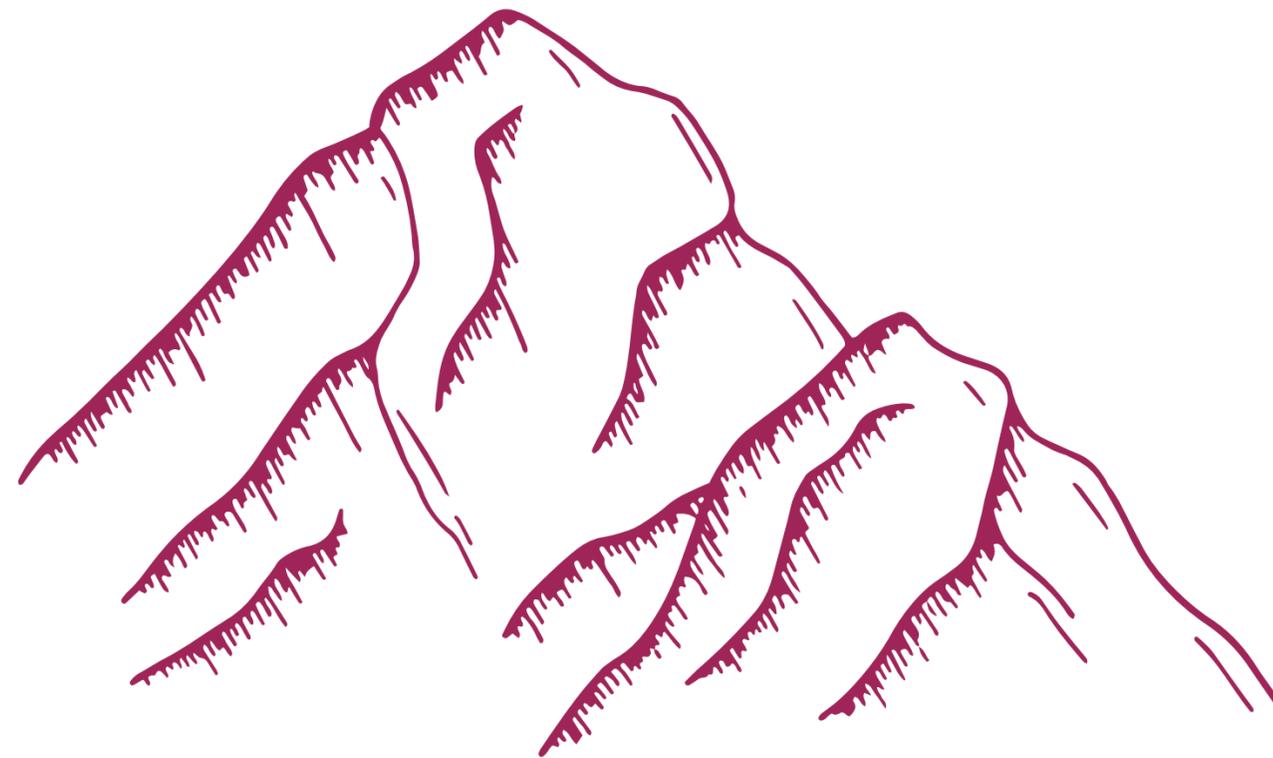
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The Covenant Foundation

Consent in the Talmud

- Was our ancestors' acceptance of Torah at Sinai truly consensual?



Bavli Shabbat 88a

- The Talmud identifies and explores an awkward formulation of a biblical verse describing the encampment of the Jewish People at Sinai. The verse says: And they camped at the underneath of the mountain (*Exodus 19:17*)
 - What does it mean to say that we were camped “בְּתַחְתֵּית” (“at the underneath of”) the mountain?
- Rav Avdimi bar Chama bar Chasa said, “This teaches that the Holy Blessed One hung the mountain over them like a barrel and said to them, ‘If you accept the Torah, Good! If not, there will be your burial place.’”



A Possible Response

(טו) וְאִם רַע בְּעֵינֵיכֶם לַעֲבֹד אֶת יְקֹוֹק בְּחַרוּ לָכֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת מִי תַעֲבֹדוּן אִם אֶת אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר עֲבָדוּ אַבוֹתֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר בַּעֲבַר מִעֶבֶר הַנָּהָר וְאִם אֶת אֱלֹהֵי הָאֲמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם יוֹשְׁבִים בְּאֶרֶץ וְאֲנֹכִי וּבֵיתִי נִעֲבָד אֶת יְקֹוֹק: פ (טז) וַיַּעַן הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ חֲלִילָה לָנוּ מֵעַזֹּב אֶת יְקֹוֹק לַעֲבֹד (אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים: (יהושע פרק כד טו) ט

(15) But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord”
(16). Then the people answered, “Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods!”
(Joshua 24)



Book of Esther

- As the Talmudic discussion in Shabbat 88a continues, Rav Acha bar Yaakov reflects on the gravity of Rav Avdimi bar Chama bar Chasa's claim that the covenant at Mt. Sinai contained an element of coercion.
- Rav Acha bar Yaakov said, "This is a great challenge [to the authority – moda'a] of the Torah."
- Rava said, "Even so, they re-received her (Torah) in the time of Achashverosh. As it is written, *The Jews fulfilled and accepted (Esther 9:27)* They fulfilled [of their own free will] that which they had already received [against their will]."



Discussion Questions

- What do you think Rava means when he says that the presence of miracles limits human choice? Why or why not?
- In what ways might the presence of a spiritual leader, as symbolic exemplar, limit or affect choice?
- What are some ways in which this potential limiting effect can be mitigated?



Yom Kippur Kattan: Preparation and Purpose

- Periodic maintenance is a necessary ingredient of every area of life. The main components of that maintenance as they relate to the practice of Yom Kippur Kattan are:
 - to open oneself to the deep response of being called by God by:
 - Affirming
 - not resisting
 - not repressing
 - not diverting myself
 - feeling that pull and
 - being in agreement with it
 - to affirm that one wishes to grow ever more harmonious with the purpose of one's life;
 - to connect with one's ideal, one's realized self, one's *mashi'ach* spark
 - to long to reduce one's resistance to God



The Periodicities of T'shuvah

- If Yom Kippur is the great moment of *t'shuvah*, then the other moments set aside for *t'shuvah* are its lower fractals.
 - Daily before going to sleep
 - Weekly on Thursday night
 - Monthly on *erev Rosh Chodesh*
 - Annually on Yom Kippur



Levels of T'shuvah

- **Nefesh/Assiyah/Present Action**

- Daily
- In the moment
- "Primordial energy-pool in the body"
- "Wherever there is desire, movement or vital-energy, we speak of the presence of nefesh"

- **Ruach/Yetzirah/Energetic Expression**

- Weekly
- "...there is attitude, posture, and direction bringing qualities of mood and intention that are beyond [personal] vitality."
- "...growth and going beyond the boundaries of self."



Levels of T'shuvah

- **Neshamah/Beriyah/Thought Patterns**

- Monthly
- “It is in thought that we construct and discover our maps of reality, and neshamah is that which, uniquely human, is ever involved in this process.”

Source: *Gate to the Heart: A Manual of Contemplative Jewish Practice* by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi



Finding the Roots and Sources of the Wrong

- In habits
 - How did habits start?
- In not considering the consequences first
- In finding the source of the behavior that puts one on that path that leads to the repetition of the behavior
- In not holding the right *kavanah* (intention)
- In not having “memory directives”
 - Not installing the right behavior when the remorse is strong



The Soul's Flaw

“In all this talk of ‘soul-reckoning,’ a word must be said about our ‘blind-spot,’ the way in which we conceal our true Self from ourselves, and conceal this act of concealment. This blind-spot is highly charged, and even as we catch a glimpse of it, it recedes, provoking all sorts of avoidant behaviors. However, if it is confronted and contained, it ultimately yields its secret and strength. Sometimes, I like to talk about this as the soul’s flaw. For every soul—though truly a part of God’s holy perfection—is possessed of a ‘flaw.’ This flaw is not unlike the flaw in an opal, which creates its special ‘fire,’ its charm and attraction. The only difference between the ‘fire’ and the ‘flaw’ in the opal is in the refraction of light. Likewise, the soul’s flaw can be a vice, or in different light, a virtue. The soul’s main task is to work on and with that flaw...”



The Soul's Flaw

...The particular soul-trait which attracts people to it, and sparks something in them, is the same trait that is thought of as a flaw. Only, when it appears as a flaw, the special light in it has gone and, because of a shift in time and circumstances, the flaw remains unadorned. This flaw and its unique fire are two sides of the same configuration of the soul. Very few people have the ability to stay aware of their blind-spots. Even if they experience moments of awareness, they vanish quickly. One of the most crucial issues in the examination of one's conscience is the search for the awareness of one's basic flaw and fire...



The Soul's Flaw

...There is no way to get away from the problems caused by the flaw. It takes great vigilance to learn to move the flaw into the right light where the fire in it begins to show. Often, it takes courageous work with a spiritual guide or friend to begin to reveal it and discern its outlines; but, in the end, only the person in whom it dwells can ultimately deal with it. The flaw insinuates itself into every facet of our lives; and unfortunately, it is our failures—which are often so close to our successes—that tell us most about it. Moreover, the flaw is multi-leveled, so that even when one manages to control it in behavior, it shows itself again on the plane of feeling. And even if controlled there, it will continue to manifest on the plane of thought. Thus, it is a life-long relationship of struggle and revelation.”

From *Gate to the Heart*, p. 87

