

Conflict Prevention Values In Judaism

A. Self

Benevolent care of the self (*al tehi rasha bifne, ahavah kamokha, im ayn ani li*)¹

self-scrutiny and change (*heshbon ha-nefesh, teshuva*)²

acquiring a good name (*shem tov*)³

intellectual study for the purposes of ethical practice (*lomed al menat la'asoth*)⁴

internalizing ethics rooted in wisdom (*hokhmah, middoth talmid hakham*)⁵

internalizing wisdom as a way of creating compassion and peace (*hokhmah*)⁶

calculation and prioritization of competing laws and values, constructive conflict

(*talmud torah, 13 middot she'ha torah nidreshet, halakha, mahloket le'shem*)

¹M. Avot 2:13; Leviticus 19:18; M. Avot 1:14. I have included rabbinic phrases for each value. These values will require a longer study to analyze. They are not precise formulations but rather abbreviated references to the epigrams and aphorisms of rabbinic moral formulations, but they do typify the way in which these values are referred to often in the lived interactions of religious life. The latter is vital, from the point of view of anthropologically-based conflict resolution. See Kevin Avruch et al., eds., *Conflict Resolution: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1991).

²See Zohar Numbers 178; for overviews of the extensive rabbinic literature on repentance, see *Sefer Orhot Tsaddikim* (Jerusalem, Eshkol, n.d.; rpt. Prague, 1581), ch. 26; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance. The citations in this and subsequent footnotes are merely selections and not an exhaustive list.

³Ecclesiastes 7:1; Exodus Rabbah 48; *Midrash Tanhuma* va-Yakhel states, "One finds three names that a human being is called, one what his mother and father call him, one what others call him, and one what he acquires for himself. The best of all of them is the name that he acquires for himself."

⁴M. Avot 4:6.

⁵M. Avot 6:6.

⁶Moshe Cordovero (d. 1570), *The Palm Tree of Devorah*, trans. Moshe Miller (Spring Valley, NY: Targum/Feldheim, 1993), chapter 3.

shamayim)⁷

becoming like God in the acts of benevolence and peacemaking (*ve'holakhta*

be'derakhav, oseh shalom b'meromav)⁸

B. From Self To Other

empathy with pain, including non-human pain (*rahamim*)⁹

personal involvement in acts of compassion as the essence of the Torah (*gemilut hasadim*)¹⁰

the use of the human face in interpersonal encounter to create peace (*sever panim*

yafot, kabbalat panim)¹¹

the infinite dignity and value of every human encountered (*tselem elohim*)¹²

favorable inter-personal judgments in moments of uncertainty (*dan le-kaf zekhut*)¹³

trust (*emunah*)¹⁴

love expressed by complete identification with the other's needs (*ahavah kamokha*)¹⁵

⁷M. Avot 5:18; 5:20.

⁸Deut. 13:5; T.B. Sotah 14a; T.B. Shabbat 133b; on peace, Job 25:2; *Sifra* be-hukotai; *Sifre* Naso.

⁹T.B. Shabbat 151b; *Genesis Rabbah* 33; on compassion as the determining characteristic as to whether a person is really a Jew, see T.B. Beza'ah 32b; on the pain of animals, see T.B. Shabbat 128b.

¹⁰T.B. Sotah 14a; *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 7, statement of Rabbi Judah.

¹¹M. Avot 1:15; 3:16; *Talmud Yerushalmi Eruvin* 5:1.

¹²*Genesis Rabbah* 24, statement of Ben Azai; M. Avot 4:3.

¹³M. Avot 1:6.

¹⁴T.B. Berakhot 60; T.B. Ta'anit 21.

¹⁵Leviticus 19:18; *Sifra* Kedoshim; Avot of Rabbi Nathan 16; on love and fulfillment of needs, see *Sefer Orhot Tsaddikim, op. cit.*, ch. 5, 46ff.

unilateral honor as the key to relationships (*ayze 'hu mekhubad, kevod haverkha*)¹⁶

language as a way of building human relationships (*shemirat ha-lashon*)¹⁷

C. From Self To Estranged Other

trust as a key prevention to violence (*amanah*)¹⁸

engagement in constructive conflict but not persisting in conflict (*mahloket le-shem*

shamyim, hizuk be-mahloket)¹⁹

the value of constructive criticism in making peace (*tokhaha*)²⁰

the importance of compromise in adjudication (*peshara*)²¹

the love of strangers, and the refusal to oppress them (*ahavat gerim*)²²

human hatred as sin, and principal cause of Divinely ordained punishment (*sina 'at*

hinam)²³

the destructive impact of revenge in deed or in words (*nekimah, netirah*)²⁴

¹⁶M. Avot 4: 1,3; 2:15.

¹⁷Leviticus 19:16; Ps. 34:13; on a range of language-related values, see R. Yitshak Abohav, *Menorat ha-Maor* (n.d.; rpt. Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kuk, 1961), 94-172.

¹⁸T.B. Shabbat 119b.

¹⁹M. Avot 5:20; see T.B. Hullin 89b on the capacity to contain one's rage in the midst of conflict.

²⁰“Criticism leads to peace....All peace that does not involve criticism is not peace.” *Genesis Rabbah* 54, in the name of Resh Lakish.

²¹T.B. Sanhedrin 6b.

²²Deut. 10:19; T.B. Bava Mezia 59b. The biblical *ger*, stranger, has been interpreted to mean “convert” in rabbinic Judaism. But this is debatable because the rabbinic category of *ger toshav*, resident stranger, may refer to a much larger group of non-Jews who abide by basic moral laws. See T.B. Avodah Zarah 64b.

²³See T.B. Yuma 9b on destruction in Jewish life coming from wanton hatred.

²⁴T.B. Yoma 23b.

the use of language to humiliate as sin (*ono 'at devarim*)²⁵

listening as the key to wisdom and human relations (*seyag le'hokhmah, shoel
u'meshiv*)²⁶

listening as peacemaking (*middot ahron*)²⁷

humility and the temporary suppression of self (*anivut, ga'avah*)²⁸

injury to the face of the other (humiliation) as murder (*halbanat panim*)²⁹

truth as a foundation to society, equal to peace and justice (*emet*)³⁰

peace as a name of God, and the pursuit of peace as the ultimate religious task

(*shalom, redifat shalom*)³¹

seeing truth in multiple and even contradictory manifestations (*shiv'im panim*

la'torah, elu ve'elu)³²

compromise as a central element in pursuing peace (*pesharah*)³³

truth as something to be found through every human encounter (*ezehu hokham ha-*

²⁵ T.B. Bava Metsia 58b.

²⁶ M. Avot 1:17; 6:6.

²⁷ Avot of Rabbi Nathan (version A), ch. 12.

²⁸ M. Derekh Erets Zuta 5;7.

²⁹ M. Kallah, statement of R. Nehorai; T.B. Berakhot 43b; T.B. Bava Metsia 58b.

³⁰ M. Avot 1: 18.

³¹ Leviticus Rabbah 9; Perek HaShalom.

³² See T. B. Yevamot 14a, on the relationship of the house of Hillel and the house of Shamai; Numbers Rabbah 13; T.B. Eruvin 13b.

³³ Avot of Rabbi Nathan (version B), ch. 24.

lomed me 'kol adam)³⁴

fostering communal consciousness among enemies through shared good deeds and mutual aid (*hakem takim imo*)³⁵

transparency and truth in negotiation (*emet, massah u'matan be' emunah*)³⁶

patience and training in resistance to anger (*noah likh 'os*)³⁷

patience with another's anger, especially in order to help him save face (*she 'at*

ka 'aso)³⁸

the art of reducing rage with gentleness (*ma 'aneh rakh*)³⁹

The overt acts of regret, confession, apology, repentance and atonement in the context of restitution (*teshuva, haratah, vidui, haratah, selihah, mehilah,*

kapparah)⁴⁰

D. From Self And Other To Community

social justice and the restoration of balance in social and economic relations,

especially of the economically weak, and the landless poor (*tsedek, mishpat*

ger, ani ve 'evyon)⁴¹

³⁴M. Avot 4:1.

³⁵Ex. 23:5; Exodus Rabbah 30:1; see the discussion in Reuven Kimelman, "Nonviolence in the Talmud," *Judaism*, v. 17 (1968), 318-319.

³⁶T.B. Bava Metsia 49b; T.B. Makkot 24, story on R. Safrah.

³⁷M. Avot 2:15.

³⁸M. Avot 4:23; T.B. Berakhot 7a.

³⁹T.B. Berakhot 17a.

⁴⁰See note 24 above on repentance.

⁴¹Deut. 16:20; Zeph. 2:3; *Otsar Midrashim*, Midrash Hashkem, p. 183.

benevolent care of the honor and security of colleagues (*kevod haverim, mamon
havero*)⁴²

opening the home to community (*hakhnasat orhim*)⁴³

the prevention of suffering, both human and animal (*tsa'ar ba'al hayim*)⁴⁴

developing skills of constructive inter-personal and social criticism that does not
lead to losing of face(*tohakha*)⁴⁵

impartial courts (*mishpat*)⁴⁶

social justice (*tsedakah*)

the limitation of material as a way to communal happiness (*ta'avah, ezehu ashir,
marbeh nekhasim*)⁴⁷

a pro-active *mitsvah* of seeking conflicts that need resolution(*redifat shalom,
bakshehu be'makom aher*)⁴⁸

personal and collective transformation, training in the willingness to change (*darkhe
teshuvah*)⁴⁹

⁴²Avot of Rabbi Nathan 15:1; 17:2; Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto (1707-1746), *Sefer Mesilat Yesharim* (rpt. Jerusalem/ New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1969), ch. 19.

⁴³*Otsar Midrashim*, Midrash Migadol le-Gedulah, p. 78.

⁴⁴T.B. Bava Metsia 32b; *Sefer Orhot Tsadikim*, ch. 8; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Murder, 13:1.

⁴⁵Lev. 19:17; T.B. Erkhin 16a.

⁴⁶Deut. 16:19; M. Pe'ah 8:9.

⁴⁷M. Avot 4:1; 2:7.

⁴⁸T.B. Perek HaShalom.

⁴⁹M. Avot 4:1; T.B. Berakhot 17a; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance.

the construction and perpetuation of customs of civility that prevent conflict (*hilkhot derekh eretz*)⁵⁰

the power of greeting the face of the other in the social construction of a pluralistic universe (*sever panim yafot*)⁵¹

⁵⁰M. Derekh Erets Rabbah; M. Derekh Erets Zuta; Rabbi Yitshak Abohav (14th century), *Menorat ha-Meor*, ed. J. Horeb & M. Katznelbogen (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kuk, 1961), 699-735 on the role of civility in conflict prevention, and generally 696-747 on “the ways of peace and love”.

⁵¹T.B. Berakhot 17a.