

## **February 5, 2010**

### **Shabbat Shalom!**

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*The reports about the bullying and subsequent suicide of Phoebe Prince last month in South Hadley, Massachusetts have been saddening and, in some respects, chilling. The relentless hounding and name-calling (in person and in cyberspace and on her cell phone) that the “mean girls,” in the words of Boston Globe columnist Kevin Cullen, perpetrated upon their schoolmate (supposedly for briefly dating a senior/football player) were totally unacceptable, but the online gloating by those same girls following Phoebe’s suicide, and their threats to anyone who would talk to authorities, sent their behavior choices far off the scale of hurtful and cruel. Presenters are going more and more into schools to discuss bullying and cyberbullying, and gossip/slander/libel are a part of that hurtful approach to others than can harm reputations and, in this case, even take a life. As we know, these examples of negative communication are not confined to the school setting.*

*This past Wednesday, our 7th Graders, led in discussion by Erin Sandler (my co-teacher), madrichim Andrew McDonald and Owen Shepcaro and yours truly, commented on texts from Jewish tradition that related, in some way, to this tragedy. I have included the texts/sayings below, followed by the rules that our students derived from each statement. Let us hope that we can build community based on these sayings and rules, because showing generous consideration for each other is the best way we have to be a Kahal Kadosh, a holy community.*

**-- L’shalom, Rabbi Larry**

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1. **Genesis 4: 9 – “Am I my brother’s keeper?”**

*Think for yourself. If you don’t care for others, people won’t care for you.*

2. **Exodus 20:13 - You shall not murder**

*(From the Etz Hayim Commentary: The Sages understood “bloodshed” to include embarrassing a fellow human being in public so that the blood drains from his or her face. “One may murder with the hand or with the tongue, by talebearing or by character assassination.” (a comment from a rabbi several hundred years ago).*

*Don’t make fun of people or bully people. Don’t ruin another person’s reputation.*

3. **Exodus 20:13 - You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**

*Don’t falsely accuse someone for something they didn’t do. Don’t believe everything you hear.*

4. **Exodus 20:14 - You shall not covet**

*Don't be jealous.*

5. **Exodus 23:1-2 - You must not carry false rumors ... you shall not side with the mighty to do wrong.**

*Don't bully or gossip. Popular is not always right, but right is not always popular.*

6. **Exodus 23:9 - You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of a stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.**

*Don't be mean to newcomers or strangers or hurt people's feelings.*

7. **Leviticus 19:16 - Don't deal wickedly (or go about as a talebearer/gossip) with members of your people, and don't stand idly by or profit from the blood of (the injury or death of) your neighbor.**

*Be nice. Don't be mean to or hurt other people.*

8. **Leviticus 19:18 - You shall not take revenge or bear a grudge against your people. Love your neighbor as yourself.**

*Forgive and forget – move forward.*

9. **Pirkei Avot - Sayings of the Rabbis Chapter 2, statement 8**

In a place where there is no decent human being, try to be a decent human being.

*Try to rise above people who are doing the wrong thing.*

10. **Pirkei Avot - Sayings of the Rabbis: Chapter 1, statement 14**

**If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I?**

**If not now, when?**

*You can't care for yourself if you don't care for others. Don't doubt yourself.*

11. **I never made a statement for which I would have to turn around and check whether the person about whom I was speaking was present. (Talmud Arachin 15b - Rabbi Yossi)**

Rabbi Abraham Twerski adds, "A reliable rule of thumb is to ask, 'Do I have to look behind more before I say it?' If the answer is yes, don't say it."

Quoted in Joseph Telushkin's A Code of Jewish Ethics: You Shall Be Holy

*Don't speak negatively of others.*