

YOUR FIRST AMENDMENT NAVIGATOR

Please read the central texts out loud to each other from the First Amendment text study. Then, starting in the upper left-hand corner, follow the commentary around the page. Read the texts, absorb them, and discuss them with your partner. If you choose, use the following questions as your guide.

The First Amendment

1. What do you think is the goal of this amendment?
2. Whom does the amendment limit, and to whom does it give freedom?

Leviticus 19:16

1. Why do you think these two instructions are placed together in Leviticus? What is the connection between peddling tales and ignoring your neighbor's suffering?
2. Whom do these rules address?
3. Is there a right to free speech implied in this commandment?
4. What is the difference between a right and a duty?

Numbers 13:25-14:4

1. Speech plays a large role in this passage concerning the Israelite spies' return from the land of Canaan. Identify the different individuals or groups who speak. For each interaction, determine the following:
 - Who is the speaker or group of speakers addressing?
 - What is their message?
 - How does this message impact the listeners?
2. How does this passage portray the people of Israel?
3. Why do the men give "an evil report of the land"? What is their motivation?
4. Were the spies guilty of peddling tales? Explain.
5. Who bears the brunt of their evil report? Who is the most slandered?

Proverbs 21:23

1. Define a "guarded tongue".
2. Give an example of when you "should have never opened your mouth in the first place."
3. Can words ever be truly taken back?

Proverbs 18:20-21

1. What does it mean to be "sated" by what you say? What kind of person is that?
2. What does the phrase "He ate his words" mean? How is this phrase "he will be sated by the harvest of his lips" differ?

Mishnah Sanhedrin 3:7

1. Why is it considered peddling tales if a judge publicizes his dissenting opinion? What's the connection?
2. What impact might it have on the person being tried?

Jerusalem Talmud, Peah 4a-b

1. Why does the Talmud equate malicious speech to the sins of idolatry, licentiousness, and murder?
2. Define malicious speech according to Rabbi Ishmael.
3. What does Rabbi Chanina prove when he brings up the example of Abraham and Sarah?
Who spares whom from malicious speech in this episode?
4. When is it ethical to lie in order to preserve peace or protect someone's feelings?
5. Is peace always more important than truth?

Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 113b

1. Examine each type of person God hates. What is the essential conflict within each type of speech described?
2. What is Rav Papa's justification for punishing Tuviah? What is the connection between testifying alone and bringing someone into ill repute?

Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Parshischa

1. Why does the fact that speech is unique to humans give us an extra responsibility for what we say?
2. How could the Torah's purity be defiled by what one individual says?