Chodesh Elul

with Bnei Akiva

A fun-filled educational packet of games, activities and learning pages

**WEEK 1: TORAH**
Battling our Yetzer Hara

**WEEK 2: TZEDAKA**
Tzedaka Escape Room

**WEEK 3: TEFILLAH**
Raising our Tefillot with Tears

**WEEK 4: TESHUVA**
Correcting our Ways

BNEI AKIVA
OF THE US & CANADA
ELUL. There are so many stories about how simply mentioning this word used to impart fear and awe of what is expected of us-- in just 30 days on “Yom Hadin” when the world is set to be judged.

These stories go as far as the extent of people fainting during Shabbat Mevarchim of the Month. Since the Month of Tishrei when Rosh Hashana falls has no Shabbat Mevarchim, the Shabbat we bless the Month of Elul includes the month of Tishrei, we are blessing Elul and “Rosh Hashana” as well.

Sefardi Jews already start “Slichot” from Rosh Chodesh Elul; Ashkenaz Jews start blowing the Shofar. Why do we start so early to prepare for Rosh Hashana? A full month is advance? Chazal tell us that Moshe returned back up to Shamayim after breaking the Luchot on Rosh Chodesh Elul. 40 days later is Yom Kippur when Hashem granted forgiveness to the sin of the Egel (golden calf) that led to the breaking of the Luchot. In other words, it looks like our preparation in advance of the Yamim Noraim should be a way to combat what led us to the sin of the golden calf. If we look at the Psukim describing the sin of the golden calf, there is a description of “parties” of joy. Chazal are critical about Am Israel wanting to be shallow and just enjoy life. But the essence of “simcha”- joy is actually a fundamental idea in the Torah. One of the reasons that we were thrown out of Eretz Israel is:

"Because you would not serve the LORD your G-d in joy and gladness over the abundance of everything."

Every year the Parsha that is either “Shabbat Mevarchim” of Elul or on Rosh Chodesh Elul is Parashat “ראה”. It may seem that the reason this was selected is the idea of “choice” - G-D is telling us that we have two possibilities “Bracha”- blessing “Klala”- curse. If we perform the “Mitzvot,” we will receive the “Bracha” -- but if you look carefully the Torah is telling us something perhaps even deeper:

See, this day I set before you blessing and curse: Blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your G-d...

It sounds as though the Torah is saying that the Bracha itself is listening to the commandments of G-D. Several Psukim later the Torah describes our entry of Eretz Israel:
The Torah commands us to build the land, settle it – and keep the Mitzvot. As we can glean from the psukim– part of settling the land is keeping the Mitzvot in a way that we feel it is a Bracha.

The Goal we have in the month of Elul is to work on our ability to live a life where we see “keeping Torah and Mitzvot” as a true blessing. We start every year on the date that reminds us how we ended up rebelling against Hashem due to lack of joy in keeping the Torah.

In modern days, we have an opportunity to succeed in this very concept the Torah is describing and the connection of being able to settle the land with joy and excitement. In Bnei Akiva we strive to keep this excitement of modern redemption “Medinat Israel” alive, leading to keeping Torah and Mitzvot B’Simcha-- all the way to the full redemption.

Chodesh Elul Tov,

Rav Shaul Feldman
Executive Director of Bnei Akiva of the US & Canada

Introduction

Elul is mostly seen, not as a month standing on its own, but rather as a month of preparation for Tishrei. From Rosh Chodesh Elul we begin working on our behaviors, blowing the shofar to “wake us up” and start thinking about our upcoming year. In this spirit, there have been many findings of אלול as an acronym within psukim throughout Tanach that teach us about the various aspects unique to this month’s preparation towards the coming holidays of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. The Lubavitcher Rebbi counts as many as 5 different acronyms representing the concepts of Tefillah, Torah, Teshuva, Tzedaka, and Geula. We are going to learn about 4 of them, 1 per week, in this month’s packet.

For you are about to cross the Jordan to enter and possess the land that the LORD your God is assigning to you. When you have occupied it and are settled in it, take care to observe all the laws...

For you are about to cross the Jordan to enter and possess the land that the LORD your God is assigning to you. When you have occupied it and are settled in it, take care to observe all the laws...
He who fatally strikes a man shall be put to death. If he did not do it by design, but it came about by an act of God, I will assign you a place to which he can flee.

In this pasuk we learn about Arei Miklat. These were cities in which one would flee to if he had accidentally killed someone, and would be able to seek refuge there. The city would need to protect him, and he would stay there until the Kohen Gadol dies.

The reason why this pasuk is associated with Elul is because of the similarity drawn between an Ir Miklat and the Torah. Just as the Ir Miklat protects the accidental killer from his pursuer, the Torah protects us from our Yetzer Hara, which pursues us and causes us to sin.

Learn the following Gemara to understand where the concept comes from, that learning Torah protects us from the Yetzer Hara.

Sotah, 21a

The Gemara asks: Does the merit of a mitzvah protect one so much as to delay her punishment? But isn’t it taught in a baraita: Rabbi Menahem bar Yosei interpreted this verse homiletically: “For the mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light” (Proverbs 6:23). The verse associates the mitzvah with a lamp and the Torah with the light of the sun. The mitzvah is associated with a lamp in order to say to you: Just as a lamp does not protect one by its light extensively but only temporarily, while the lamp is in one’s hand, so too, a mitzvah protects one only temporarily, i.e., while one is performing the mitzvah.

And the Torah is associated with light in order to say to you: Just as the light of the sun protects one forever, so too, the Torah one studies protects one forever; and it states in the previous verse with regard to the Torah: “When you walk, it shall lead you; when you lie down, it shall watch over you; and when you awake, it shall talk with you” (Proverbs 6:22)...

Rav Yosef said that with regard to a mitzvah, at the time when one is engaged in its performance it protects one from misfortune and saves one from the evil inclination; at the time when one is not engaged in its performance, it protects one from misfortune but it does not save one from the evil inclination. With regard to Torah study, both at the time when one is engaged in it and at the time when one is not engaged in it, it protects one from misfortune and saves one from the evil inclination.

Later on in the Gemara, Rabba disagrees and claims that Torah only protects us while we are learning, but not afterwards, citing Achitofel and Doeg from the Tanach, who were both learned, but also wicked. If that would be the case, in addition to learning Torah, we must be vigilant ourselves against the temptations of the Yetzer Hara which cause us to sin. To learn more about resisting the temptations of the Yetzer Hara, included is a board game which will help us practice resisting our temptations.
**ACTIVITY**

Bnei Akiva’s Yetzer Hara Board Game

**What you’ll need:**
- A printer
- Game pieces from any other game according to the number of players
- A regular 6-sided die
- A timer (watch will suffice)
- A phone
- A snack your family will find irresistible
- A clicking pen

**Instructions:**
- Youngest player goes first or you can decide on a different way of figuring that out
- Each player takes a turn to roll the die and follows the instructions on the board
- If you land on a challenge: successfully complete the challenge, move forward 3 spaces. If you fail, move back 3 spaces.
- First to get to Rosh Hashana wins!
The same days on which the Jews enjoyed relief from their foes and the same month which had been transformed for them from one of grief and mourning to one of festive joy. They were to observe them as days of feasting and joy, and as an occasion for sending gifts to one another and presents to the poor.

**ACTIVITY: Solve the puzzles and learn about Tzedaka to escape the room!**

**Tzedaka Escape Room**

Tzedaka is another one of those keywords that comes to mind right after mentioning the word Judaism. As such an integral part of our religious practice and our community, we see the practice of Tzedaka everywhere we go. Derived from the word meaning “righteousness” the Rambam describes the practice as giving everyone their due kindness, giving to whoever is in need. This giving can take place in many forms, and Baruch Hashem, for better and for worse, we have a lot of opportunities to give (but that also means unfortunately there are a lot of people who are also needy.)

How much to give? Where to give it? How should we give it? We’ll learn all of that through this Tzedaka escape room...

**Prep time:** Approx. 10-15 minutes

**Activity time:** 30-45 min

**What you’ll need:**
- tape
- post its
- pens
- scissors
- printer
- Tzedaka box/Tzedaka-themed prize
**Facilitator instructions room 1:**

- Start the kids off with the prompt and the crossword.

- All other papers spread around the room or table. They should be easy to find without too much difficulty.

- After they solve the crossword puzzle, they should look for what it correlates to. When they find the check they will need to fill in the missing amount.

- The check says ma’aser kesafim inc - meaning that is the next clue. Calculate $\frac{1}{10}$ of the amount of the check and find where that corresponds to.

- That should bring them to the monthly expense sheet. The number 1,400 appears there with the directions, “under the chair.” Tape the “Go to ____ room” clue underneath the chair.

- The other bills are just there to add confusion. If you want to add some of your own bills, also great.
Room 1: Clue A
Among the many halachot of Tzedaka, a big part of the mitzvah is Ma’aser Ksafim - giving maaser (lit. 1/10) of our money to tzedaka. Let’s try to figure out how much we need to give in order to get to the next room!

Complete the crossword puzzle below

Across
3. giving to those who need
5. Our transfer between the weekly and mundane to the Kodesh
7. Eternal homeland
8. Holidays in which we were commanded to ascend to Beit Hamikdash
11. Our gift from Hashem, which we learn day and night

Down
1. Recognizing your sin and vowing to never do it again
2. One of our 'signs' which we strap on each morning
4. Giving or helping someone who a) you are not required to and/or b) you are required to but more than you are required
6. Moving from Chutz La’aretz to Israel
9. Belief that all will be good in the end
10. A different term for tefillah, meaning worship
**Room 1: Clue B**

- **Check**
  - Pay to the Order of: Israel Israeli
  - Memo: Paycheck Av.
  - Amount: $ ???

**Room 1: Clue C**

**Monthly expenses**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mortgage</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the closet</td>
<td>740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under the rug</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inside the cup</td>
<td>2,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under the chair</td>
<td>1,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hanging from the door</td>
<td>1,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the ceiling</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behind the books</td>
<td>985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the toy box</td>
<td>745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>next to the electric socket</td>
<td>1,350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Room 1: Clue D**

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### City of Ann Arbor Water Utilities

**PO Box 8647 301 E. Huron St., Ann Arbor, MI 48107-8647 (734) 794-6333**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Address</th>
<th>Service Class</th>
<th>Account Number</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Billing Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100 SMITH ST</td>
<td>RES</td>
<td>528804-139542</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3/1/2017 - 5/31/2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Important Information:**
Please be advised that our rates have increased as of 7/1/2016. You can view the rates and pay your water bill online at www.a2gov.org.

**Previous Balance** $151.72  
**Discount Received** ($16.18) CR  
**Payment Received 03/24/2017 - Thank You** ($145.54) CR

**WATER 7.00 ccf x @$1.51000/ccf** $10.57  
**WATER 21.00 ccf x @$3.25000/ccf** $68.25  
**WATER 17.00 ccf x @$5.62000/ccf** $95.54  
**WATER 1.00 ccf x @$5.62000/ccf** $5.62  
**Water 0.62 Domestic Customer Charge** $11.25  
**SEWER 46.00 ccf x @$4.32000/ccf** $198.72  
**Sewer 0.62 Domestic Customer Charge** $11.25  
**STORMWATER DISCHARGE 0.07 acres x @$425.00/acre** $29.75  
**Stormwater Domestic Customer Charge** $6.77  

**Total Amount Due By 7/1/2017** $437.72  
**Discounted Amount Due if Paid by 07/01/2017** $393.95

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Please return this portion with your payment.

### Checks payable to: City of Ann Arbor Water Utilities

Please include your 12-digit account number on your check.

- **Service Address:** 100 SMITH ST  
- **Account Number:** 528804-139542  
- **Document No.:** 2641788  
- **District:** 90

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### Remit To:

DEPT. #72610  
CITY OF ANN ARBOR TREASURER  
PO BOX 77000  
DETROIT, MI 48277-0610

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**Amount Due if Paid By:** 7/1/2017 $393.95  
**Amount Due if Paid After:** 7/1/2017 $437.72  
**Ann Arbor Assistance Fund Donation:**

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**Payment Enclosed**

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**Chodesh Elul**

with Bnei Akiva

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10
Room 1: Clue E
Go to the ________________ Room!
Facilitator instructions room 2:

- Place the intro letter on the door of the room you indicated for the end of room 1

- Place the different pictures of batei knesset, yeshivot/midrashot, and tzedaka organizations (separately) on tables, beds, or any other surface, spread out (make sure to include the letter/number that appears *below* the picture. The letter-number combination will decode the code in the prompt. The organization logo will lead to the next clue.

- Put the different shapes (separately) on the wall either printing and using tape, or drawing them on post-its

- Write the name of a different location for each shape on the back. On the one with the heart, write the name of the location of the next room.
Now that we know how much money we need to give to tzedaka, let’s figure out where to give it!
Tzedaka should primarily be given to those in dire need, but it’s also important to give to yeshivot, Batei Knesset, and other organizations that fulfill mitzvah requirements, like providing medical supplies (Yad Sarah) or helping the blind/deaf (Avukat Or) or supporting Jewish and religious zionist education (Bnei Akiva). The fulfillment of the mitzvah at its highest level is teaching someone in need a skill or craft with which they will be able to earn a salary OR to give someone a job. There are also organizations which provide guidance on how to manage their money (Paamonim), so that they can arise from poverty or prevent themselves from becoming needy. Let’s see where we’re going to give to!

7263193534
Room 2: Clue C

Heart

Rectangle

Circle

Triangle

Trapezoid
Facilitator instructions room 3:
• Place the opening prompt for this room on the door of the designated room along with the story of Yossele the miser.

• All other pages should be spread around the room. The Kibbutz assignment list should be taped to the back of the door.

• The story has several words in bold and underlined. Unscramble those words and you get the phrase “better late than never.”

• Find out who is late by looking at the schedule and the cell phone correspondance.

• Find the letter to David to read about the anonymous giver.

• Find the letter to Phillip to correlate with that letter, and figure out, using the guess who board, who is the common neighbor.

• Roberts name appears on the kibbutz assignment list (included), directing the participants to the laundry room. In a drawer/cabinet/machine put a tzedaka box, a build-your-own tzedaka box, or any other project related to giving tzedaka as the prize.
Prompt:
There are many ways to give tzedaka. One can give money, food items, services, supplies, etc. One can also give through bank transfer, through a shaliach, or even in person. But the highest level of giving is called Matan B'Seter - literally translated as “giving in secret”. The idea behind this concept is to give without the receiver knowing, as to not embarrass him on one hand, and on the giver side, to express the importance of giving without receiving any credit. Giving only for the sake of mitzvah. In this room we are going to have to solve the mystery and find out who was the secret tzedaka giver, and figure out where to go next!

Story:
Yossele, was known to be the richest man in Krakow, but he was considered a stingy, mean miser. He shared his wealth with no one, never gave to anyone – ever. Everyone in the village where he lived knew how much he had and how he hoarded it, and everyone judged him for not doing something to help the suffering and needy. But he never made public donations...

They thought he was hard-hearted, and they hated him for it. They talked about him and his stinginess and prayed that God, blessed be the Name, would remember his meanness. The children feared him and threw stones at him when he walked in the street. Yossele, like everyone else, eventually got old and sick. The word spread that he was finally nearing the end. Before he died the community burial society went to him and asked for a gift of a thousand rubles for the poor. He turned his head to the wall, refusing even to speak with them. So they left him and he died alone.

When the miser died, the townspeople who long despised him refused to bury his body for several days. Out of scorn, they eventually buried him in the back of the cemetery, in an area reserved for paupers and social outcasts, rather than giving him a plot amongst the wealthy. This would be more fitting, they thought, for a man who had not recognized the poor while he lived.

Within a week of the misers death disturbing changes began to surface. Just before the Sabbath, the community leaders started approaching the rabbi for money to be given to poor women and children and old people. He asked them, “What did you do before? Why are you only asking me now? You never did previously.” The rabbi began making inquiries. To his horror he found that every week before the Sabbath, someone had been secretly giving to the poor very late at night, so that they did not have to beg. But now that has stopped. It wasn't too long until they realized it was Yossele.

The rabbi gathered the whole community at his grave and decreed that they would fast and do tshuva for what they had done to Yossele while he was alive, for how they had dishonored him in death and how it would have been better to judge him more favorably. Ultimately, they had the word “Tzaddik” inscribed on his tombstone, next to his given nickname, “Yossele the miser”. The rabbi, Harav Yom Tov Lipmann Heller asked to be buried next to him, in the back of the Remuh Cemetary in Krakow.
Chodesh Elul
with Bnei Akiva

GUESS WHO?

Alex
Anita
Peter
Eric
Charles
Sam
Joe
Maria
Philip
Richard
Susan
Max
Alfred
Robert
Frans
Claire
Paul
Bill
David
Bernard
George
Tom
Herman
Anne
Dear David,

I am looking to donate some money to a tzedaka organization next month. I recall that you have mentioned a few that you often donate to... Yad Eliezer was one... I think Paamonim was another. If you don’t mind sending me a list, I would greatly appreciate it. Also, if you could advise me, if you know, if they will honor my request for it to be anonymous. Or if perhaps you wouldn’t mind passing along a check. I am not seeking any acknowledgment for my contributions.

Thanks,

Your neighbor
Shalom Phil,

I understand that you have connections with Avukat Or in Jerusalem. I will be travelling to Israel soon and I would like to drop off a donation. Would you be able to forward me their address and let me know if they have a mail box drop off that I would be able to put an envelope in. I know you offered once to introduce me to someone there, but I would rather just give the money without meeting anyone.

Looking forward to your response,

Your neighbor
WEEK 3: תפילה

I am my beloved’s And my beloved is mine; He browses among the lilies

Without a doubt, Tefilah plays a major role in Judaism. Whether it’s pleading to Hashem for mercy and forgiveness in selichot or praising Hashem’s glory and crowning him as king for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, Tefilla is one of the keys to our atonement. As it says in the tefillah of Unetaneh Tokef:

"ותשובה תפילה וצדקה מעבירים את רוע הגזרה
But repentance, and prayer, and charity remove the evil decree!"

Tefillah is powerful in and of itself, but there is an additive that makes it unstoppable: tears. Let’s learn about the power of tears in the following Gemara:

On the subject of prayer, Rabbi Elazar also said: Since the day the Temple was destroyed the gates of prayer were locked and prayer is not accepted as it once was, as it is said in lamentation of the Temple’s destruction: “Though I plead and call out, He shuts out my prayer” (Lamentations 3:8). Yet, despite the fact that the gates of prayer were locked with the destruction of the Temple, the gates of tears were not locked, and one who cries before God may rest assured that his prayers will be answered, as it is stated: “Hear my prayer, Lord, and give ear to my pleading, keep not silence at my tears” (Psalms 39:13). Since this prayer is a request that God should pay heed to the tears of one who is praying, he is certain that at least the gates of tears are not locked.

Why do you think tears are so powerful?

For those of you who have visited the Tank Museum Yad Lashiryon in Latrun on previous Israel visits, this Gemara was the source of inspiration for Danny Caravan’s (architect of the memorial hall there) Tower of Tears. Built out of 12 tons of reinforced steel armor, the tower features shell holes and dents, but also “tears” streaming down the walls, depicted the idea that shells may not be able to tear through the armor, but the tears do, and in the process they change the armor and wear it down (rust).

For those of you who haven’t yet visited, put in on next trip’s itinerary :)

Chodesh Elul with Bnei Akiwa
**Activity:** Salt Water (tears) experiment

**What you’ll need:**
- A couple of large tall glasses (preferably clear)
- Salt
- Eggs (not boiled)
- Sharpies

Fill the glasses with warm water (so it will be easier for the salt to dissolve later).
Have the kids write their tefillot on the eggs (carefully) with sharpies. It would suffice to write individual words like health, Israel, Tshuva, Beit Hamikdash, success, etc. Give them a few minutes to think of what they would like to daven for.

Place the egg in the water. Tell them that we are going to raise our tefillot to Hashem with our “tears.” Add salt to the glasses (with the egg still inside. If the glasses aren’t big enough you can take the egg out and put it back in afterwards.) and stir until all the salt dissolves. The amount of salt depends on the amount of water in the cup, but it should be **a lot** of salt.

Observe how after the salt is dissolved in the water, the Tefilla egg now floats on the top [goes up to Hashem].

Afterwards feel free use your eggs for omelettes for dinner or baking challot or cakes :)

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*Notice: The experiment is a fun and educational way to teach children about the importance of prayer. It combines science with spirituality, making learning enjoyable.*

*Remember to always handle sharpies and sharp objects with care.*
Then the LORD your God will open up your heart and the hearts of your offspring to love the LORD your God with all your heart and soul, in order that you may live.

Teshuva is a mechanism for which we return to Hashem with purifying ourselves from sins and correcting our ways. The Rambam describes 3 main stages of teshuva: recognizing the sin, confessing the sin, and committing to never do it again. Teshuva will then be completed when you will be in a situation to recommit the sin and you refrain from doing so. Here is the exact language of the Rambam (Hilchot Tshuva, 2;2):

We plan on correcting our ways using advice from the Rambam from a different place - Hilchot Deot (1;3)

In order to highlight this idea, we created a matching game with challenges, for you to match a sin with a challenge to “correct your ways” by doing the exact opposite of the sin that was committed. Hopefully we’ll be able to improve our behaviors, and have fun at the same time. Behatzlacha!
ACTIVITY

Bnei Akiva’s Teshuva Matching Challenge

Matching challenge:
• Set up the 12 matches (24 cards in total) randomly, and play like a standard memory game.
• Each pair consists of one sin and one tikkun - something to fix what the sin was that was committed. Each one of the pair will have an identical background having to do with Rosh Hashana/Yom Kippur. [please standardize the size per card]
• Once the match is made, they have to perform the challenge. If they are not able to complete the challenges, they will lose the match, and they have to put the cards back and mix them up.

What you’ll need:
• A printer
• Thick or colored paper (a relatively light cardstock should be fine). The idea is that they shouldn’t be able to see the pictures from the other side. Another trick could be putting mailing labels on the back.
LASHON HARA
Say 5 nice things about someone in the room

TELLING A LIE
Confess about something you did that your parents don’t know about (yet)

BASELESS HATRED
Call up someone you’re not as friendly with and see how s/he’s doing

BEING ARROGANT
Find something to put on your head and hop around the table quacking like a duck

LAUGHING AT SOMEONE ELSE
Tell a funny story about yourself

EMBARRASSING SOMEONE
Talk about the good qualities of your brother/sister (or friend)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TALKING DURING DAVENING</th>
<th>Don't say a single word for the next 3 minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOT LEARNING TORAH IN YOUR SPARE TIME</td>
<td>Say a quick Dvar Torah on anything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORGETTING A BRACHA</td>
<td>Go on a pantry raid for foods with different brachot and say all of them in correct order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WASTING FOOD/THROWING AWAY GOOD FOOD</td>
<td>Eat an entire apple (or pear), including the core (but not the stem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISRESPECTING OTHERS</td>
<td>Take everyone’s drink order and go prepare them in the kitchen (and serve them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT RESPECTING OUR PARENTS/RABBIS/TEACHERS</td>
<td>Everyone else in the circle has to tell you to do something, and you must do it (within reason)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>