



## The Weaponization of Language and Its Discontents

This week, some idiot took a murderous chant, chanted by another idiot, livestreamed by the BBC at Glastonbury, and sprayed it on the side of a telephone box some 100m from my home. I'm grateful to the Council team who ensured its prompt removal, but we really, really shouldn't be here.

*Death and life are in the power of the tongue*, teaches Proverbs. I know that verse well. Language can bring healing and strength, of course it can. Language can also be used to inflict pain – the Talmud compares inappropriate language to the spilling of blood. But the thing that really scares me – the thing we need to pay particular attention to in these times – is the ability of language to ferment discord in society; brutalising us, setting us against one another, excusing, normalising and even promoting physical violence.

The verse preceding the 'famous' verse from Proverbs just cited is, perhaps, even more important. *By the fruit of a person's mouth is their belly satiated*. Our language, perhaps even the language we consume through hearing, the language that is forced, or welcomed into our personal *Tchum*, or self, normalises us as we hear it. No wonder the crowd at Glastonbury sung merrily along to a chant advocating murder of a three-letter abbreviation I suspect many didn't understand.

But it's not enough to condemn the idiots and those who, outright, couldn't care less for our survival as a people with a homeland, or even as a religion, or even as a social group of people who like falafel or gefilte fish. We have to be prepared to subject our own language to the tests we wish others to meet.

I watched the first part of *Gaza: Doctors Under Attack* last night. For those who haven't been following, the BBC pulled the documentary it had commissioned 'lest it gave the impression of partiality' and it is now available on Channel 4. It's appalling. I've spent months hearing IDF and Israeli contextualisations and normalisations of deaths and destruction of Gazan medical staff and property. I've never been persuaded and, after watching this distressing documentary, I'm even more deeply angry and concerned. The clear fact that Hamas have hidden in hospitals, and worse, has been used to normalise behaviour that should not be normalised. Language has been used to attempt to shape narratives that justify unjustifiable deeds by those professing to support Israel too.

We cannot weaponize our own language against the threat of weaponized language used against us; the attempt to meet 'fire with fire' will not bring security. It will increase the conflagration bringing only more threat and more destruction. In a landscape that seems to value to shrill above the balanced, we have no other option other than to fight for a moderacy in the way we talk about, even, the most tense and scary situations of our time. We need to use our own language with care and we need to magnify and permit into our own *Tchum* – personal space – those who speak with care. There is no other way towards peace.

Shabbat Shalom

And, in this week where we celebrate our Pride Kabbalat Shalom service (6:30pm tonight), it's a pleasure to share the last in our series of Pride Shabbat musical treats.

This [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBBtEcxC-g8&list=RDQBBtEcxC-g8&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBBtEcxC-g8&list=RDQBBtEcxC-g8&start_radio=1) is Yoav singing Adon Olam to the tune from Eurovision 2025 - A New Day Will Rise. It's stunning. It's been really touching to see so much traffic on this and the two prev vids (I'll post links to them also). It's a good time to take heart from song and prayer and to stand proud, as Jews and as - or in allyship - with the LGBT community.