NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BOARD OF RABBIS

RABBI-CONGREGANT NO-HARM BRIT (COVENANT)

I. NO-HARM BRIT

One tool that rabbis can use in working with anyone who is thinking about suicide is a no-harm agreement. It is always advisable to ask a person who is thinking of suicide to contact someone whenever the thoughts threaten to turn into action. For spiritual leaders, it may make sense to frame this as a *brit*, a sacred covenant, between an individual and their rabbi. It should include an agreement to ask for help for suicidal feelings that is sealed with a concrete action such as signing the document or, even better, also exchanging a solid item of value like a book. This *brit*, can be very simple, hand-written or quickly printed out, and can take the form of a contract that uses wording such as:

Promise me that you, (full English and/or Hebrew name) _____, will not kill yourself without making a phone call to (full name and phone number) _____ first and talking to them. If (previous name) _____ is not available you will call (full name and number of a second and possibly third person/hotline) _____. This *brit*, sacred covenant, is based on the Jewish principles of *b'tzelem Elohim* and reflects the vision of our tradition that each person is equally created in the image of God and of value and worth. It is sealed by our signatures and with this object (book, kiddush cup, etc) _____ on (Hebrew date) _____which translates as (English date) _____ in the city of _____.

Signed by:

Rabbi _____ Congregant)_____

The words "Promise ME" are very important, because people in crisis will do a favor for another meaningful person when they will not do an action for their own benefit. The blank can be filled in with a counselor's number, a local crisis/ suicide service, 911, or the rabbi him/herself. If you choose to use yourself as the contact person (which may or may not be appropriate depending on the situation and your relationship) make sure to have someone else listed as well in case you are out of town or not available, as for most rabbis it is not realistic to be reachable 24/7 and it is unfair to both of you to set up unreachable expectations. Both of you should sign the brit (regardless of whether or not you are the contact person) and each should keep a copy as a commitment to each other.

2. SELF-CARE BRIT

Increasingly, many crisis centers and community leaders are also using Self-Care contracts. These imply that the person can anticipate the crisis and take action to defuse it. This idea can be particularly empowering to use with a young person in crisis to remind him or her of their own resilience and strength. Together, a rabbi and a congregant select 3-5 actions the person can take that are soothing and restoring. The suicidal person will either try to do them first and call an emergency number if they don't work, or try them during the call to see if they work before other measures are put in place. Examples that might work particularly well with youth include:

- Make a "self-care" playlist.
- Call a friend
- Prayer (you may want to work together on a prayer to use in these moments that uses language that would be meaningful for the individual)
- Frivolous magazine
- Playing with or cuddling a pet (either your own or a neighbor's)
- Journaling

Created by Rabbi Elliot Kukla, Bay Area Jewish Healing Center
and Eve Meyer, San Francisco Suicide Prevention

This legacy resource of the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center (BAJHC) is used by the Northern California Board of Rabbis with permission of BAJHC.