

# VIRTUE: JUSTICE

צְדָקָה

Tze-dek / justice

noun / jus·tice / 'jæs-təs

*the quality of being just, impartial, or fair*

## Guide for Your Group

### 1 WELCOME

Ask each person to introduce themselves and to share with the group a part of their day or week they would like to bring with them as they begin this conversation, and/or a part of their day or week they would like to leave behind.

As we gather in our Sh'ma group, may we honor the values of our Jewish tradition. May we bring compassion, insight, and wisdom to our learning and conversation. May we recognize the Divine Image in one another, and let that awareness be reflected in our words and actions.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, חוֹנֵן הַדָּעַת

Baruch atah Adonai chonein ha'daat.  
Blessed are You, Adonai,  
who grants us wisdom and awareness.

Before we begin, let's review the brit—the covenant—that animates our time together:

- **Accountability:** I'll show up to our agreed upon times. I'll let the guide(s) know the (good) reason I will be absent. I will also be punctual and respect everyone's time.
- **Presence:** When we're together, I'll be present and mindful. I will listen and share. Life (and our mobile devices) offers many distractions, but I will stay present and engaged.
- **Double Confidentiality:** I'll maintain complete confidentiality. What I hear and say stays here. It means that even when I see group members in another context, like at Temple or in the neighborhood, I will not initiate a conversation on what has been shared.
- **Vulnerability:** I'll stretch myself to be as open and honest as possible with my perspectives and experiences in order to create a safe environment that might encourage others to take risks as well.

- **Respect:** I will remember that all of us are here for a common purpose and I will respect and acknowledge everyone in my group.
- **No Fixing, Advising, Saving or Setting Straight:** I will give each person the gift of true attention without trying to “solve their problem.” No advice unless it's asked.
- **Listening:** I understand that some of us are talkers, while some of us are quieter. I'll be aware not to dominate discussions and to balance how much I'm talking with how much I'm listening.
- **Curiosity:** Judaism is a religion of exploration; of big questions more than answers. I will get the most out of my group by being open to our discussions and the people around me.
- **Ownership:** This is our Sh'ma Group. This is our community to create. While we have guidelines and suggestions, it is ours to shape and form. We will get out of it what we put into it.

### 2 REFLECT ON LAST MONTH'S DISCUSSION/ CONVERSATION

What challenges did you face in pursuing last month's virtue? What are you still thinking about from your last discussion?

### 3 TODAY'S DISCUSSION/CONVERSATION

Compare Ben Franklin's definition of the virtue with the passage from Pirkei Avot. Use the questions below to help guide the conversation.

### 4 MAKE YOUR COMMITMENT

Before your meeting ends, set a goal for yourself for how you can better live that month's virtue. Share it with the group and plan to follow up on how you did at your next meeting.

**Example:** For justice, could you commit to helping an individual or advancing a cause in some small way every day for a month?

## Side-By-Side: Ben Franklin and Pirkei Avot

### **BEN FRANKLIN'S DEFINITION**

Wrong none, by doing injuries or omitting the benefits that are your duty.

### **PIRKEI AVOT**

(PA 2:12)

Rabbi Yose said, Let the property of your fellow be as precious to you as your own; and make yourself fit for the study of Torah, for it is not yours by inheritance; and let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven.

(PA 1:18)

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said, By virtue of three things does the world endure: truth, justice and peace, as it is said, You shall administer truth and the justice of peace in your gates.

## Questions To Discuss

- Both Franklin's definition and the Pirkei Avot passage define justice. How do you define justice? What do you think society's definition is?
- Pirkei Avot says that truth, justice, and peace are fundamental to the world. Why do you think this is? How are these concepts related? Are there ways they potentially conflict?
- Can you think of any paragons of justice?
- What's the best way to respond after you've been unjust to someone? What's the best way to respond after someone has been unjust to you?
- What is one area where you hope to see more justice? How does Judaism encourage you to create a more just world? How can you do that in your own life? How can we encourage the community to do that?