

VIRTUE: SINCERITY

כְּוָנָה

Ka-va-nah / sincerity

noun / sin•cer•i•ty / 'ser-ə-tē, -'sirhonesty
of mind: freedom from hypocrisy

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 sincerity, could you commit for one month to keeping track of the situations in which you say something you don't necessarily mean or believe?

Side-By-Side: Ben Franklin and Pirkei Avot

BEN FRANKLIN'S DEFINITION

Use no hurtful deceit. Think innocently and justly; and if you speak, speak accordingly.

PIRKEI AVOT

(PA 4:3)

He used to say, Do not despise any man, and do not dismiss anything, for there is not a man who has not his hour; and there is not a thing that has not its place.

(PA 2:13)

Rabbi Shimon says: Be careful in the reciting of Shema (and praying). When you pray, do not make your prayer fixed, rather prayers for mercy and supplication before the Omnipresent, blessed be He, as it says (Joel 2:13), "For He is gracious and merciful, long-suffering and full of kindness, and repents of the evil." And do not be wicked in your own eyes.

Questions To Discuss

- The first text discusses the importance of giving every person the benefit of the doubt and the second speaks of ensuring the sincerity of prayer. What connects the two ideas? How does Franklin's definition relate to them?
- Some might associate the word "sincerity" with being honest and authentic. What role does the white lie play in a virtuous life? Is it better to be honest or to fib in order to spare someone's feelings? Franklin says "use no hurtful deceit."
- Why does Judaism create such a strong prohibition against gossip?
- Think of a time when it was hard to be sincere. Why was it hard?
- How might someone cultivate sincerity in his/her own life?