

VIRTUE: TRANQUILITY

מְנוּחַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ

M'nuchat Nefesh / tranquility
noun / tran•quil•li•ty / tran-'kwi-lə-tē
the state of being calm

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 tranquility, could you commit to leaving part of your weekend unplanned or unscheduled? Practice tranquility by eliminating some of the stress that happens when packed schedules go awry.

Side-By-Side: Ben Franklin and Pirkei Avot

BEN FRANKLIN'S DEFINITION

Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.

PIRKEI AVOT

(PA 3:1)

Akavia ben Mahalalel says: Keep your eye on three things, and you will not come to sin: Know from where you came, and to where you are going, and before Whom you are destined to give an account and a reckoning. From where did you come? From a putrid drop. And to where are you going? To a place of dust, worms, and maggots. And before Whom are you destined to give an account and a reckoning? Before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.

(PA 4:16)

Rabbi Yaakov says: This world is like a hallway before the world to come. Fix yourself in the hallway so you may enter the drawing room.

Questions To Discuss

- Both Pirkei Avot passages speak to how we conduct ourselves in the world. How does this relate to Ben Franklin's definition of tranquility?
- We might summarize Franklin here as saying: "Don't be petty and don't cry over spilled milk." Why is tranquility, understood in this way, important?
- What are the consequences of failing to be tranquil?
- When was the last time a "trifle" or "accident" bothered you? Were you able to practice this virtue, and let go? If so, what helped you successfully let go? If not, what hindered you?
- How can keeping Shabbat encourage tranquility?