

VIRTUE: TEMPERANCE

נְזִירוּת

Nezirut / temperance

noun / tem•per•ance / 'tem-p(ə-)rən(t)s
moderation in action, thought, or feeling

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 temperance, could you practice digital temperance and commit to an hour free of phone, computer, and social media check-ins?

Side-By-Side: Ben Franklin and Pirkei Avot

BEN FRANKLIN'S DEFINITION

Eat not to dullness and drink not to elevation.

PIRKEI AVOT

(PA 3:3)

Rabbi Shimon said, “If three have eaten at one table and have not discussed words of Torah over it, it is as though they had eaten of the sacrifices of the dead, as it is written (Isaiah 28:8) ‘For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness without God.’ But if three have eaten at one table and have spoken words of Torah over it, it is as though they had eaten from the table of God, as it is written (Ezekiel 41:22) ‘And he said to me, This is the table that is before the LORD!’”

(PA 3:13)

Rabbi Akiva says: Joking and lightheartedness acclimate toward promiscuity. Tradition is a safeguarding fence around Torah. Tithes are a safeguarding fence around wealth. Vows are a safeguarding fence around abstinence. A safeguarding fence around wisdom is silence.

Questions To Discuss

- Both Pirkei Avot passages and Franklin’s definition address the idea of indulgence. How do they relate? How are they different?
- Some psychologists say that self-control diminishes as the day goes on—so, we are strong in the morning but weaker at night. Does this ring true to you? Others say that self-control is like a muscle—that the more you exercise it, the more it grows? Has that been your experience?
- Should temperance be imposed (as it was during the Temperance Movement), or should people be left on their own to cultivate this virtue?
- Is the overuse of technology a modern form of indulgence? Does a lack of digital “temperance” conflict with spiritual life or tradition?