

# Ben Franklin meets Pirkei Avot

Ben Franklin, one of the founding fathers of our nation, was an inventor, writer and signer of the Declaration of Independence. He also believed in the possibility of moral perfection, and in pursuit of that goal, he identified 13 specific virtues, which became the focus of a unique mission. Franklin believed that by practicing temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity and humility, he could accomplish a life without “fault.” He also understood that attaining a moral life involved not only self-growth but also investment in and improvement of the larger community. To pursue this vision, Franklin created a Junto – a weekly mutual improvement club – in 1727.

A millennia and a half before Franklin’s gathering first met, a group of rabbinic scholars in Israel fashioned a similar roadmap to living a moral life. It was known as Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers). In this ancient Jewish text, the sages highlighted specific behaviors – often quite similar to Franklin’s virtues – that would help to put a person on the moral path in life.

The Ben Franklin Circles – a project launched last year by 92nd Street Y, Stanford University’s Hoover Institution and Citizen University – encourage people to form their own mutual improvement clubs, revisiting Franklin’s virtues in our time and providing an opportunity for meaningful conversation about personal as well as civic values. With this toolkit – developed with the Union for Reform Judaism and Central Synagogue – we invite you to discuss and debate Franklin’s 13 virtues alongside selected teachings from Pirkei Avot that explore similar concepts. Both Franklin and Pirkei Avot offer timeless insight into the nature of justice, the importance of sincerity, the impact of humility and more. Franklin strove for “moral perfection,” but also understood human limitations. So did the rabbis. As the 2nd century Rabbi Tarfon himself said in Pirkei Avot, “It is not your responsibility to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it.”

We hope that exploring these two great traditions side-by-side will help us to engage in powerful dialogue about both our Jewish and American values. Let us all move forward on this journey together.

# Virtue – Temperance

## נְזִירוּת

### Nezirut / temperance

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

## Guide For Your Circle

# 1

### ICE - BREAKER

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(a) their name; and

(b) a part of their day they would like to bring with them as they begin this conversation, and/or a part of their day they would like to leave behind

# 2

### RECAP LAST MONTH'S VIRTUE

Ask the group to reflect on how they fared with their commitment from the last month

- Did you achieve your commitments around this virtue?
- What challenges did you face?
- What surprised you about the experience?
- Did your understanding of the virtue change over the month?

# 3

### DISCUSS NEXT MONTH'S VIRTUE

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 Ask The Group

- Both Pirkei Avot passages and Franklin's definition address the idea of indulgence. How do they relate? How are they different?
- Describe a moment when you wish you had better temperance/self-control. Is temperance difficult for you? Why?
- 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?

# Virtue – Silence

שְׁתִּיקָה

**Shtee-kah / silence**  
noun / si·lence / 'sī-lən(t)s  
*a lack of sound or noise*

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**Example:** For silence, could you commit to spending 15 minutes in silent reflection every evening for one month?

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

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

Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself. Avoid trifling conversation.

### **PIRKEI AVOT**

(PA 1:17)

Shimon his son said, "All my life I have grown up among the Sages, and I have found nothing better for a person but silence. And the expounding of the Law is not the most important thing but the practice of it; and whoever speaks excessively causes sin."

## Questions To Ask The Group

- What are both Ben Franklin and Pirkei Avot suggesting about the value of silence?
- Does our culture value silence?
- Do you think silence is a Jewish virtue? Why?
- Do you make time for silence each day? How?
- Describe a moment when you wish you had been silent but weren't. What were the results?

# Virtue – Order

סדר

**Se-der / order**

noun / or•der / 'ör-dər

*the arrangement or sequence of objects or of events in time*

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**Example:** To practice the virtue of order, could you commit to setting aside a couple minutes every evening to organize the items on your desk so you begin and end every day with order?

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

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

Let all your things have their places. Let each part of your business have its time.

### **PIRKEI AVOT**

(PA 3:16)

He used to say, Everything is given on pledge and a net is spread out over all the living. The shop is open, the merchant extends credit, the ledger is open and the hand records therein. Whosoever wishes to borrow, let him come and borrow. The collectors make their appointed round each day and take payment from man whether he knows it or not. It is on hand, that on which they can rely; the legal procedure is right; but all is ready for the festive banquet.

(PA 3:17)

AND Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said, Where there is no Torah, there is no civic society; where there is no civic society, there is no Torah; where there is no wisdom, there is no fear of God; where there is no fear of God, there is no wisdom; where there is no knowledge, there is no understanding, where there is no understanding there is no knowledge. Where there is no sustenance (flour) there is no Torah; where there is no Torah, there is no sustenance (flour.)

## Questions To Ask The Group

- The first text deals with order in the business world, and the second addresses broader questions of social order. How are the two ideas of order connected? How do you relate them to Franklin's definition?
- What are some places where order is important in Judaism?
- How do you struggle to maintain order in your life?
- Creativity and order seem to have a relationship. On the one hand, the creator orders chaotic and disparate elements—whether pigments, words, or musical notes—to create something beautiful. On the other hand, many creative types have reputations for being unruly and disorderly in their own lives. What's the relationship between creativity and order?
- What role does order play in a community? Should people keep their yards and street fronts clean and ordered? Why does it matter?

# Virtue – Resolve (Resolution)

## קִישָׁה עֲרָף

### Kh-shay oref / resolve

verb/ re•solve \ri-'zälv, -'zölv also -'zäv or -'zöv\  
to make a definite and serious decision to do something

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**Example:** For resolution, could you decide to concentrate on one task every day for as long it takes to finish as opposed to multi-tasking or being distracted?

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

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

Resolve to perform what you ought. Perform without fail what you resolve.

### **PIRKEI AVOT**

(PA 2:14)

Hillel said, Do not set yourself apart from the community; do not be sure of yourself until the day of your death; do not judge your fellow man until you have been in his position; do not say of any word that it cannot possibly be heard, for in the end it will be heard. And do not say, When I shall have leisure I shall have study, for you may never have leisure.

(PA 1:15)

Shammai says, "Make your Torah fixed, say little and do much, and receive every person with a pleasant countenance."

## Questions To Ask The Group

- Both Pirkei Avot passages speak to the idea of procrastination. How does this relate to Ben Franklin's definition? Though Hillel and Shammai often disagree, are they saying something similar here?
- Is resolution a difficult virtue for you? Why or why not?
- What is a resolution you have been proud of keeping?
- What kind of resolution would you like to create regarding Jewish life?
- Resolution has a personal and communal aspect: you should have resolution in your own affairs, but also in your affairs with others, like in keeping appointments and promises. Why is it important to keep your word to others? How might this improve society?

# Virtue – Frugality

## בַּל תַּשְׁחִית

### Bal Tash-chit / frugality

noun / fru·gal·i·ty / frōō 'galədē

*prudent in saving; the lack of wastefulness*

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**Example:** For frugality, could you create a daily budget to evaluate what you spend and how? What is worth the money you spend? What isn't?

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

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

Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself. Waste nothing.

### **PIRKEI AVOT**

(PA 2:7)

The more flesh, the more worms. The more possessions, the more worry. The more wives, the more witchcraft. The more maidservants, the more lewdness. The more man-servants, the more theft. The more Torah, the more life. The more sitting [and studying], the more wisdom. The more counsel, the more understanding. The more charity, the more peace. One who has acquired a good name has acquired for himself. One who has acquired words of Torah has acquired for himself the life of the World to Come.

(PA 4:9)

Rabbi Yonatan says: Anyone who implements the Torah in poverty, his end will be to implement it in wealth. And anyone that disregards the Torah in wealth, will in the end disregard it in poverty.

## Questions To Ask The Group

- Both Pirkei Avot passages suggest what we should value and what we shouldn't. How does this coincide with Ben Franklin's definition?
- How does frugality play out in Jewish ritual or holiday life?
- How might you become more frugal? Is frugality a goal for you?
- Conversations about Judaism and frugality are quite loaded – why is this? And what are some ways around it?
- In what ways could our community be more frugal? How can the practice of frugality benefit the community?

# Virtue – Industry

עֲבוּדָה

**Avodah / industry**

noun / in•dus•try / 'in-(,)dəs-trē  
*the habit of working hard and steadily*

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**Example:** Benjamin Franklin kept a daily schedule to track how he was using his time. Could you try something similar and eliminate actions that are unnecessary?

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

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

Lose no time. Be always employed in something useful. Cut off all unnecessary actions.

### **PIRKEI AVOT**

(PA 2:16)

He used to say, It is not incumbent upon you to complete the work; yet, you are not free to desist from it. If you have studied much Torah, a great reward will be given to you, for your Employer is trustworthy to reward you for your labor. And know, that the reward for the righteous is in the time to come.

(PA 2:2)

Rabban Gamliel the son of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi said: Excellent is the study of the Torah together with a worldly occupation; for the exertion [expended] in both of them causes sin to be forgotten. And all [study of the] Torah in the absence of a worldly occupation comes to nothing in the end and leads to sin.

(PA 3:4)

Rabbi Chananya ben Chakhinai says: One who stays awake at night, and one who wanders on a road alone, and one who turns his heart to idleness, such a one is liable for [forfeiture of] his life.

## Questions To Ask The Group

- What do both Franklin and Pirkei Avot say about how we prioritize our time?
- Today, we might call industry by another name, "productivity." Do you consider yourself a productive person? Do you think our society is productive?
- Is there such thing as a Jewish work ethic?
- How does Shabbat provide an antidote to industry? How do we appreciate both Shabbat and industry as values?
- Franklin writes, "Be always employed in something useful." What's your definition of "something useful"? How do you determine what is useful? How can our practice of industry benefit the larger community?

# Virtue – Sincerity

פְּוֵנָה

**Ka-va-nah / sincerity**

noun / sin·cer·i·ty / 'ser-ə-tē, -'sir-  
*honesty of mind: freedom from hypocrisy*

## Guide For Your Circle

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**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 Ask The Group

- 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. What was it? Why was it hard?
- How might someone cultivate sincerity in his/her own life?

# Virtue – Justice

צִדְקָה

**Tze-dek / justice**

noun / jus•tice / 'jəs-təs

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

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**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 Ask The Group

- 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?

# Virtue – Moderation

## אִמְצָעוּת

### Em-tza-ye-ut / moderation

noun / mod·er·a·tion / mädə'rāSH(ə)n

*an avoidance of extremes in one's actions, beliefs, or habits*

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**Example:** In Franklin's definition he urges us to "forebear resenting injuries." Could you commit to practicing moderation by controlling how you respond to what you perceive to be insults or slights?

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

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

Avoid extremes. Forebear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.

### **PIRKEI AVOT**

(PA 4:1)

Who is the mighty one? He who conquers his impulse, as it says, "slowness to anger is better than a mighty person and the ruler of his spirit than the conqueror of a city." (Proverbs 16:32). Who is the rich one? He who is happy with his lot, as it says, "When you eat [from] the work of your hands, you will be happy, and it will be well with you" (Psalms 128:2). "You will be happy" in this world, and "it will be well with you" in the world to come.

## Questions To Ask The Group

- How does Franklin's definition relate to Pirkei Avot's idea of "the mighty one" or "the rich one"?
- Franklin seems to be calling for emotional and psychological moderation (i.e. avoid resentment). Is it important to control your emotional and psychological states? Why? How can someone learn to control their inner states more effectively?
- What's the biggest challenge for you when it comes to moderation? Describe something you feel or do in an extreme way that could benefit from some moderation.
- How does Judaism encourage moderation?
- Should society as a whole practice more moderation? What might be the benefits?

# Virtue – Cleanliness

נְקִיּוֹן

**Ni-ka-yon / cleanliness**  
noun / clean'li•ness / klĕn'lĕ-nĭs  
*habitually and carefully neat and clean*

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**Example:** For cleanliness, could you commit to doing one household chore you neglect? Making your bed everyday? Leaving the kitchen sink empty? Setting time to do your laundry?

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

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

Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes or habitation.

### **PIRKEI AVOT**

(PA 3:14)

He would say: The human being is beloved, for he was created in the image [of God]; even greater love [was shown by God] in that the human being is informed that he was created in the image [of God], as it says: "For in the image of God, God created the human being."

## Questions To Ask The Group

- The Talmud\* states that anything created in the image of God has three qualities: infinite value, equality and uniqueness. How might this connect to Ben Franklin's definition of cleanliness?
- Franklin included cleanliness on his list of 13 *civic* virtues. Why do you think he included cleanliness?
- Is cleanliness a Jewish virtue? What are ways cleanliness factor into Jewish life and practice?
- How does cleanliness relate to the concept of self-care? Is self-care a Jewish value? How can you practice more self-care?
- How can we turn the concept of cleanliness outward to help improve the community?

\*Sanhedrin 37a

# Virtue – Chastity

צְנוּעוּת

tzne-yut / chastity

noun / chas·ti·ty / 'chas-tə-tē

*the state of not having sex with anyone*

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3

### DISCUSS NEXT MONTH'S VIRTUE

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:** This is perhaps the most personal of Franklin's virtues. We ask you to reflect on what this means in your own lives and personal relationships.

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

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

Rarely use venery but for health or offspring; never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.

### **PIRKEI AVOT**

(PA 3:10)

He would say: Anyone from whom the spirit of creations find pleasure, from him the spirit of God finds pleasure. And anyone from whom the spirit of creations do not find pleasure, from him the spirit of God does not find pleasure. Rabbi Dosa ben Harkinus says: [Late] morning sleep, midday wine, chatter of children, and sitting in the assembly houses of unlearned people remove a person from the world.

(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.

(PA 4:21)

Rabbi Elazar HaKapor says: Envy, lust and honor drive a man from the world.

## Questions To Ask The Group

- How does Franklin's definition relate to Pirkei Avot? Some people might hear the word "chastity" and think the passages are advocating a sexless life. Is that what these passages convey?
- The Hebrew word that comes closest to chastity is "tzniyut" which better translates to modesty. Do you believe there is a connection between modesty and chastity?
- We used the same passage from Pirkei Avot (3:13) in the sections about temperance and chastity. How do these two virtues relate?
- Of all the virtues on Franklin's list, this one might strike a modern person as most outdated. Is it outdated? Or do you think chastity is a virtue that people ought to practice? Why or why not?
- Franklin also seems to argue not to use or abuse sexual and intimate relationships. How has sex become used and abused in our society and our community? What can we do to remedy this?

# 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 Circle

1

#### ICE - BREAKER

Ask each person to introduce themselves, and to share with the group:

(a) their name; and

(b) a part of their day they would like to bring with them as they begin this conversation, and/or a part of their day they would like to leave behind

2

#### RECAP LAST MONTH'S VIRTUE

Ask the group to reflect on how they fared with their commitment from the last month

- Did you achieve your commitments around this virtue?
- What challenges did you face?
- What surprised you about the experience?
- Did your understanding of the virtue change over the month?

3

#### DISCUSS NEXT MONTH'S VIRTUE

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 Ask The Group

- 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?

# Virtue – Humility

עֲנָוָה

**Ah-na-vah / humility**

noun / hu•mil•i•ty / hyü-'mi-lə-tē

*the quality or state of not thinking you are better than other people:*

*the quality or state of being humble*

## Guide For Your Circle

1

### ICE - BREAKER

Ask each person to introduce themselves, and to share with the group:

(a) their name; and

(b) a part of their day they would like to bring with them as they begin this conversation, and/or a part of their day they would like to leave behind

2

### RECAP LAST MONTH'S VIRTUE

Ask the group to reflect on how they fared with their commitment from the last month

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### 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:** Part of being humble is learning to listen, to show others they are as important as you are. To practice humility, could you try to listen more intently and interrupt less?

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

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

Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

### **PIRKEI AVOT**

(PA 2:4)

Rabbi Eleazar ben Shamua said, Let the honor of your disciple be as dear to you as your own; and the honor of your friend, as the reverence for your master; and the reverence for your master as the reverence for Heaven.

(PA 4:13) and He used to say Do His will as you would do your own will, so that He may do your will just as He does His will. Set aside your will for the sake of His will, so that He may set aside the will of others before your will.

## Questions To Ask The Group

- There are a lot of different ways to think about humility. By referencing Jesus and Socrates, Franklin suggests that humility involves thinking of yourself as unimportant and undistinguished, and being a loving servant or others. How would you define it?
- How is Moses also a paragon of humility? What does it mean that he is the leader of the Israelites?
- Why is it important to be humble? How does it improve the community?
- How does Judaism emphasize both humility and service?
- Is there a danger in being too humble? When does humility become servility or obsequiousness? Have you ever been too humble?

# Hebrew Explanations

## BF Virtue: Temperance

HEBREW TERM: נְזִירוּת

In the Hebrew Bible, "nazirites" were those who took on vows of abstention. Some of the most famous engagers in "nazirut" were Samson and Samuel whose devout lives led to remarkable gifts. Their acts of avoidance kept them away from the "dullness" that Franklin warns against.

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## BF Virtue: Silence

HEBREW TERM: שְׁתִּיקָה

Shtika, or silence, is one of the principles of Musar, the Jewish ethical practice. In our ever-deafening world, the ability to embrace silence and "avoid trifling conversation" has become all the more important.

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## BF Virtue: Order

HEBREW TERM: סֵדֵר

The word seder has come to be identified with the traditional meal for Passover where Jews gather to tell the story of the Exodus. Its meaning is order as it relates to the precise structure in which the meal happens. The seder of the seder follows Franklin's idea that all things should "have their place."

## BF Virtue: Resolve

HEBREW TERM: קְשִׁיּוּת

In Exodus, God describes the Israelites as a people that is kh'she oref, stiff-necked or stubborn. Though it seems to be an insult, it has taken on a complementary valence as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks suggested, "stubbornness will be not a tragic failing but a noble and defiant loyalty"-- and maybe that stubbornness will lead one to "perform without fail what you resolve."

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## BF Virtue: Frugality

HEBREW TERM: בַּל תַּשְׁחִית

In Deuteronomy 20:19, Moses relays God's instructions about wartime behavior and explains that trees are not to be harmed. The Rabbis later broadened this direction in order to caution against unnecessary waste by explaining that "nothing that God created in the world was superfluous or in vain." Rav Hisda articulates his own theory of frugality by saying "one who can manage by eating [inexpensive] barley bread, but instead eats wheat bread, has violated the commandment of ba'al tashkhit." Bal Tashkhit was the Rabbi's way of saying: "waste nothing."

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## BF Virtue: Industry

HEBREW TERM: עֲבוּדָה

Avodah has a dual meaning-- profane, regarding normal work, and sacred, regarding the service of God. Both suggest a lack of frivolity and align with Franklin's direction to "lose no time."

## BF Virtue: Sincerity

HEBREW TERM: כּוֹנֵה

"Prayer without kavanah," the philosopher Bachya ibn Paquda explained, "is like a body without a soul." Kavanah, often defined as intentionality but literally meaning direction, is deemed essential by the rabbis for prayer. They decreed that one could not just move one's mouth in prayer but had to be sincere or have kavanah in reciting the words.

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## BF Virtue: Justice

HEBREW TERM: צְדָקָה

"Tzedek, tzedek-- justice, justice-- shall you pursue" exhorts Deuteronomy 16:20. This declaration is of such primacy that tzedek, justice, repeats twice. The pursuit of justice is at the heart of the biblical and rabbinic project and continues to be our responsibility today.

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## BF Virtue: Moderation

HEBREW TERM: אִמְצָעוּת

Emsteyut comes from emsta, middle. The ideal person should aim, as Rabbi Natan explains, "to walk in the middle" and thus "avoid extremes" as Franklin suggests.

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## BF Virtue: Cleanliness

HEBREW TERM: נְקִיוּת

For the Rabbis, there was a strong connection between physical cleanliness and ritual purity. The Talmud states that the a person's body is a sanctuary and thus should be treated appropriately. Though Jewish texts do not stress cleanliness for cleanliness' sake, cleanliness provided a vehicle to achieve other aims.

## BF Virtue: Chastity

HEBREW TERM: צְנִיעוּת

Though tzniyut (or tznius) often refers to modest dress, it connects to the larger values of modesty and humility. Perhaps Franklin might have thought that Judaism's advocacy of tzniyut would have led to limited "venery."

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## BF Virtue: Tranquility

HEBREW TERM: מְנוּחַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ

Menuchat ha-nefesh translates literally to rest or repose of the soul. Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv suggested "a person who has mastered peace of mind has gained everything." Such a state of equanimity would make it easier to "be not disturbed at trifles."

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## BF Virtue: Humility

HEBREW TERM: עֲנָוָה

Does strength, mental acuity, or leadership define Moses and his heroic efforts to lead the Israelites from slavery to freedom? Rather, Moses is defined by his anava, his humility, as Numbers 12:3 describes him as more humble "than any person on earth." While Franklin wished for us to imitate Socrates or Jesus, we have a representative of humility in Moshe Rabbeinu-- Moses, our Rabbi.