

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

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 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?