

Getting to Know Your Values and Middot

(Exercise adapted from Tracy Gary and Melissa Kohner, *Inspired Philanthropy*, updated and expanded by Cantor David Reinwald)

Step One: What Are My Most Important Values?

From the list below, choose three to five that are true values/perspectives that are part of your life. (You don't have to rank them yet, and you can include something that is not on the list.) Be honest to yourself as to the values that you experience in daily life. Middot exist in both the positive and negative, so if there are strong negative aspects that you have struggled with, but are trying to adapt toward the positive, you remain true to yourself to choose them alongside the positive middot. You might say that something is a "value" when it is a more general idea, and something is a "middah" when it has become a quality or a characteristic of a person.

acceptance
achrayut/responsibility
ahavah/love
ahavat yisrael/love of all Jewish people
anavah/humility
areyvut/mutual responsibility
bal taschit/preservation of environment beauty
bitachon/trust
boshet panim/stubbornness
cherut/freedom
chesed/loyalty-kindness, compassion
chochmah/wisdom
chutzpah/audacity
communication
courage
creativity

daat/knowledge
democracy
dignity
diversity
emet/truth
emunah/faith
equality
g'vurah/strength
hachnasat orchim/welcoming people into your home and community
hakarot hatov/recognizing the good in others
hiddur pnai zaken/respect for elders
histapkut/simplicity
hitlamdut/apprenticing
Honesty
integrity
kaas/anger
kavod/honor
kinah/jealousy
kehillah/community
kibbud av va'em/respect for parents
lev patuach/open-heartedness
m'chilah/forgiveness
mishpacha/family
m'nuchot hanefesh/equanimity
n'divut/generosity
ometz lev/courage
opportunity
pachad/fear
rachamim/compassion, mercy
refuah/healing
respect
savlanut/patience
seder/order
service
sh'tikah/silence
shvil hazahav/moderation
simcha/joy
simplicity
shalom/peace
tikkun olam/repairing the world
t'shuvah/forgiveness, repentance
tzedeck/justice
tzelem elohim/all people are created in God's image
yirah/awe
yoshras/integrity
z'rizut/alacrity

Step Two: Getting to Know Your Values

Pick two of your top five--maybe your top two, if you know them. You are going to write a "middah biography" for each of them.

What does that mean? The idea is to explore how and why each middah has become central or essential to the way you currently live. This doesn't have to be organized carefully. This is just a way for you to gather your thoughts.

How to do this?: First, think and write about how this middah has shown up in your life. In other words, write about some experience, past or present, that shows this middah in you or that describes how it became important to you.

Second, try and figure out where you obtained this value. Write about family members, friends, other people, books, classes, teachers, movies, events, history that might have communicated this value to you--Jewish and not specifically Jewish. You could also interview your family members to see if the middah is in the family--in their own lives, or in someone who influenced them--and whether they can tell you more stories of how this middah describes you.

Step Three: Finding the Intersection of Your Middot

Take a look at all of the middot that you initially selected and be mindful that there are likely plenty of others in the entire list that inhabit your life, but we are trying to find focus. Do they cross at a point of action for yourself? Do they also find connection with others who inhabit your life? Can you put that point of intersection now into words that define a vision of what you hope to accomplish over this next year or in the immediate future? How do you hope to gain a higher level of spirituality in the coming year? What do you plan to do to find that level of fulfillment?

Step Four: Turning Middot Into Vision for Change

Now, let's focus in again -- How do your top two or three middot combine to create a path forward for you? Are there ways to utilize the positive aspects to make change for yourself or others? Can you find ways to refine any negative traits to use them for tikkun olam (think of how great leaders used dissatisfaction and anger to see the change they wanted to happen)?

And, the essential question: Based on your strengths, what tree will you plant this year, or what tree will you continue to water?