

CHARACTER BINGO!

The one stone upon which the entire building rests is the understanding that God wants every person to complete themselves, body and soul.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Path of the Upright, 1740

Creativity Yetzirah יצירה	Love Ahavah אהבה	Love of Learning Talmud Torah תלמוד תורה	Social Intelligence Derekh Eretz דרך ארץ	Humor Simchah שמחה
Humility Anavah ענוה	Teamwork Arevut ערבות	Optimism Tikvah תקווה	Curiosity Sakranut סקרנות	Appreciation of Beauty Tiferet תפארת
Social Responsibility Aharayut אחריות	Perspective Mabatim מבטים		Perseverance Netzach/ Hatmadah נצח/התמדה	Fairness Din דין
Self-Control Hitapkut/ Gevurah התאפקות/גבורה	Gratitude Hakarat Hatov הכרת הטוב	Enthusiasm Zerizut/ Hitlahavut זריזות/התלהבות	Bravery Ometz Lev אומץ לב	Kindness Hesed חסד
Spirituality Kedushah קדושה	Leadership Manhigut מנהיגות	Forgiveness Mehilah מחילה	Honesty Yosher יושר	Prudence Tzniut צניעות

Character is not a single trait. Rather, it is the totality of our moral, emotional and behavioral development. As with almost any skill or attainment, our achievement in this aspect of life requires consistent effort. The questions and activities in the following pages are meant to guide you in this effort. Think of them as coaches prodding you to your best performance.

You'll have the best results if you decide to do these exercises with a friend, someone we will call here your "character partner." The shared conversation will spur you both on, and being accountable to someone else will keep you on task. Feel free to go in any order you would like.

Consider and reflect on each question for two weeks. As you move forward to new terms, spend just a few moments reviewing the past elements of character. Once you complete the activities or questions associated with that two-week period, cross off the associated bingo square.



Character Descriptions,

Wisdom

Creativity *Yetzirah*

It is often useful to think of the opposite of a term to best understand it. For creativity, the thesaurus is stuck with words like “unproductive, uninspired, and inept.” Other possible antonyms for creativity are “stuckness,” “repetition” or “rigidity.” With these in mind, think about this past week. What was your most creative moment? Was there something that led you to such a breakthrough? When have you been stuck recently? What kept you from finding a solution?

Curiosity *Sakranut*

The root of the Hebrew word, *sakranut*, means to study or survey. Children are naturally curious, because they know little about the world. As we age, we tend to exploit what we have already learned. Curiosity thus shares or requires an element of humility--an assumption that what you currently know is not all there is to know.

When are you at your most curious? When have you just jumped to conclusions recently, assuming you knew the answer?

Love of Learning *Talmud Torah*

A midrash teaches that before birth, everyone of us mastered the Torah. At the moment of birth, an angel tapped us on the upper lip, forming the cleft and causing us to forget all we had learned. Thus we conclude that learning is a process and not an end result.

Spend some time over the next two weeks learning something you have not paid much attention to. Learn about medieval music, classical architecture, a Torah commentary, economic theories, or pick up a book of math exercises. The main thing is to set aside some meaningful time to learn something new.

Perspective *Mabatim*

Our age has tremendous rigidity, where people are highly connected to their perspective. Yet our tradition wisely reminds us that there are 70 faces to the Torah.

In your professional life, find perspectives that are counter to what you believe. Try to understand what is correct in that point of view, and how it takes into account some nature of your work that your own perspective hasn't.

Courage

Bravery *Ometz Lev*

Jewish history is full of brave warriors, from King David, the Hasmoneans, the Partisans in WWII and the IDF. Yet bravery is a quality that everyone needs, not just soldiers. Over the next two weeks, pay attention to the small incidents of injustice that occur in the work, home or school environment. Notice how you feel when you pay attention to those occasions. Share with your character partner exactly what you were feeling or thinking.

Perseverance *Netzach/Hatmadah*

“Cut your losses and run.” “If it's broke, don't fix it.” “Don't go down with the ship.” These aphorisms offer good advice in many situations. Yet in so many other cases, what we need is to persevere. Nothing great was achieved without the capacity to “stick with it.”

What is your greatest regret for something that you gave up on when you should have kept at it? Where do you need to be persistent now?

Honesty *Yosher*

Honesty is not an ultimate value in Judaism, but an essential situational value. If a white lie or an omission can make someone feel better, it's often permitted. When does dishonesty matter? When you are using it to avoid responsibility for your actions or someone else's, or when it misleads others and therefore “steals” the other person's rights to make informed decision. Thus in Judaism, dishonesty that benefits you is almost always forbidden.

When have you been dishonest recently? Describe the situation. Explain what led you to fib. Enumerate the advantages you got by so doing. Now imagine who you would be if you weren't dishonest?

Questions and Activities



Enthusiasm *Zerizut/Hitlahavut*

In Judaism, enthusiasm is normally channeled toward your relationship with God. You should run to do a mitzvah according to many commentators.

Where do you need more enthusiasm? A work project? Parenting? Spousal relationship? Figure out one or two areas, then commit to acting with greater enthusiasm over the next two weeks. Describe your success and failure to your character partner.

Humanity

Love *Ahavah*

In the *siddur* (prayerbook) God and the Jewish people are described as in a mutual love relationship. That love is made real by taking concrete actions to help the other. Commit to three concrete actions that will deepen your love for those in your life. Pay attention to any changes in the relationship that occur as a reaction to your actions.

Kindness *Hesed*

Over the next two weeks, recognize the character strengths of others and compliment them for those strengths. Observe what happens to yourself and the other person. Repeat.

Social Intelligence *Derekh Eretz*

Pay attention to exemplary behavior that you saw someone engage in. What character trait does that behavior illustrate?

Justice

Social Responsibility *Aharayut*

During tax season, examine what money you have given to tzedakah. In your car, carry bottles of water and dollar bills. When you see a homeless person, offer them water and a dollar. Ask them their name.

Teamwork *Arevut*

Describe the teams you are on to your character partner. What is your role in each team? Do you have the same role or different roles on different teams? If you tend to be shy, speak out or step forward. If you tend to be outgoing, step back and let someone else volunteer or speak first.

Fairness *Din*

Pay attention to when you give someone the benefit of the doubt. Notice when you pre-judge a situation or person. When that occurs, go back and speak to the person again to understand their side of things.

Leadership *Manhigut*

Think of a personal hero. What do you admire about that person?

Temperance

Forgiveness *Mehilah*

Who do you need to forgive? What did they do? What is preventing you from granting forgiveness? Ask your character partner to help you get past this.

Humility *Anavah*

Jewish humility is not a sad or depressed state of being. It should actually produce joy, courage and calm dignity. In a modern book of Jewish character development, author Alan Morinis describes humility as leaving enough space for others and yourself.

Before you go to sleep, declare you will make sure you and those around you have enough “psychic space” to thrive. Pay attention during these two weeks to when you take up too much or too little space, or prevent another person from having sufficient space. Try to correct this tendency in real time. Discuss with your character partner.

Prudence *Tzniut*

“If you got it, flaunt it.” Modesty may be out of vogue, but it is an essential part of knowing where you end and where others begin. That sounds vague? Teens with an unclear sense of boundaries engage in more dangerous behaviors than others.

Over these two weeks, pay attention to how you use social media. How often do you use it only to post about yourself and your family? When do you use it to engage with others or inquire how they are doing?

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Self-Control *Hitapkut/Gevurah*

In Pirkei Avot, we read, “Who is heroically strong? Those who conquer their impulses.”

If an email or exchange with someone is bothering you, don’t respond immediately. Sleep on it or wait several hours.

Transcendence

Appreciation of Beauty *Tiferet*

Schedule three separate 1 minute slots into your day. Set them up on your smartphone with an alarm. During those moments, look around you, find something of beauty, breath in a slow and methodical method and meditate on those objects. If your mind drifts, gently return your awareness to the object. Maintain this practice for the full two weeks.

Gratitude *Hakarat Hatov*

Before bed, think of three moments or people for whom you are grateful. On Friday night, share several of those with others.

Optimism *Tikvah*

If you don’t know the words and melody to Israel’s national anthem, HaTikvah, memorize it. Hum it to yourself whenever you get discouraged, and think of how our ancestors maintained their hope over 2000 often difficult years of oppression. You will be okay.

Humor *Simchah*

So many comedians are Jewish. It’s been said it is part of the secret of our survival. For the next two weeks, look for the gentle humor in your most difficult situations. Get a book of Jewish humor and read a page or two over your cup of coffee or breakfast.

Spirituality *Kedushah*

Come to services and recite the prayers slowly in English. Don’t worry about their meaning. Say a blessing before eating and really mean it. Notice how miraculous your body is.

Material has been sourced from letitriple.org, traditional Jewish works of mussar, sociological and psychological studies, Solomon Schechter’s “Aspects of Rabbinic Theology,” an article in “Reform Judaism Magazine” and much study. Any errors or misinterpretation of the tradition are David Kosak’s.

