

Getting to Know Your Values and *Middot*

STEP 1: What Are My Most Important Values?

(Exercise adapted from Tracy Gary and Melissa Kohner, *Inspired Philanthropy*)

From the list below, choose three to five that are your own top values. (You don't have to rank them yet, and you can include something that is not on the list.) These should be things that you not only think are important, but that you see yourself living by or trying to live by. You might say that something is a "value" when it is an idea out there, 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
areyvut/mutual responsibility
bal taschit/preservation of environment
beauty
cherut/freedom
chesed/loyalty-kindness
chochmah/wisdom
communication
courage
creativity
daat/knowledge
democracy
dignity
diversity
emunah/faith
equality
hachnasat orchim/welcoming people into your home and community
hakarat hatov/recognizing the good in others
hiddur pnai zaken/respect for elders
honesty
integrity
kehillah/community
kibbud av va'em/respect for parents

mishpacha/family
opportunity
rachamim/compassion
refuah/healing
respect
service
simcha/joy
simplicity
shalom/peace
tikkun olam/repairing the world
tzedek/justice
tzelem elohim/all people are created in God's image

STEP 2: 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 important to the way you live. This isn't going to be a paper; it doesn't have to be organized carefully. What's important is to get your thoughts out.

How to do it? 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 got 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. 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.

Turning Middot Into Giving

(Exercise adapted from Tracy Gary and Melissa Kohner, Inspired Philanthropy)

Middot come out in a person's life in all sorts of ways--with friends, family, and people we know; in the way we think about life or the things we learn; in the ways we try to change the world or our place in it for the better. We are concentrating on giving, so now it is time to work on aligning what we want to give money to with what we regard as our most important values.

From the list below, select three issues or populations that you think you are interested in giving money to support.

AIDS
animals
antisemitism
antiracism
arts
boys
civil rights
corporate responsibility
developing nations
disabled people
disaster relief
domestic violence
economic justice
education
employment--jobs and training
environment
electoral reform
gay/lesbian/bisexual rights
girls
gun control
health care/medicine
homelessness/affordable housing
human rights
immigrants' rights and services
inner cities
Israel
Jewish education
Jews in other countries
libraries
media
Native American rights
peace/conflict resolution
poverty
prison reform
race relations
reproductive rights
senior citizens
spiritual development
substance abuse
synagogue
women's rights
youth/teens

Now, look at your lists of values/*middot* and issues/populations to fund. Write down as many relationships as you can see between your values and your issues. In other words, in what ways does your interest in a certain issue reflect a value or a *middah*?

For example:

- “One of my values is achrayut/responsibility. I am interested in giving to support Israel because I feel that I have a responsibility to fellow Jews, particularly when they are in danger.”
- “My values include kehillah/community and tzedek/justice. I want to give money to help race relations because it seems like all the people in our city don’t feel like they are one community, and I think part of that has to do with the injustices that African-Americans have experienced.”
- “Mishpacha is a very important value to me, and it’s interesting that I chose the environment as one of my issues. I think of the environment and people as part of a family, where every animal and part of the land plays its own part and is related.”

Suppose you can’t figure out a relationship, even a stretched one? That means it’s time to ask yourself why you think you are interested in each issue--what value do you value that you didn’t realize? Also, look at the list of issues again and try hard to find one that corresponds to one of your values.