



OPEN BOOK: DEVELOPING MIDDOT THROUGH DAF STUDY

This resource will allow us to learn middot (values) through the approach of traditional text study, using contemporary texts as a point of focus. This guide sheet will help you open the book on these text pages.

DEFINING OUR TERMS

- **Daf** is the Hebrew word for 'page', and traditionally refers to a page in the Talmud.
- **The Talmud** is the body of Jewish civil and ceremonial law and legend comprising the *Mishnah* (oral tradition) and the *Gemara* (commentary on the Mishnah). The Talmud represents our communal discourse of what it means to behave and belong.
- **Hevruta** is the Hebrew word for a 'pair of friends', and is the traditional method for learning Talmud with a partner.
- **Middah** is a virtue or character trait.

THE STRUCTURE OF A MIDDAH DAF

- The unique structure of a *daf* is defined by the placement of a 'core text' in the center of the page, which is then situated within two columns of commentary: the *peshat* (simple or contextual) level of meaning, and the *derash* (allegorical or metaphorical) level of interpretation.
- Both the *peshat* and the *derash* columns are meant to add depth to and be in conversation with the core text, each other, as well as with you and your *hevruta*.
- The 'core texts' in the center of each page are selected from popular songs, poems, speeches, and other forms of contemporary media spanning the last 60 years or so that will help us illuminate and discuss a particular *middah* (ex: Community, Wonder, Joy, etc.).

STEPS FOR EXPLORING A MIDDAH DAF

1. **Start with the core text in the center of the page first.**
As a group, read through it, and if applicable, play accompanying audio or video.
2. **Ask for initial reactions.**
What is the text trying to say? What is the main point? Where are some particularly potent expressions of the main focus in the text?
3. **Break into Hevrutot, pairs.**
Give each pair enough time to discuss the accompanying two columns of commentary.
4. **Bring the group back together and select some version of a 'wrap-up' exercise.**
Here are some examples:
 - Facilitate larger group discussion with questions designed to get learners thinking about how core themes apply to their lives.
 - Provide time for creative exercise like visual art, music or poetry to reflect on or express core themes.
 - Place a large sheet of paper in front of room, ask each person to write one word or idea on the paper; then review your new *daf* and discuss.

Do you have an idea for another core text or middah to explore? Or have feedback on this program?

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