

Mussar Practice Group  
Congregation Neve Shalom  
Week Six: Humility/Anavah

**Opening Chant:**

הָרִינִי מִקַּבֵּל/מִקַּבֵּלֶת עָלַי מִצְוַת הַבּוֹרֵא: וְאַהֲבַת לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ

*Hareni m'kabel/m'kabelet ali mitzvah HaBorei: V'Ahavtah l'reyechah k'mocha*

I hereby accept the commandment of the Creator: Love your neighbor as yourself.

**Text: Pirke Avot 1:14**

הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אִם אֵין אֲנִי לִי, מִי לִי. וְכִשְׁאֲנִי לְעַצְמִי, מָה אֲנִי. וְאִם לֹא עֲכָשְׁיוּ, אֵימָתִי:

[Hillel] used to say, if I am not for myself, who will be for me?

And if I and only for myself, what am I?

And if not now, when?

**Sitting:**

**A Joke:**

One year, during the High Holy Days, at the most solemn moment in the service, the Rabbi kneels and puts his forehead to the floor and wails, "Before you oh Lord, I am nothing!"

The Cantor looks at him, thinks it couldn't hurt, and kneels, puts his forehead to the floor, and exclaims, "Before you oh Lord, I am nothing."

The synagogue president, on the bimah with her clergy watches this and thinks that it is a pretty good idea, so she goes to the middle of the bimah, kneels and puts her forehead to the floor and says, "Before you oh Lord, I am nothing."

The Rabbi nudges the Cantor. "Look who thinks she's nothing!"

**Sharing Reflections from Every Day Holy Day Exercises**

- Dictionary Definition: The quality of being humble, that is marked by meekness or modesty; showing submissive respect, or low rank or station.
- How does Morinis define humility?

- “Limiting oneself to an appropriate space while leaving room for others.”
  - Humility stands between conceit and self-effacement – Rambam (How else might we express this?)
  - Rava said: “Who possesses [haughtiness of spirit] deserves excommunication, and if he does not possess it, he also deserves excommunication” Babylonian Talmud Sota 5a-b
- What does Morinis mean by *No more than my space, no less than my space*?
  - What are the circumstances in which you, personally, will seek to be aware of this middah?
  - Below is a list of the Thirteen Middot. Which others might contribute to your awareness of humility?

**Text: The Thirteen Middot**

- |                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| 1. Equanimity    | 8. Frugality   |
| 2. Patience      | 9. Diligence   |
| 3. Order         | 10. Silence    |
| 4. Decisiveness  | 11. Calmness   |
| 5. Cleanliness   | 12. Truth      |
| 6. Humility      | 13. Separation |
| 7. Righteousness |                |

**Is there a particular text in this chapter that you found especially compelling?**

- The story of Rabbi Zecharia ben Avkulas and the fall of the Second Temple (pp. 48-9)
- The way that the rabbis were arranged in the Great Sanhedrin (p. 50)
- The Creation Story (“Let Us make man in Our image”) (p. 51)
- Others?

**How will you “work” on this middah over the coming weeks?**

- When you enter a room, a situation or a conversation, ask yourself, “How much space should I be taking up in this setting?”
- Think to yourself, “What do I have to learn from this person or this setting?”
- Ask yourself, “What do I have to offer?”
- Finally, “Do I have an obligation to speak or to act?”

### **A Closing Teaching:**

This teaching comes from Rabbi Simcha Bunem of Pershyscha. It was said of Reb Simcha Bunem that he carried two slips of paper, one in each pocket. On one he wrote: *Bishvili nivra ha-olam*—“for my sake the world was created.” On the other he wrote: *V’anokhi afar v’efer*—“I am but dust and ashes.” He would take out each slip of paper as necessary, as a reminder to himself.