

Sakranut/Curiosity/סקרנות



In Modern Setting:

“Millions saw the apple fall, but Newton asked why.” -Bernard Mannes Baruch

“I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious.” – Albert Einstein

“Around here, however, we don’t look backwards for very long. We keep moving forward, opening up new doors and doing new things, because we’re curious...and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.” — Walt Disney

Aggaditah:

From recent studies in Positive Psychology, we now know that curiosity is essential for human flourishing. Sakranut (Curiosity) is not listed as a middah in mussar (Jewish ethics) literature *per se*, however, it is a key trait in many of our foundational stories such as Moshe turning to see the phenomenon of the burning bush, king David meditating upon the vastness of the sky, or the incredible adventures of Talmudic sage Rabbah bar bar Hannah (no, that isn’t a typo) as he explored the world, for example:

“Rabbah b. Bar Hana stated: Once we were travelling on board a ship and saw a fish whose back was covered with sand out of which grew grass. Thinking it was dry land we went up and baked, and cooked, upon its back. When, however, its back was heated it turned, and had not the ship been nearby we should have been drowned...”



Rabbah b. Bar Hana further stated: I saw a frog the size of the Fort of Hagronia. (What is the size of the Fort of Hagronia? — Sixty houses.) There came a snake and swallowed the frog. Then came a raven and swallowed the snake, and perched on a tree. Imagine how strong was the tree. R. Papa b. Samuel said: Had I not been there I would not have believed it.” (Bava Batra 73a-b)

What does this have to do with us? One of the things that it allows us to do is to be curious about each day, what it holds for us to learn from and how it will influence us moving forward. We have a chance to step away from our days that have been programmed and instead to be open to the unknown world that is always present. We don't need to travel like Rabbah bar bar Hana, we just need to open our eyes in new ways, to be a bit more curious about this world and the people in it that surround. There are wonders awaiting.

The Science of the middah:

Curiosity benefits our social and romantic lives.

Curious people are often considered good listeners and conversationalists.

In the early stages of a relationship, we tend to talk about our interests or hobbies. One reason for this is that people tend to equate “having many interests” with “interesting,” and for good reason.



Curious people tend to bring fun and novelty into relationships.

Curiosity is associated with intelligence and problem-solving ability. Although researchers have not identified the precise pathway by which curiosity leads to cognitive growth, a likely explanation concerns the rich environment curious people create for themselves as they seek new experiences and explore new ideas.

Put simply, curious brains are active brains, and active brains become smart brains.

Curiosity is associated with high performance in both academic and work settings. There is evidence to suggest an upward spiraling relationship between curiosity and knowledge. The more we learn, the more we want to learn, and so on. - [Dr. Ben Dean, U of Penn](#)

Description/Definition of the Middah of סקרנות/Sakranut/Curiosity: Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering.

Try it/מעשה

Each day this week, at least once when we feel the impulse to reach for our phone or computer to check our email again, let's look around and notice something interesting like something

positive going on on campus or a natural sight that you haven't noticed before. Just be with that experience for a full minute and then resume.

Think about it / מחשבה

Ask someone about their hobby that you haven't previously felt interest in. Inquire about its details. What does the other person enjoy about it and how do they discovered it?