

## **The Middot Project**

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**Purpose:** The Middot project blends the emerging wisdom of Positive Psychology with the timeless perspective of Jewish values aimed at a lifetime of meaning and human flourishing.

The busy Jewish Studies classroom hopes to build the text skills of the student as well as nurture a value system that will support the student as he or she matures. But what do we mean by “Jewish values?” The Middot Project is a classroom, and community-wide effort to articulate and support continued growth in six virtues and 24 characteristics identified in Positive Psychology to lead to happier, healthier, more meaningful life. In other words, the Middot Project aims at nothing less than greater human flourishing and raising up the type of thoughtful student the classical texts being studied imagined as their audience.

### **In the Classroom:**

Once a week, in preparation for Shabbat, each Jewish Studies class puts away sefarim (books) and turns attention to the Middah of the Week (one of the 24 character traits proven to aid human flourishing - for a complete list, see The Map and the Middot Listing). Texts are shared, application of the middah is discussed, heroes of the middah are identified and celebrated. In some classes, assignments that support exploration of the middah are assigned for the upcoming week (see Sample).

The entire school community explores the same weekly middah.

**The Soul Bowl:** It is taught that angels bring us a *Neshema Yetera*, an extra soul for Shabbat. So, in addition to the communal middah, each student and visitor to the school before Shabbat draws a random middah from the Soul Bowl. The Soul Bowl is filled with special cards, a variety of all 24 Middot. Each student, faculty member, and communal visitor (parents) are invited to focus for one week on two human characteristics which make our lives better, the common communal middah and their personal random middah from the Soul Bowl.

Note: *Creating the cards and the Soul Bowl was a wonderful project which included the Art Department.*

### **Community Participation:**

The key to character training is immersion of a value system. Therefore, we marry the in-class exploration of the communal middah through as many avenues as possible. Some examples:

- **Tefilah:** At each Tefilah, be it the Mechitzah Sachrit, a creative after-school Mincha, and at All-School Tefilah, there is a lesson and brief discussion on the communal middah. This directly builds on the in-class learning.
- **Signage:** Signs developed through the Art Department support focus on the week's communal middah.
- **Weekly e-blast:** Digital communication is sent each week which includes a lesson on the communal middah.
- **The Soul Bowl:** This bowl is set near the school door on Fridays (see above).
- **Mediated Website:** In the school's weekly digital communication, following a description of the week's communal middah, an internal link is shared to allow families to share insights on into the week's middah (or any other middah). The site is mediated so that every comment is vetted as appropriate.

### **Resources (attached):**

**The Map:** The 'Map' of Middot is a visual organization of the 24 characteristics around the six points of the Star of David. Each point represents one of the 6 Virtues: Transcendence, Temperance, Courage, Humanity, Wisdom, and Justice (see [VIA.org](http://VIA.org) who helped develop this classification and with whom I've trained in partnership with Rabbis Without Borders).

**The Middot Listing:** The Listing aligns each of Positive Psychology's 24 characteristics with terms for classical Jewish values ([letitripple.org](http://letitripple.org) has just begun similar work. See their small but growing video library).

**Sample Middah - Sakranut (Curiosity):** This sample shows a typical resource for a Middah (positive characteristic - Jewish Value). Each classroom resource shares several components: a) a modern application. b) a Jewish textual resource. c) Scientific finds on the character. d) a thought practice - Think about it. e) a practical skill building practice - Try it.

## **Reflections from five years of development:**

Over the past five years, the Middot Project continues to evolve and improve. Here is some of why such a project works at de Toledo and why it could work in any Jewish High School.

- 1) **Scalable.** The project can be done in just the classroom, throughout the community, and can involve area synagogues as well.
- 2) **Personal.** Hillel taught, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me?” Differentiated and individual learning is easy through personal reflections and exercises between the teacher and each individual student.
- 3) **Communal.** Hillel also taught, “However, if I am only for myself, what am I?” To reflect the twin foci of individual and community, each student is also expected to attend to the communal middah along with everyone else.
- 4) **Classic Jewish Values Paired to a Contemporary Lens.** Positive Psychology is emerging as a ‘language’ of talking about what leads to greater human flourishing. The body of scientific work that studies these virtues and characteristics is growing and becoming more precise. It is not surprising that classical Jewish values have something to say in each case. By bringing the two together, Judaism finds contemporary expression in scientific research and Positive Psychology finds grounding in our tradition.