

Middah Reflection #1:
Achrayut – Responsibility
By Shmuly Yanklowitz

Responsibility is one of the most important *midot* to cultivate in one's soul. *Acharayut* (responsibility in Hebrew) comes from the root “*acher*” (other). To take responsibility means to cultivate the “ability” for response to an “other.” This responsibility to another is born in the moment where no one else is present to assist. As Hillel said (Avot 2:6) “*uveemkom sh'ain anashim hishtadail lihiyot ish*”: in a place where there aren't people of moral courage taking responsibility, one needs to step up. The Rabbis learned this lesson from Moshe Rebbeinu himself (Shemot 2:12).

Rather than look to others to create our meaning, our opportunities, or our missions, we are charged to be proactive. Gandhi famously said “Be the change you want to see in the world.” G-d comes to love Avraham Avinu because he and his children are “Shomru Derech Hashem Laasot Tzedakah u'Mishpat” (Genesis 18:18). Here we learn that the Jewish people are born in our becoming *shomrim*. Viktor Frankl, the great Jewish psychoanalyst, once said that “Being human means being conscious and being responsible. By becoming responsible agents for social change we actualize not only our humanity but also our mission as Jews.”

May we all meditate on the midah of responsibility and set up rituals to grow in our ability to grow as agents of responsibility.

-Shmuly Yanklowitz