



Rabbi Tani Burton
 Elul Workshop 5783
 Sukkat Shalom-Bnei Noach

Exploring Middot (Character Traits) and Personal Development

1. Introduction: Understanding and Working on Middot
 - Exploring the pursuit of self-improvement and ethical growth through the lens of character traits or middot.
 - Emphasizing the importance of understanding middot before embarking on their refinement.
 - Linking wisdom to actionable behavior and the transformational power of practical Torah learning.
2. Topic 1: Understanding and Working on Middot
 - The foundational step of comprehending middot before seeking to rectify them.
 - Connecting wisdom to behavior and the practical application of Torah teachings.
3. Topic 2: Three Groups of Middot
 - Categorizing middot into three groups: Middot of Hashem, soul's middot, and body's middot.
 - Unpacking the divine attributes, virtues, and negative emotions within each category.
4. Topic 3: Fixing Body's Middot
 - Focusing on the body's middot due to their complex nature.
 - Exploring the seven primary emotions and their link to the inner layer of middot called "Daat."
5. Topic 4: No Such Thing as 'Bad' Middot
 - Understanding that middot are neutral and guided by wisdom.
 - Highlighting the role of Daat in directing emotions positively or negatively.
6. Topic 5: The Roots of Middot: The Four Elements
 - Tracing the origins of middot to the four elements: fire, wind, water, and earth.
 - Examining the interplay of elements and the concept of tikkun hamiddot.
7. Topic 6: Unifying the Middot
 - Advocating a holistic approach to middot by viewing them as interconnected traits.
 - Recognizing the value of cultivating unity among various character attributes.
8. Topic 7: Order of Elements and Unifying
 - Drawing parallels between the order of creation and the potential for unity among elements.
 - Relating the sequence of creation to the balanced creation pattern of man and woman.
9. Topic 8: Middah - "Measured"
 - Defining middot as qualities with boundaries and balance.
 - Contrasting harmony through balanced middot with disruption caused by exceeding limits.
10. Topic 9: Each Element Divides Into Four Parts
 - Unveiling the presence of all four elements within each element.
 - Emphasizing the need to balance and harmonize elements for character development.
11. Conclusion: A Journey of Integration and Transformation
 - Weaving wisdom, ethics, and personal growth through the exploration of middot.
 - Encouraging a journey of self-improvement, fostering balance, harmony, and interconnectedness within oneself and the world.



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II. Group Workshop Exercise: Cultivating Wholeness Through Mussar Practice

Discuss the following. Refer to the list of middot on the last two pages.

How do you perceive the connection between the concepts of wholeness (shlemut) and peace (shalom)? In your view, what might wholeness look like in a person, considering both their flaws and strengths?

Sharing Impressions:

- Have you ever encountered someone who struck you as embodying a sense of wholeness? What traits or behaviors made you perceive them this way?
- How do the traits discussed in the text relate to your observations of individuals you consider whole?

Reflection and Reframing:

- Can you reframe your daily actions and choices with the aim of moving closer to wholeness?
- What specific actions or decisions can you identify that align with your journey toward greater wholeness?

Identifying Problematic Traits:

- Among the traits listed, which ones do you find challenging to manage or control in your life?
- Can you share examples of situations where these traits have posed difficulties for you?

Committing to Practice:

- From the provided list of daily practices, which one resonates with you the most? Why?
- How might committing to this practice contribute to addressing a trait you identified as problematic?

III. Personal Development Plan: Cultivating Wholeness Through Mussar Practice

Day 1-3: Choosing a Character Trait (Middah): Select one character trait (middah) from the provided list that you wish to work on over the next 20 days. Reflect on why you chose this trait and how it relates to your journey toward wholeness.

Day 4-6: Awareness (Hergesh): For the next three days, focus on developing awareness of situations that relate to the chosen trait. Observe when and how this trait manifests in your thoughts, feelings, and actions. Keep a journal to document your observations.

Day 7-9: Self-Restraint (Kibbush): Continuing with the same trait, practice self-restraint. When you notice the trait arising, consciously choose to exercise self-restraint by refraining from immediately acting on it. Instead, pause and reflect on how you want to respond.



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Day 10-12: Positive Redirection (Tikkun): Shift your focus to positive redirection of the chosen trait. Find opportunities to channel the energy of this trait into positive actions. Engage in activities that align with this trait and contribute to your personal growth.

Day 13-15: Reflection and Growth: Reflect on the progress you've made during the first half of this journey. Compare your initial observations with your current awareness of the chosen trait. Note any changes in your responses and feelings.

Day 16-18: Connection to Torah Texts: Research and select Torah texts that resonate with the chosen trait. Explore verses, stories, and teachings that provide insights into cultivating and balancing this trait. Reflect on how these texts enhance your understanding.

Day 19-20: Integrating Wholeness: As you approach the end of the 20-day period, consider the journey you've undertaken with the chosen trait. Reflect on how working on this trait aligns with the concept of wholeness and contributes to your personal growth.

Day 21: Final Reflection and Next Steps: On the final day, spend time reflecting on the entire process. Consider how your awareness, self-restraint, and positive redirection practices have impacted your relationship with the chosen trait. Assess your growth and identify areas for continued development.

Ongoing Practice: Beyond the 20 Days: While the 20-day period may be complete, recognize that the journey toward wholeness and self-improvement is ongoing. Choose whether to continue working on the same trait or select a new one. Use the Mussar steps of Hergesh, Kibbush, and Tikkun to guide your ongoing practice.

By dedicating 20 days to the deliberate practice of a chosen character trait, you engage in a focused and transformative process. This plan encourages self-awareness, self-restraint, positive redirection, and the integration of Torah teachings into your personal growth journey.

Balancing Character Traits: Navigating the Spectrum of Middot

In the journey of refining one's character, the delicate balancing act of various middot, or character traits, plays a pivotal role. Here, we explore a selection of these traits, examining their extreme and balanced manifestations:

1. Humility (ענוה – Anavah) Extreme: Excessive self-effacement leading to lack of self-worth. Balanced: Acknowledging one's strengths without arrogance, while recognizing the value of others.
2. Patience (סבלנות – Savlanut) Extreme: Indifference or complacency. Balanced: Enduring challenges calmly while maintaining a proactive approach to growth.



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3. Gratitude (הכרת הטוב – Hakarat Ha'Tov) Extreme: Taking everything for granted, showing no appreciation. Balanced: Recognizing and expressing gratitude for blessings and experiences, big or small.
4. Compassion (רחמים – Rachamim) Extreme: Being overly emotionally affected by others' suffering. Balanced: Empathizing with others' pain without losing emotional stability.
5. Order (סדר – Seder) Extreme: Rigidly adhering to routine, rejecting spontaneity. Balanced: Striking a balance between structure and flexibility, fostering an organized and adaptable life.
6. Equanimity (מנוחת הנפש – Menuchat Ha'Nefesh) Extreme: Detachment and emotional numbness. Balanced: Maintaining inner calm and emotional balance amidst life's fluctuations.
7. Honor (כבוד – Kovod) Extreme: Seeking recognition and validation at any cost. Balanced: Respecting oneself and others, finding dignity in every interaction.
8. Simplicity (הסתפקות – Histapkut) Extreme: Rejecting all comfort and luxury to an extreme. Balanced: Embracing a simple and meaningful life, appreciating what is essential.
9. Enthusiasm (זריזות – Zerizut) Extreme: Being hyperactive and impulsive without thoughtful consideration. Balanced: Approaching tasks with energy and zeal, tempered by measured thoughtfulness.
10. Silence (שתיקה – Sh'tikah) Extreme: Withholding all communication even when necessary. Balanced: Knowing when to speak and when to listen, using silence purposefully.
11. Generosity (נדיבות – Nedivut) Extreme: Giving without regard for one's own well-being. Balanced: Giving selflessly while ensuring one's own needs are met.
12. Emet (אמת – Emet) Extreme: Brutal honesty that lacks sensitivity. Balanced: Speaking the truth with kindness and considering the impact of one's words.
13. Moderation (שביל הזהב – Shevil Ha'zahov) Extreme: Overindulgence or extreme asceticism. Balanced: Finding the golden mean in all aspects of life, avoiding excess and deficiency.
14. Loving Kindness (חסד – Chesed) Extreme: Sacrificing one's own needs for others constantly. Balanced: Balancing self-care with acts of kindness toward others.
15. Responsibility (אחריות – Achrayut) Extreme: Shouldering all responsibility, neglecting self-care. Balanced: Taking ownership of one's actions and commitments while maintaining personal well-being.
16. Trust (בטחון – Bitchon) Extreme: Blindly trusting everyone without discernment. Balanced: Trusting others while being discerning and considering the context.



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17. Faith (אמונה – Emunah) Extreme: Blind faith without reason or critical thinking. Balanced: Cultivating faith while embracing intellectual inquiry and growth.

18. Awe (יראה – Yirah) Extreme: Paralyzing fear and anxiety. Balanced: Experiencing reverence and awe in a way that motivates positive action.

In the intricate dance of personal development, understanding and harmonizing these character traits contribute to an individual's growth and the creation of a more balanced and virtuous self.