

## STUDY SHEET FROM RABBI NANUS FOR MAY 20, 2020

### MUSAR SPIRITUAL PRACTICES THAT TEACH HOW TO LIVE A MEANINGFUL LIFE

Musar is a Jewish spiritual practice that gives concrete instructions on how to live a meaningful and ethical life. Mussar is virtue-based ethics — based on the idea that by cultivating inner virtues, we improve ourselves. This is in contrast to most Jewish ethical teachings, which are rule-based.

#### THE 13 MIDOT (SOUL TRAITS) OF MUSAR

On a scale of 1-10, where does each of your midot lie along the spectrum?

##### HUMILITY

Humility is knowing your proper place in the world and acting accordingly. Too little Humility leads to arrogance, and too much Humility leads to self- debasement.

##### PATIENCE

Patience governs our ability to bear the burden of an uncomfortable situation. Too little Patience leads to anger and frustration. Too much Patience leads to inaction and a fatalistic attitude.

##### ENTHUSIASM

Enthusiasm is the energy that drives us to positive, mindful action. Too little Enthusiasm leads to laziness and apathy. Too much Enthusiasm leads to rash decisions and frantic busyness.

##### TRUST

Trust is trusting in God (or the Universe) that whatever happens, things will be ok. Too little Trust leads to fear and worry. Too much Trust can lead to recklessness and irresponsibility.

##### LOVING-KINDNESS

Loving-Kindness leads to selfless acts to help others without reward. Too little Loving Kindness leads to selfishness and cruelty. Too much Loving-Kindness leads to excessive doting, and a lack of self-care.

##### TRUTH

Truth covers both our ability to avoid falsehood, and to appreciate other people's perspectives (aka their truths.) Too little Truth means that we are dishonest. Too much Truth may lead to unkind words.

**HONOR**

Honor covers how we treat and think about others. Too little Honor leads to rude and judgmental behavior. Too much honor leads to flattery, and obsequiousness.

**GRATITUDE**

Gratitude governs our ability to recognize the good in any situation. Too little Gratitude, can lead to depression and paralysis. Too much Gratitude stifles action and energy to address injustice or personal danger.

**ORDER**

Order is the Soul Trait that gives structure to our lives. Too little Order leads to chaos and disarray. Too much Order can become obsessive and controlling, which limits freedom.

**SILENCE**

Silence is the trait that governs when we talk and when we do not. Too little Silence produces hurtful speech. Too much Silence is a lost an opportunity to bring good into existence.

**EQUANIMITY**

Equanimity is the Soul Trait that governs whether you keep your cool or lose your head. Too little Equanimity leads to an emotional roller coaster, feeling super excited or really down. Too much Equanimity can lead to a lack of engagement and ambivalence.

**FEAR**

Fear is short for Fear of consequences. Too little Fear leads to capricious, reckless or brash behavior. Too much Fear leads to risk aversion, and an extreme reluctance to leave the comfort zone.

**AWE**

Awe is defined as “referential respect with an element of dread or wonder.” With too little Awe, we become self-centered and cynical. With too much Awe we become disconnected with the world.

**THE PRACTICES OF MUSAR**

In order to develop, change, or transform on a journey toward holiness, knowledge in itself, is inadequate. While the pathway starts with learning, knowledge needs to come to life. Practice is what embeds the learning in the heart so that it becomes the fabric of who you are. For example, the lazy person becomes energetic; the miserly person becomes generous.

**Text study**

**Meditation**

**Silence and retreat**

**Journaling**

**Chanting**  
**Contemplation**  
**Visualization**  
**Tzedakah**  
**Doing good deeds on behalf of others.**

Musar students practice one trait for one or two weeks, often in a series of 13, moving through 4 cycles of 13 traits in a year.

Basic Musar practice begins with three core practices.

In the morning, students focus on one selected soul trait or *middah*. They use a phrase, often in Hebrew, to recite in such a way as to enliven and energize the soul.

In the evening, the practice is to keep a journal. Students look back over the day and record the events of the day where the *middah* showed up. If you are working on generosity, you would ask yourself, where did it show up? How did you react? You would write about the situation in an objective way. The journal is a way of highlighting the experience so that as time goes on one starts to see a pattern. Once you know you are going to be keeping a journal, as the day plays out, the thought of keeping a journal will “flag” your experience. It will help you build awareness. Journaling is an effective practice as long as it is done regularly.

Between the morning and the evening, the Musar student gives himself or is assigned an exercise, a *kaballah*. For example, you might do three generous acts today. One day, generosity with your money, another, your feelings, another, your possessions. You can be generous in so many ways. The goal is not the practice per se, it is to transform the inner being of the individual so that you move closer to the ideal of what a human being can be.