

Trust

Middah for the Hebrew Month of Adar 5773

1 Adar 5773 - February 11, 2013

Through this year of 5773, at Temple Beth El we will be working on Tikkun Hanefesh – repairing and renewing our souls through the study of a genre of Jewish literature called Middot. On the first day of each new Hebrew month, you we will receive a “Middah” guide. The word “Middot” means measures or character traits. Our lives are measured by the character we have. Each study guide will have background on the middah of the month and exercises to daily remind us of the character trait we are working on.

What are Middot?

Pirkei Avot (6:6) teaches that the Torah is greater than the priesthood or royalty. According to our tradition, royalty is acquired through 30 middot – virtues or qualities. To be a priest in the ancient Temple, you needed 24 virtues. But the Torah -- the ultimate path we strive to take -- is acquired through 48 middot --

48 character traits by which we measure our lives.

Rabbi Alan Morinis says in his book, 'Everyday Holiness,' that each one of us has every single one of the 48 character traits. He writes: 'What sets one person apart from another is not whether we have certain traits while someone else has different ones, but rather the degree, or measure of the traits that live in each of

our souls.' The angriest person, for example, has an excess of the anger trait, but Mussar, (Jewish ethical literature from 19th century Eastern Europe) insists that there must be at least some degree of calm within that raging soul. So must there also be a touch of anger in even the calmest individual. The stingiest person still has at least a grain of generosity, and so on with all the traits." (Everyday Holiness, pg. 19).

Background texts*

- This middah, in traditional Judaism, is focused on God. Trust is about believing that all the God does is for the good. Trust entails letting go of worrying.
- According to Rabbi Alan Morinis: "The Mussar teaching is to call up "trust" to counteract our "reactivity." When you recognize that you do not write the script of your life, nor do you direct all the action, then it sinks in that there is really nothing to worry about. This is true for personal events and for global history as well. It is no more warranted to worry over wars that are raging than it is over whether you will be late for your daughter's school play. We have a serious responsibility to try to make the world a peaceful, more just place, and also to be on time for our appointments. But once

we have made that effort, we are wise to trust that the outcome will be as it should be. As Rabbi Tarfon said: 'It is not yours to finish the task, but neither are you free to desist from it'" (Avot 2:16).

- Faith is the essence of Torah. (*Mivhar Hapeninim*)
- In Psalm 25:15, King David says "My eyes always look toward Adonai, for God will free my feet from the net."
- Blessed is the person who trusts in God, and God shall be his source of trust. - Jeremiah 17:7
- A person who tries to practice trust in God while leaving himself a backup plan is like a person who tries to learn how to swim but insists on keeping one foot on the ground. – Rabbi Yosef Yozel Hurwitz, Alter of Novarodok

- Ramban (Nachmanides) writes: Faith and trust are two separate concepts. The latter is dependent on the former, while the former is independent of the latter. Faith precedes trust, and can exist in a believer's heart even when he lacks trust, for faith can exist without trust. Trust, however, denotes the existence of faith, for it is impossible for trust to precede it or to endure independently.
- "If worry comes to your heart, take it as a warning from God who loves you. Examine your deeds and take counsel with those whose advise you. When you have fulfilled God's will, trust God and your serenity will return" Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Satanov, *Cheshbon ha-Nefesh*.

*Many of the texts are adapted from *Everyday Holiness* by Alan Morinis.

A Story from our Sacred Texts Capturing the Middah

Leviticus 25

The Lord said to Moses at Mount Sinai, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the Lord. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you—for yourself, your male and female servants, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.

"Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land. Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live there in safety. You may ask, 'What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?' I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.



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MIDDAH WORKOUT FOR ADAR

Middah Meditation – *To remind yourself to strive for trust, select one of the following quotes to say every morning. You can rotate the quotes.*

- The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them. – Ernest Hemingway
- As soon as you trust yourself, you will know how to live. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
- Blessed is the one who trusts in God. – Jeremiah
- "I believe in the sun even when it isn't shining, I believe in love when feeling it not, I believe in God even when God is silent." – written on a wall in a cellar in Cologne,

Germany during the Holocaust

Middah Exercise

For the *middah* of *bitachon*, trust, each day of this month, ask God for help with something and thank God for whatever happened.

Think of something you fear that is not dangerous (such as visiting the sick or calling a relative with whom you have had a falling out.) During the next month, do that thing that causes you fear as often as possible. Before each time you do it, remind yourself to have trust.

REFLECTIONS

Can trust and faith in God translate into trust and faith in other people? How are they the same? How are they different? How can one build up one's trust in God? If one struggles with their God belief, can one substitute faith and trust in God for trust in someone or something else that will help to bring about calm? What challenges do you have with placing trust in God? How would having trust in God impact your life?

Discussion: In what ways does following the sabbatical laws of Leviticus by allowing the land to lie fallow every seventh year require trust in God? While a small segment of Jews in Israel observe this Biblical law today, is there a modern equivalent to the sabbatical agricultural laws that you can apply to your life? How and when can we let go of work in order to regenerate? How do we need to trust in God when it comes to our economic circumstances? How do we need to trust in God when it comes to our children or our future? What techniques can help you to let go and have more faith in God or in your future?

For further background, consider purchasing in our Discovered Traditions Temple Beth El Gift Shop: *Everyday Holiness* by Rabbi Alan Moranis (Boston: Trumpeter Books, 2007).