

how to use this journal



This journal is designed to be an easy way to help you in the practice of Mussar. *Cheshbon HaNefesh*, or accounting of the soul, is a deliberate evening practice of scrutinizing one's daily behavior, which Mussar relates is a reflection of our character traits (middot). The pre-designed pages in this journal are set up to assist you in actively going through two seasons of middot accounting. Consistently using this journal is the key to understanding your progress and growth. You will have a unique path that you design for yourself as you explore your character through the framework of Mussar. This is your "personal curriculum" as described by Alan Morinis in his book *Everyday Holiness*. You will come to understand your strengths, weaknesses and the work that lies before you through diligent interaction with your journal.

getting ready for the week

Preceding each section of weekly middot practice is an introductory page explaining the *middah*, an accounting chart for the week, and a suggested list of *kabbalot* (practices) for you to select as your coursework.

daily journaling

The pages following the *middah* introductory page are daily pages. Here you can focus on recording very objectively your behaviors and interactions with the *middah* of the week. Included on each day are:

- *phrases*: located at the top of each daily page, you commit this phrase to memory throughout an entire week for a particular *middah* and use it as a reminder
- *quotes*: a different quote is given each day that helps to bring perspective to

various aspects of the *middah*

- *thoughts section*: this is where you record your challenges, victories or reflections with this particular *middah* at the end of the day before retiring. It is crucial to journal and record your results daily; missing a day is discouraged as it disrupts the Mussar discipline and leaves blanks in your progress.
- *checklist*: this allows you to keep track of what practices you employed each day (meditation, retreat, study, practice, accounting)

meditation (*hitbonenut*)

This is best performed in the morning before your daily duties. Find a quiet spot to sit where you will be undisturbed for at least 10 minutes. Allocate the time to meditate as a necessity, like you would to eat breakfast or shower. Find a comfortable space in a chair or on the floor and breathe in and out and notice your breath. When your breath becomes uncalculated and a natural rhythm, you are ready to proceed. Say, think or feel *shlema* (wholeness) – focus and try to block out external noises and mind noise. Focus on the *middah*, your challenges with the trait and how you will adapt your behavior and thoughts. Don't wander, come back if necessary in your meditation. At the end of the day write what distracts you during your meditation in your journal as it will illuminate your working points for coming days.

retreat (*hitbodedut*)

This is an unstructured, spontaneous and individualized form of prayer and meditation taught by Rebbe Nachman of Breslov. Through *hitbodedut* one may establish close, personal relationship with God and gain clearer understanding of one's personal motives and aspirations. See the Riverton Mussar website (rivertonmussar.org)

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for our class on meditation as it relates to Mussar.

study

Integrate text study and working with a *chevrutah* (partner) in study at least once a week – this is vital in having accountability with another trusted soul and maintaining a diligent walk in Mussar practice.

practice

Several practices are listed on the *middah* summary page at the beginning of the week. The goal for the week would be to circle one or two which you feel you need to work on daily. For example, if you are working on generosity, possible *kabbalat* may be:

- give \$1 per day to someone who is in need
- give of your time each day to help someone with a task
- offer services at a discount if you normally charge a fee

This will help you in your practice of generosity and bring it to a higher and more refined level. As you progress through the week, you would refer to these circled practices and check off “practice” on your daily checklist (shown next to the “thoughts” section of each journal page) if you practiced generosity.

accounting

With respect to the accounting chart, you would record daily in the column relating to the day of the week (Sunday is 1, Monday is 2, etc...) by marking a "+", "-", or "0", depending how you did regarding that *middah*. If you found yourself exemplifying the trait in a positive fashion, then you rate yourself with a "+". If you were in a situation where you missed the mark displaying the character trait in its proper light, then rate yourself with a "-". If you have no information by which to rate a particular *middah* for any given day, then rate it simply with a "0". This simply means that it is a neutral score and there hasn't been any noticeable decline or improvement. The chart allows you to rate yourself in all 13 middot for the cycle each day, not just the one for the week. This helps you keep all of them in focus during your mussar work.

At the end of the week, you would tally your score (adding all the numbers in a row) and putting the total in the last column, the one with the "+" heading. There are 13 of these accounting charts per cycle (26 total). You will be able to focus on these 13 middot two times this year.

At the back of the journal there are two charts of summation, one for each 13-week cycle. Record here your weekly totals from the cycle you just came through. This will help you to see your progress through the year. Transcribe the totals from each week into each of the 13 columns.

Yasher koach – may this journal and your personal accounting strengthen you for the sake of humanity and Heaven.

humility

Week 1



humility is about seeking a level playing field between all people. In displaying this trait, one does not seek to degrade or puff up oneself or others. Mashiach Yeshua plainly says, *“The greatest among you shall be to you as a servant. Everyone who lifts himself up will be brought low, but everyone who lowers himself will be lifted up.”* (Matthew 23 : 11-12, DHE). Humility out of balance can appear two ways. One extreme displays haughtiness, while the other extreme displays groveling and self-deprecation. The obvious middle is where humility shines.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	+
humility								
patience								
gratitude								
order								
equanimity								
honor								
enthusiasm								
silence								
generosity								
adaptability								
moderation								
loving-kindness								
responsibility								

Circle the daily practices you will try this week:

- In a conversation, focus intently on what the other person is saying and not on what you will say next.
- Practice active listening and talk less.
- Prefer someone’s needs over yours.
- When someone says something that does not agree with your opinion, considering holding your tongue and letting it go.

Look at everyone as made in the image of Hashem.

Why did God give us two eyes? One eye is for observing our neighbor's virtues, and the other for detecting our own failings.

— CHASIDIC

meditation

retreat

study

practice

accounting

thoughts

Ask yourself:

1. What were the seeds that started to erode your humility today?