More than self-help: *Middot* (character training) is personal mastery

_by Sam Glaser_


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The seven core discussions discuss the basic middot of respect, compassion, listening, kindness, humility, care and friendship. When students endeavor to reach mastery in these areas, the result is a “living classroom” and as they gradu-


to the healing of our character traits.

We’re lucky that countless sages have given us powerful techniques to set goals and actually reach them. The following is an overview of the Jewish solution for transforming spiritual and ethnic behavior as we age.

The founder of the Musar movement (concerned with enhancing moral and spiritual behavior) states that the best way of repairing one bad trait is through learning the entire Talmud — how to get rid of us. Maimonides maintained that imbalanced character traits result in a veil blocking holiness in our lives.

Life has become less certain. We have witnessed a certain breakdown in boundaries. At least in pollution and, more broadly, a spoor to consciousness of pollution and our individual contributions to it.

Life has become less material. It has become evident in 2020 how all of the shopping we could not do enabled us to see that while some shopping was nec-

necessary and rightly missed, or switched online, other shopping was not nec-

essary. The time spent, the items to be purchased — not necessary.

Life has been less self-indulgent. It has become evident in 2020 that we take our health and well-being for granted, and we miss our meds, or focus on exercise or of our individual contributions to it.

Life has become less anonymous. It has become evident in 2020 that in residential American neighbor-

hoods, people actually live in those houses that seemed empty morning, noon and night, people can now be seen walking the streets in much greater numbers than before.

Life has become less detached from nature. It has become evident in 2020 that we all are more dependent on electronic media — we have come to protect ourselves against the rewards and hazards of profes-

sions not our own.

Life has become less obsessed. It has become evident in 2020 that much as we might accommodate the missteps of a normal season of professional football, hockey, theater and concerts, it is possible to live without it.

Life has become less routine. It has become evident in 2020 that the rewards and hazards of professional lives are too compassionate in justice, and we may neglect our own needs. If we recognize the importance of others, as the sages teach the principle, \( \text{Ma'asei} \text{vaadim} \text{ka'duma Torah} \), that we deal with others. When we notice one side getting off kilter, we have to emphasize the other side of the continuum to restore equilibrium.

Rabbi Israel Salanter (1810-1883).

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