

takes one not out of holiness but out of a communal version of holiness (so someone who is *tamei* cannot enter the heart of communal holiness, the Temple).

Zlochower: It's very hard to map the Hebrew language onto English. Holiness is a larger concept than just *kedusha*. Is there anything mundane or is everything holy?

Waskow: My friend and teacher Rabbi Max Ticktin teaches that in *havdallah* we move from *kadosh* to *chol*. *Chol* is from the same root as *halil*, a wind instrument like a flute — hollow. It appears also in “*chillul*

haShem.” When we take what looks like the living tree of God and hollow out all the insides, it's not living anymore, although the tree still looks like a tree and looks like it's living. Max teaches that *chol* is not profane or ordinary. It is the hollow open possibility place. On Shabbat we are filled and aware of *kedusha*, but when we move into weekday time, we must decide how to fill the open hollow-time-space. The work-a-day week is, therefore, potential *kedusha* rather than actual, immediate *kedusha*. The world is full of the possibilities of holiness.

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The Holiness of Teaching

Mimi Feigelson

The relationship between teachers and students has taken on multiple forms and shapes in our tradition. The Zohar (III 153a) sees them as the sun and moon — the foundation of our world. The Rambam (*Avot* 1, 6) equates that relationship to the highest form of friendship. The Chernobyl Rebbe, the Maor Aynayim perceives their connection as the *kidushin* (matrimony) of husband and wife.

The first word in the Torah, “*B'reishit*,” is read in *Seder Raba D'Breishit* as the acronym of six words that to my understanding explain the potential and the actuality of what transforms teaching into a holy and Godly endeavor:

“*B'reishit*: There is no *B'reishit* other than six attributes of the acts of an artisan/governess, and these are:

1. *Bet* – *B'niyut*, building
2. *Reish* – *R'kimut*, embroidering
3. *Alef* – *Amizut*, steadfast-holding/strengthening
4. *Shin* – *Sharshut*, enrooting
5. *Yud* – *Y'shivut*, sitting/stabilizing
6. *Tav* – *T'michut*, supporting/upholding

The Holy-One, Blessed-Be-S/He said: *B'reishit*, I built, I embroidered, I strengthened, I enrooted, I sat/stabilized, I upheld, the heavens and the earth.”

These six Divine attributes should drive us to make manifest the holiness of teaching: Can teachers embody these demands when in the presence of their students? Do students have the experience of “*B'reishit* moments” when encountering their teachers?

These are the guidelines and challenges:

Building: Do our students walk away greater than when they walked in? Is more of who

they are available to them?

Embroidering: Do our students have a greater capacity to adorn the garments of their souls in new ways? Do they have the tools to weave together parts of themselves that previously felt disconnected?

Steadfast-holding/Strengthening: Do our students turn away feeling held by their teachers? Do they feel that they are walking in God's world with a loyal partner? Do they have a sense of resilience that has been enriched?

Enrooting: What part of ourselves, as teachers, have we planted in our students' hearts? What part of God's world do they call “home”?

Sitting/Stabilizing: In this ever-evolving world, do we offer our students a sense of stability? Do we gift them with a sense of security and freedom that enables them to explore the world?

Supporting/Upholding: Do our students know that no matter where they find themselves, no matter how far or low they wander, we, their teachers, will find them and nurture them to resilience and independence?

It is in the interplay of light and darkness, the meeting of heaven and earth, that godliness is encountered. It is here that the teacher/student relationship acquires an element of holiness, sanctity.

The Talmud teaches that the Torah was transmitted as black fire on white fire, and we, in line with this tradition, must maintain the integrity of the black letters along with the white spaces of the parchment to render a Sefer Torah (a Torah scroll) fit for sacramental reading. Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev teaches that two letters glued as one would

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compromise the manifestation of the white spaces — the words of revelation complete but the silence and secret of revelation blemished. The holiness of teaching is created when both realms are embraced — the known and unknown, the past and future, the revealed and the ever-unfolding. Teachers and students alike are configured from black letters and white spaces. In that encounter, students and teachers embrace in the realm of holiness.

I recite *Tehillim*/Psalm 121 prior to every class that I teach and every meeting that I have with one of my students. I've been saying this several times a day for the past fifteen years. I do this to *acknowledge* the mystery and blessing of the encounter that is going to take

place. I do this to *honor* the unknown and the journey my students and I are to embark upon — like one who recites *Tefillat Ha-Derech* (the traveller's prayer). I do this as an act of *gratitude* for the trust and love that we will share, regardless of the content of the learning or conversation that is going to take place. I do this as a *humbling* agent as I dwell between "anyone who has taught the child of their friend Torah it is as if they have birthed them" and "my help is from God, Creator of heaven and earth."

I have been birthed in my life by many blessed men and women. I have birthed in my life, thank God, many beloved and holy children. "*Eli, Eli, sh'lo yigamer U'olam*"/My God, My God, May this never end. (Chana Senesh) 🕊

Torah as a Spiritual Garment: The Mussar of Learning

Ira F. Stone

Mussar is the general term used to describe the central spiritual discipline in Jewish tradition: the integration of *middot*, character traits or more generally, ethics, into all other aspects of Jewish expression. Understood this way Mussar transcends distinctions between movements, geography, and philosophy as it outlines the core characteristics of Jewish living. The goal of spiritual life is the transformation of human personality such that the central virtue of the Torah, *V'ahavta l'rayecha kamocho*, "Love your neighbor as yourself," can be enacted. How to achieve this transformation became the central question of Jewish spirituality. Even among the greatest of Jewish mystics, unification with the Divine was understood to be dependent upon the rectification of *middot*.

In this context the role of Torah and specifically the rabbinic value of learning Torah, and by extension learning in general, requires some clarification. Of what value is learning in the cultivation of character? Does one's learning Torah lead to acts of goodness that are indicative of this personality transformation? Can someone without Torah learning achieve ethical transformation? These questions assume, naturally, that Torah is instrumental, that it has — as a goal — the performance of specific acts and that learning is subservient to this instrumentality. We learn in order to do and it is the *doing* that

counts. Yet, within rabbinic tradition there is also the idea of *Torah U'sh'ma*, that is, learning for its own sake. This is a concept particularly upheld within the Mussar tradition. Thus our questions are deepened: What is the relationship between learning Torah and spiritual transformation when that learning is *not* instrumental but rather an end in itself?

The answer to these questions emerges out of a particular understanding of Torah, and hence of learning, within the Mussar world. Torah is not conceived of as a text, but rather as a spiritual garment. The goal of spirituality is to refine the soul in order for this garment to affix itself to one's soul. Mitzvot, then, are the specific cultural expressions of "wearing" this spiritual garment and *halakhot* become the historical form these cultural expressions take at any one time. But prior to the conceptualization of mitzvot, Torah must "affix" itself to one's soul. The actions that prepare the soul to bear Torah are contained within the *middot*, the character traits such as humility, kindness, righteousness, patience, and equanimity. The *middot* precede mitzvot and make Torah in this fundamental sense possible.

Learning Torah is a complex process, a spiritual discipline that begins by learning *middot* — learning to emulate the life-skills, if you will, of a spiritual master. The Torah itself places God in this position of spiritual master to be emulated when God denies Moses' re-

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