**An introduction to *Middot***

**Rabbi Ze’ev Sultanovich**

In the Bible, the term *middot* refers to measurements related to buildings, areas, or similar physical spaces. This root word is also found in the term *maddim*, a uniform, measured to fit the wearer. As time progressed, particularly during the Second Temple era, the concept expanded, and in Rabbinic Hebrew, it came to mean moral qualities. The common thread between these meanings lies in the notions of precision and definition. Consequently, we can infer that just as there can be quantitative and physical standards, so there can be moral and spiritual standards.

Similar to how a builder or tailor needs precise physical definitions for accurate work, a judge requires a clear definition of the human act performed and the intention behind it. Crafting moral definitions is undoubtedly more challenging than creating quantitative-physical ones, demanding greater intellectual effort to achieve this goal. The complexity arises from evaluating the qualities and dispositions of the soul, considering educational and social influences, and factoring in the spiritual and practical tools available at a specific time and place. This complexity poses significant challenges and increases the potential for error in moral judgment. Engaging in personal and public soulful accounting is a formidable task, demanding continuous scrutiny and a readiness to acknowledge and rectify mistakes. Unlike physical labor, moral-spiritual work is neverending.

The Rabbis introduced an additional dimension to the concept of *middot* when they associated them with *derekh Hashem*, meaning “the path of God.” In essence, this perspective suggests that God reveals Himself in the world through attributes that manifest His guidance and supervision. This teaching unveils a profound theological-philosophical idea: understanding and defining God’s presence can occur through His *middot*, similar to how a person reflects on and recognizes oneself. This is because the very nature of *middot* involves boundaries and definiteness, characteristics inherent to humanity.

As an example, concepts like *giluy* (revealed) or *seter* (hidden), when applied to God, are human constructs, as the infinite nature of God eludes any precise definitions or measurements. Rabbi Kook delved deeply into these issues in a number of articles and books, particularly in his philosophical work, *Da’at Elokim*. One might assert that the concept of *middah* enriched and complemented the idea of *to’ar*, attribute, which pertains to God’s presence and actions from a human perspective. It is worth acknowledging that terms like these, when related to God, are impressions of human consciousness. Still, their primary purpose is to distinguish between God and humanity, intensifying the awe inherent in faith. In philosophical terms, *to’ar* signifies a transcendent approach, while *middah* embodies the immanent approach. Both aspects converge in the same sublime Being, Who is, simultaneously, infinitely distant and incomprehensibly close.

The Rabbis addressed the apparent contradiction between the two:

But is it actually possible for a person to follow the Divine Presence? Has it not already been stated: “For the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God” (Deuteronomy 4:24). Rather, the meaning is that one should follow the qualities (*middotav*) of the Holy One, Blessed be He (*Sota* 14a).

Once the decision was made by the Rabbis to utilize the concept of *middot* in the context of the relationship between God and humanity, a crucial question arose: what specific *middot* should individuals follow and adhere to? The descriptions in the Bible suggest that various and contrasting *middot* characterize God’s interactions with humans, including love and hate, mercy and anger, war and peace, forgiveness and jealousy, among others. The Rabbis’ conclusion is unequivocal, as Maimonides articulates it: “to imitate His good deeds and exalted qualities by which God, may He be exalted, is described.” He cites the Sifrei (Deuteronomy 49:1): “‘To walk in all his ways’: Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, is called merciful; you too, be merciful. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, is called pious; you too, be pious.” That is to say, the Rabbis advocated for prioritizing the emulation of the exalted *middot*, according to Maimonides’ formulation.

This teaching goes beyond being merely a moral and educational lesson; it represents a profound and comprehensive understanding of God’s path in His interactions with the world and humanity. The foundation of this teaching is drawn from the verse in Psalms (30:6), “His anger is but for a moment, His favor, for a lifetime,” which is cited in the context of explaining Balaam’s strength – his ability to discern the moment when God was “angry” (see b. Berakhot 7a). There is no comparison between God’s frustration with the imperfections of humanity and the world and His decision to create and sustain the world, to ensure that humanity endures, to sustain Israel, and to continue to save them despite their stubbornness in various situations. Recognizing the inequality of the *middot* within the context of God’s leadership, the benevolent *middot* emerge as the “exalted” and primary ones. Therefore, they become the sole pathway for individuals to achieve moral perfection through constant and continuous ascension.

The foundation of the world itself rests on these *middot*, making them the exclusive pathway for both individuals and humanity as a whole to evolve and construct the surrounding reality. Moreover, these *middot* play a pivotal role in shaping an individual’s knowledge, belief system, emotional landscape, moral compass, and intellectual world. The concept of man being created “in the image of God” takes on a profound meaning in this context – as humans engage with the world in a manner akin to God, they draw closer to Him and become more deeply connected. Understanding this, the active dimension of love within faith complements the passive dimension of awe. It establishes a dynamic relationship where individuals actively engage with the benevolent *middot*, mirroring God’s actions in the world.

The commandment to be precise in weights and measurements, traditionally associated with the material-economic realm, must also be understood as encapsulating the purity of moral action. Trade, being an existential-material need in human society, requires accuracy and honesty. In this way, we can understand that the commandment to be accurate in material-economic weights and measurements contains within it the purity of moral action. Trade is an existential requirement of human society. Precision and honesty in trade is a moral expression of the fundamental desire to live in accordance with being created “in God’s image.” One does so not merely out of fear of potential punishment but as part of the joy one finds in one’s love of humanity and the world. This passionate love has no boundary or purpose, even while it has a particular, defined expression in every moment and situation—mirroring the way God interacts with humanity in the spirit of Ecclesiastes (12:13), “for that is the whole duty of man.”

**The book *Middot HaRa’aya* serves as a gateway into the realm of *middot*, guided by the perspective of Rabbi Kook *z”l*. It sheds light on the Torah as elucidated by the Rabbis of previous generations, interpreting it as divine wisdom imparted by the Almighty. It is a blessing and privilege to engage in study and teaching collaborating with God in the exploration of His Torah and the world He has created.**

*Orot HaKodesh*/Part 3 – *Mussar HaKodesh*

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook

Cultivating *middot* through intellectual understanding must precede their cultivation through emotional experience, for without a grasp of what is good and bad, how can one navigate towards acquiring the good and avoiding the bad, especially when it is a natural and habitual inclination?

Purifying the *middot* of the soul

**Torah and *middot***

**I**

Even though the Torah and the commandments both cultivate *middot*, still it is impossible to rely on this alone, and it is necessary to engage in the refinement of *middot*, and in moral rectification in particular.

**The need to cultivate *middot***

**II**

The cultivation of *middot* is a neverending process. Even if a person has cultivated *middot* to the extent that he is at an average spiritual level, when he ascends to a higher level, he extracts mysteries of life from the chaotic depths that lead to spiritual insights. These have not been clarified before, and always require new cultivation. Therefore, righteous individuals, whose personal growth is never ceasing, and who progress from strength to strength, are characterized by their unwavering engagement in repentance, an important part of which is the cultivation of *middot* and bringing clarity to them.

**The wisdom of improving *middot***

**III**

The correct order of improving *middot* within the soul is a unique wisdom that, for its development, requires the integration of the entire wealth of one’s spiritual resources with the comprehensive renewal of our generation, coupled with a broad perspective on the world. This perspective should encompass all of our generation’s fields of knowledge and emotion with all their innovations. This process must infuse all these elements with a new soul, aligning them with the strong and pure requirements of holiness and morality.

**Softening the impurities**

**IV**

Impurities that accumulate within the human soul and manifest as negative *middot,* cunning, vile lusts, anger, and hatred are reflections of the general impurities present in the world. The softening of these impurities in the human heart and the depths of his soul is accomplished by the improvement of *middot*, and even more so through the illumination of the Torah and the act of offering prayers that are raised upwards in the holy light, softening the general impurities and resulting in positive outcomes.

**The two souls**

**V**

The teaching that a person’s spirituality is comprised of two souls—a divinely good soul and an animalistic evil soul—serves as a profound and honorable foundation for understanding the essence of the soul, providing a well-paved path toward a complete moral life. Awareness of this nature allows a person to always find fulfillment, both in times of serenity and in times of suffering. In times of calm, he connects his thinking to the divine soul, in order to expand and strengthen it. In moments of suffering, he addresses the animalistic soul, cleansing its filth, pleased that it is being purified through affliction. This allows the individual to view his faults as external elements to his core being so that he can judge himself justly. The aspiration to transform the nature of the animalistic soul into goodness and refinement becomes a crucial and ongoing task that the individual feels – to his inner core – is essential. By engaging in this the individual finds himself constantly performing holy service that is essential for him and for the world, refining and elevating all that needs purification.

**In the depths of the soul**

**VI**

Some people keenly feel the presence of the impure and evil soul within, leading to bitterness and a sense of inner turmoil. However, it is crucial to recognize that alongside the impure soul, there resides within each individual a pure, holy, and sublime divine soul. At times, the revelation of the light belonging to the divine soul can intensify the presence of the impure soul, which strives to express its existence: “The thoughtless woman is riotous” (see Proverbs 9:13). In these moments, guided by the wisdom of God within, individuals have the capacity to seize control of every aspect—courage, strength, talent, ideas, discourse, and achievements—of the impure soul and subjugate these elements to the root of holiness. Then the dross is rejected and dissipates, sinking into the abyss of the soul without resurfacing. The elements of purity, encapsulated in the holy lights, previously engulfed in the stronghold of the impure soul, are now set free and they gravitate towards the divine soul’s light illuminating the pinnacle of holiness even seven times over.

**A *tikkun* for the soul**

**VII**

In the realm of reincarnation, the state of the soul may carry fundamental deficiencies inherent to its essence, distinct from the imperfections caused by physicality and its conditions. During periods when the body is robust and physical desires are dominant, these fundamental deficiencies may not be prominently noticeable, as another stream of control – strong and powerful – directs life. However, as the physical desires wane, the spiritual deficiencies from past existences begin to surface. This marks the time for the actual correction of the soul, a process for which all previous efforts in moral guidance, directed against physical forces, were merely a prelude. This course of correction, though potentially noble, may encounter challenges that are perceived as obstacles arising from physicality. Still, the essence of this correction is inherently noble and worthy, and its absolute victory relies on the noble reinforcement of the spirit. This reinforcement extends beyond the current lifetime, encompassing the repair of even previous lives. Generation after generation will praise your deeds, and your faithful ones will bless you (see Psalms 145:4, 10).

**The order of purification and its obstacles**

**VIII**

The path of spiritual refinement ideally begins with the purity of deeds, gradually extending to the purification of feelings and *middot*, ultimately reaching the purity of the mind, following that order. Happy is the person who succeeds to follow this path! However, there are instances when a person may find it impossible to engage in self-rectification in this orderly fashion. Such a person must not be fixated on the prescribed order, rather they should seize whatever opportunities they can to grow, refine, magnify and glorify the Torah. Even if there are unresolved emotional and behavioral issues – including the most weighty, i.e., challenging interpersonal matters – the person should not forsake his ascent and his pursuit of goodness and elevation in any way possible. Sometimes, external factors may hinder progress, such as a lack of ability or even a temporary lack of will. A person is encouraged not to abandon his upward journey despite the presence of challenges, of lack ability, or even lack of will, for even a lack of will may be viewed as beyond his control. Although God forbid that one make use of the heretical excuse of those who deny free choice, as that is a corrupt attitude, there may be elements of this perspective that can address serious afflictions of the soul, as can be derived from the (Talmudic) principle: “Had it not been for these three verses, the legs of the enemies of Israel (a euphemism for Israel) would have collapsed” (b. Berakhot 32a). The principle is that as a person grows in achievement and desire to increase the good, his actions should naturally expand. He should not be deterred by any obstacles, whether spiritual or material. As strength and courage build within, the sacred heroism from Above emerges in the soul, enabling success in all endeavors.

**Elevation of the mind and the purity of the *middot***

**IX**

While improving one’s *middot* is essential, still one should not delay elevating the spirit and intellectual perspectives due to unpurified *middot*. Conversely, it is impossible to purify *middot* without a significant upsurge of spirit, and the greater one is, the more effort must be made to enhance one’s intellectual and spiritual realm to gain clarity about the true essence of purified *middot*. In certain situations, individuals may need to draw entirely from their intellect, disregarding immediate concerns about *middot* and their derivatives, for we have a heavenly promise that elevating the intellect leads to the elevation of all aspects, purifying them in the process. It is crucial that we not measure the content of these *middot* in great people by conventional standards of good and bad, for in individuals with abundant knowledge, the measure may differ significantly from that of average people, whose lives are predominantly driven by emotion and imagination. The distinction between these people is akin to the difference between the states of sleep and dreams and the wakeful clarity of thought.

***Dvekut* and alignment of the *middot***

**X**  
When the soul is intimately connected to life, to the light of God, and the love of divine devotion, all the *middot* naturally align. For those great thinkers who reach the elevated level of devotion, their correction and alignment with divine principles occur in accordance with the measure of *dvekut*, supreme devotion, that flows through the channels of revealed science, the Torah, *mitzvot*, and the entire realm of morality and spiritual strength. The inner necessity of divine *dvekut* holds a special place in the soul of Israel and surpasses any logical thought. It resides in the heart, guided by the abundance of *ru’ah hakodesh* (divine inspiration), and it propels itself forward through the hope of salvation, permeating and extending across all spheres of action that influence both communal and individual aspects of life.

**Residue of *middot* and *dvekut***

**XI**The residue of bad *middot*, when intertwined with the quality of *dvekut* )divine devotion) within the soul, can manifest its influence more intensely than the bad *middot* found in most people. This is because there is nothing in the world as deeply embedded in the soul as heavenly *dvekut*. For this reason, the profound and expansive life of the righteous, those who stand before God and revel in the pleasure of devotion and divine desire, cannot be fully comprehended. The greater and more powerful one’s general life force, the more potent the negative aspects within them become, according to the deep meaning of the rabbinic teaching: “Anyone greater than another, his evil inclination is greater than his” (b. Sukka 52a). As a result, as long as the world has not reached perfection, the righteous are engaged in an ongoing battle against the residual evil within them, entwined with good. Yet God does not abandon them, and they consistently progress from strength to strength, continuously conquering and prevailing. The righteous never forsake the essential content of life—devotion to the divine. Instead, they continually elevate, embrace, and purify it. In this constant ascent of their devotion and themselves, everything ascends, the entire world, all life, the the entirety of existence. It is through the lifting of the foundation that the entire building rises, and by the effort of the root, the branches and leaves are strengthened, along with their many minutiae.

**Great *middot* and deficiencies**

**XII**

Great individuals in the world possess strong and impactful *middot*, which, when expressed, may seem as forceful as wild animals. However, the essence of these traits lies in their strength, and as these individuals grow in stature, their refinement also increases. The *middot*, which are rooted in the nature of the will, are illuminated by the light of life, and higher intelligence shines through them. Rather than being compressed or contracted, these traits should be expanded and elevated. When faced with feelings of smallness, those with great *middot* may respond with overly sharp measures, possessing the ability to introspect deeply and identify defects within themselves. However, they should not deceive themselves with false modesty by considering themselves the worst of humanity for they should recognize that many people celebrate without reflecting, oblivious to the lack of acceptance of their own *middot*. It is only those who are clear-minded, who allow their souls to be affected by their less-than-desirable *middot* and actions, recognizing that awareness of these defects is, in itself, a great accomplishment. This recognition serves as a guarantee that those who are consistently concerned with acknowledging their defects will not be humiliated. Instead, they will ascend to a profound understanding that the deficiencies themselves are significant advantages, originating from a great soul and intended for the pursuit of greatness.

**The root of *middot* and sadness**

**XIII**

All *middot* can be elevated because they are rooted in holiness, except for sadness, which has no root at all, for “strength and joy are in His place” (I Chronicles 16:27). It is essential to elevate its source and as the root rises, so does the corresponding *middah*. But the root of sadness is pride, anger, or worry, stemming from those sources.

**The foundation of anger and creativity**

**XIV**

The foundation of anger is found in the absence of spiritual creativity. When spiritual forces gather, ready to manifest in expressed and picturesque glory, they press upon the soul and may disturb it, resulting in inner anger. Wars among nations, murder and robbery among humans, and even anger in animals—from the venomous bite of a snake to the small sting of vermin intent on causing harm— can all be traced back to the general anger contained in the world, which restrains the power of creation. As spiritual creation expands, and various factions of broad opinions branch out, as the Torah grows and becomes more beautiful, peace begins to permeate the world: “Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me” (Isaiah 27:5).

**Anger and creativity**

**XV**

Anger is something that should be hated with the utmost depth of our being. We should harbor a strong aversion towards boiling anger, expressing this dislike with great intensity but maintaining moderation and calmness. Boiling anger has the potential to confuse the mind and undermine all positive aspects of humankind, both the individual and the community. Observing a group or party that consistently communicates with anger serves as a sign that it lacks intelligence and substance to fill its emptiness. In reality, it may be angry with itself, but egoism prompts it to project the poison of its anger onto others. In contrast, supreme sages who have reached the pinnacle of justice and kindness are characterized by justice and righteousness and are always filled with pleasantness, so that kindness and truth adorn them throughout the day.

**Purifying zealousness**

**XVI**

The *middah* of zealousness needs to be purified so that when it approaches the boundary of holiness it will be pure zealousness on behalf of God. And if generally speaking, it is not possible without some residue of the weakness of flesh and spirit, one must apply self-criticism to ascertain its essential basis, to ensure that it is not jealousy of one’s fellow man, which brings rot to one’s bones (see Proverbs 14:30), rather zealousness on behalf of God, which offers its owner a covenant of peace (see Numbers 25:12).

**Greatness and care in honoring one’s fellow**

**XVII**

At times, due to spiritual greatness, negative *middot* may also be reinforced, manifesting in mockery and contempt for others, driven by specific resentment in the heart toward them. Although it may appear that the heart requires this expansion, and occasionally one could contend that there is no slander or intention of evil, rather an expansion of one’s inner character, which is primarily holy, caution is advisable, as it falls under the category of “Do not say, I will repay evil; Put your hope in the Lord, and he will save thee” (Proverbs 20:22). When a righteous person experiences a moral fall, the key is not to despair but to strive to ascend to the highest realms of holiness. Particularly, one should not be disturbed by one’s sin in relation to his fellow human beings, especially in matters of honor and gaining honor at the expense of a friend’s degradation, for these actions may sometimes contain a hint of goodness due to the greatness of the soul, but they need to be distilled through repentance fueled by love. Always repent to the strength of humility, love for one’s fellows, and prudence in matters of human honor.

**The *middah* of equanimity**

**XVIII**

The level of equanimity in one’s *middot* is to rise to the level where an individual does not need praise or condemnation, even for his spiritual needs. Such an individual does not harbor pride that would necessitate condemnation, nor does he succumb to the lowliness of sadness or a lack of purpose or enlightenment, intelligence, diligence, and sharpness in the depth of the mind and clarity of innovation that it would make it necessary to be raised from his surroundings to reach his highest spiritual level. For as long as someone needs the element of human praise, even for spiritual good, he has not yet reached the level of equanimity. Attaining equanimity requires great self-esteem and a noble, wonderful power to the point that he will not need either praise or condemnation. In this state, one no longer seeks human praise, even for spiritual achievements, signifying the true realization of this *middah*. A person who reaches this level becomes a member of the group of the righteous, accepting all affairs with equanimity, fulfilling the verse, “I will sing of righteousness and justice; I will chant a hymn to You, O Lord” (Psalms 101:1), meaning, if righteousness I will sing and if justice I will sing. It is specifically through the acquisition of equanimity, that spiritual honor—the honor of truth—thrives in the soul, as there is nothing that can destroy it. The need for combating the dross of pretended honor and all the more so the desire for ridicule to bring down haughtiness become irrelevant. It is for those honest-hearted individuals bound by the bond of supreme wisdom that oversees the entire world in the clear light of truth, that Proverbs (3:35) teaches, “The wise shall obtain honor.” Their power increases and their silence is wondrous, as the first letters of the words of the verse spell out “strength” (כחי) and the last letters spell out “silence” (דמו): “Silence is praise” (Psalms 65:2), and “Mighty creatures do His bidding” (Psalms 103:20).

**Excessive awe and sadness**

**XIX**

We observe how *kelipat noga* (lit. the husk of Venus – the fourth *kelipa* in Lurianic Kabbalah that contains a mixture of good and evil), rooted in the animalistic soul, cunningly lies in wait for the spiritual inclinations, enticing them to it in order to subdue the human spirit, shroud its brilliance, and constrict the dominion of the Sacred in the world. Through additional acts of devotion and an excessive sense of awe, it seeks to sap the strength of the will and curtail mastery over inner sanctity. Subsequently, when the animalistic forces are stirred by physical deeds, they emerge to overwhelm the feeble will, burdened by the excess of righteousness and the accompanying sorrow. In this state, it beguiles souls and power: “She also lies in wait like a robber, and increases the transgressors among men” (Proverbs 23:28). Nevertheless, God does not forsake His righteous ones, for “Seven times the righteous man falls and gets up” (Proverbs 24:16). However, the individual whose journey aligns with the divine will fortifies himself like a lion, turning steadfastly towards the Torah, embracing honesty and justice, and engaging in heartfelt prayer filled with joy and strength, finding the time to seek Him: “Seek the Lord, and his strength: seek his face continually” (Psalms 10:4). Excessive awe diminishes the strength of an individual’s will, allowing negative *middot* to take root in the depths of the soul so that when opportunities arise, these traits emerge from their concealment, steering the person off course. Excessive awe can exist only in the absence of the enlightening influence of knowledge. Knowledge serves as a guiding light, lifting these *middot* to higher levels, preventing them from settling deep within the soul so that the path of righteousness continues to ascend, free from frequent deviations, and the sacred courage of the heart thrives, evolving across all avenues of life.

**Inner shame**

**XX**

Since a small unworthy thought occupies a space in the soul concerning matters of divine affairs and the entirety of holiness, its subtle poison extends its influence over actions, studies, and conversations, that are influenced by it. Then the spiritual impurities, shadows, deceitful thoughts, weakness, flattery, and lust cling to all things sacred, establishing for themselves a place in the Torah studied not for its intrinsic value and in empty flattery in fulfilling commandments. The person dedicated to holiness, with a pure spirit intolerant of such contaminants, experiences profound weariness when approaching his sacred duties without purification. While at times it may be imperative not to delay due to the potential impact on the external aspects of study and action, there remains a perpetual necessity for introspection and inner shame, recognizing that the Supreme Holy Spirit has not yet fully permeated one’s being and does not propel his work, learning, and actions. Rooted in a sincere quest for holiness, individuals have the privilege of discerning their inclinations, perpetually ascending in the purity of spirit. This facilitates the arousal of the higher, pure aspect within, motivating the fundamental and essential facets of his actions, learning, teaching, and observance of the Torah and commandments of God with a love that is pure, supreme, strong, holy, and illuminating.

**Recognizing one’s inner ignominy**

**XXI**

The authentic *tzaddik* possesses a profound sense of ignominy, intimately aware of the magnitude of the ugliness concealed within himself, whether stemming from the pervasive evil in the world yet to be clarified, from the very essence of the evil side within his own soul, or from the frailty of willpower and the dimming of the light of honesty and justice that does not shine across many facets of his being. The *tzaddik*, however, refrains from openly displaying his lowliness and sometimes the heart does not even reveal it to the mouth, for two reasons: first, to prevent the humiliation and weakening of the good side of the soul, for “the cabbage is damaged together with the thorn” (b. Bava Kamma 92a); and second, to avoid taking pride in the humiliation itself, ensuring that overt humility does not evoke excessive jealousy. Regardless, the Examiner of hearts, knowing the depth of inner humiliation, attributes to the *tzaddik* all the virtues of humility. Even if the *tzaddik* does not overtly manifest this virtue in all its beauty and glory due to the aforementioned considerations, it is credited to them as if they had performed it, akin to a mitzvah that they intended but could not execute through no fault of his own, which the verse acknowledges as if he did it (see b. Kiddushin 40a).

**Suffering purifies**

**XXII**

When an individual experiences the anguish of the torments of hell due to the consequences of evil deeds and negative *middot*, coupled with the absence of Torah resulting from neglect in its study, and the sorrow arising from being hindered in divine *dvekut*, these collective tribulations act as a purifying fire for the soul. It is within the crucible of these challenges that one can anticipate salvation.

**Depression and humility**

**XXIII**

When a person confronts a profound sense of emptiness, recognizing his own insignificance and feeling the weight of his soul troubled by a pervasive sense of nothingness, he must recognize that God’s salvation is soon to illuminate his path and that since “the measure of good is always greater than the measure of punishment” (b. Sota 11a) then if “pride goes before ruin” (Proverbs 16:18), it follows that preceding greatness and enlightenment goes inner humility and a humbled spirit. The individual must immediately embrace the *middah* of humbleness, establishing this quality in every facet of his spiritual being. Then the individual will ascend in the purity of his soul, clinging to the source of peace and basking in the light of “the Lord robed in grandeur” (see Psalms 93:1), the living Lord of all worlds.

**Forgetfulness and joy**

**XIV**

There are times when it is beneficial to forget one’s sins, especially when done for the sake of Heaven, that is, that it is driven by a genuine desire to serve God joyfully, to expand the mind through Torah and wisdom, and to contribute to the improvement of the world, infusing one’s actions with the light and joy of God. In these circumstances, it is as though, measure for measure, these sins are considered forgotten before the Holy One, blessed be He: “These too shall be forgotten,” “These” being a reference to the sin of the Golden Calf (see b. Berakhot 32b). The power of memory is magnified by the good and the holy so that every *mitzvah*, virtuous deed, and pure thought radiate with a double memory—a positive recollection before the divine.

**Ugliness and beauty**

**XXV**

At times, a person’s soul is laid bare, revealing all its ugliness, a sight that can be unsettling and evoke fear so that the only solace one finds is in recognizing that the strength of the ugly side of the soul and its impurity is proportionate to the potential for the beautiful side to grow and increase in purity. This balance is divinely designed, one in contrast to the other (see Ecclesiastes 7:14). Once an individual conquers and transcends the initial horror induced by the ugly side of the soul, the pure side begins to shine forth and the beauty inherent in the soul becomes visible so that the eyes witness and overflow with the radiance of this purity and all the monstrous visions are comforted: “Then the humble shall have increasing joy through God, and the neediest of people shall exult in the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 29:19).

**Destruction and construction**

**XXVI**

When a person senses that his spirituality has crumbled, it is essential to recognize that this juncture marks the opportunity to construct a new edifice—one more noble, sublime, present, and glorious than the previous structure. In facing this task, one must muster strength and endeavor to rectify his actions and ways systematically, with courage of heart, a pure, and a heart filled with determination and inner joy: “Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He shows sinners the way. He guides the lowly in the right path and teaches the lowly His way” (Psalms 25:8-9).

**Falling and exaltation**

**XXVII**

When a person grapples with feelings of wretchedness and emptiness, sensing a depletion of spiritual strength that leads to a fall and collapse, it is crucial to recognize that a great light awaits him. All the shortcomings and cancellations, both practical and spiritual, positive and negative, from his entire history stand before them, and all his sins bear witness. The individual reflects, repents with deep remorse, and rises from the abyss to the highest heights—transcending from impurity to purity, from darkness to profound light. On this journey of departure and ascent, periods of darkness may be traversed, testing the individual’s resilience. Yet, in his understanding that God is merciful and kind, fear dissipates for though he walks through a valley of deepest darkness, he fears no harm, knowing that God is with him (see Psalms 23:4). The individual calls out to God from the depths of the abyss, and his voice is heard. The light of wisdom beckons, illuminates the path, and both wisdom and grace lend support, adorning the person. Soon, a return to safety is achieved, marked by wisdom, joy, and valor.

**To fall and to rise**

**XXVIII**

When someone experiences a fall prompted by a weakness of spirit and moral stumbling, it is imperative to resolve within his heart to draw up precious stones from the depths of the abyss so that he can return, rise, and renew his strength with increased valor and peace, bathed in the illuminating light of the world even more profoundly than in previous times. This holds true also for entire generations and across all times.

**Declines and righteousness**

**XXIV**

One who harbors a profound reverence for God, consistently yearning to translate this holy sense into action, whose soul longs for a deep connection with divine devotion according to his feeling and attainment, and who desires to rise spiritually always higher and higher despite encountering numerous obstacles, practical stumbling blocks, and frequent declines – every day, at every time, and every hour – must not lose sight of the essential knowledge that “One should know of himself whether or not he is completely righteous” (b. Berakhot 61b). And in this *middah* of a perfect *tzaddik,* there are also several elements, one must recognize that even if, in general, they feel covered in grime and find themselves in the depths of the sea, the essential power of perfect righteousness lies within the depths of his soul. It is this divine living light that serves as a point that binds them in a robust connection to the world of life and this connection becomes the anchor that establishes his rank in a fully understood way: “Though the misfortunes of the righteous be many, the Lord will save him from them all” (Psalms 34:20).

**Bitterness and purification**

**XXX**

As the moral sense becomes keener, an individual recognizes his cunning, and the accompanying bitterness in his soul – which recognizes his undeveloped moral values – increases within him, to the extent that he becomes very embittered. Yet, every person with an honest heart comprehends the importance of accepting this quality with love since it serves as a cultivation force that imparts valuable *middot* and cultivates meritorious qualities within a person. Regarding this, it is said: “‘Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God’ (Psalms 146:5), [rather than “hope” (*sivro*), read “broken” (*shivro*)], for the righteous one is content to break his bones to bring honor to the Holy One, blessed be He” (Zohar Vayakhel 198).

**Bitterness and consolation**

**XXXI**

Subjective awareness holds immense value, and it is crucial not to underestimate its significance, and when considering its religious content it is entirely included in the principle “Be not wicked in your own esteem” (m. Avot 2:13). In moments when a person is filled with bitterness about themselves, his moral values, and his views from a subjective standpoint, and he lashes out at the pressure that his thoughts press upon him, he should know then and recognize that these storms are not meant to dislodge the valuable content that is so important to him that serves as a bridge from his limited world to a wide world filled with light and the freedom of holiness. Rather he must gather strength, turning to his connection with God. Along the path of his inner life, he must hold steadfast and bolster his courage, and knowing that repentance is near, he must gird himself to enhance his senses. A fresher and more comprehensive light will emerge before him from a world full of laws, righteous judgments, and true teachings. From this wellspring of wisdom, he will find light allowing him to carve out a mine of perspectives and consolations. Through this process, the individual can choose and bring closer to them the inner spiritual institution that operates within his close feelings. Like the morning light, the sun will rise before him, and a new morning, consolations and new hopes from the source of salvation will spring up before him: “For you shall forget the reproach of your youth, and remember no more the shame of your widowhood” (Isaiah 54:4), “For Israel and Judah are not bereft of their God” (Jeremiah 51:5).

**Examining the soul in the light of the Torah**

**XXXII**

The supreme naturalness of the Holy Light becomes palpable in the personal life of an individual, manifesting in the pure depths of faith. This light serves as the testing ground for the soul, where every sin and imperfection is keenly felt. The heart, driven by love, urges towards repentance, and within the depths of this process lies a hidden sorrow intermingled with joy. A gentle longing, akin to a flowing stream, plays soft tunes of sorrow and joy, of exaltation and depression, gradually crescendoing. At times, the hidden spirit pauses at the center of action, scrutinizing actual facts with penetrating insight. In these moments, the soul may be buffeted by the flurry of scrutiny, and the guidance for the path of life may seem difficult and confusing. In such circumstances, the only counsel is the counsel of God—the light of the Torah in its myriad revelations, teachings, laws, principles, and protective fences. It serves as the guiding candle illuminating the darkness, providing comfort to the soul. Not every suggestion of sin from the imagination holds true, and rebuking Satan from both sides is essential – do not sin excessively, and do not overly adhere to righteousness. Balanced scales of righteousness and honest weights bring equilibrium to the staff of life, offering comfort to all the brokenhearted. The pure, holy, joyful, and happy life continues to become increasingly beautiful and sanctified. The eyes are lifted, and the world shines with its splendor, as the grace of God fills the soul; the assurance of grace, favor, blessing, joy, and the salvation of the worlds beats in the heart. A great multitude of brand-new ideas emerges, inspiring the renewal of spiritual power, the increase of Torah, and the magnification of wisdom, balancing discourse, deepening the sense of virtue, and piling up in an elaborate arrangement of every act and enterprise. The path of life becomes straight, and love for every created being expands so that the entire world, from eternity to eternity, resonates with a new song.

**Equivocation and constant service**

**XXXIII**

Understanding why one struggles to engage in pressing work is essential, an occasional occurrence for those with a gentle spirit who often find themselves immersed in lofty thoughts. Sometimes, this hindrance arises from the rapid pace at which the soul flashes with ideas and desires, making it challenging to settle on a fixed position due to the constant movement from strength to strength. However, a lack of purity and humility can also contribute to this equivocation, even amid frequent moments of exaltation. When a person combines clarification of *middot* with spiritual upliftment, a sense of complete rest is renewed within them. This balance allows for the performance of constant service and uninterrupted work, free from harassment and disturbances arising from either rebellion or mutiny within the soul.

**Rest for the purpose of service**

**XXXIV**

There are times when a person must recognize the importance of not constantly being driven by the duty of action and study. It is necessary to provide oneself with rest and space so that the soul can autonomously rise and expand in its inner journey within the heart of life, encompassed by all the action and study, amidst service and prayer. After such a period of rest, infused with an element of the holiness of the Sabbath, the soul is invigorated to return with great strength to spiritual and practical service. Now, every detail is approached with a sense of freshness, drawing from the source of life in the full mind, illuminated by the light of life.

**Rising slowly to higher levels**

**XXXV**

The pursuit of great moral virtues often intensifies the influence of the evil inclination, depleting a person’s spirituality. The considerable effort invested in combating the evil inclination could otherwise be directed toward ascending to higher spiritual levels. Therefore, instead of seeking rapid and drastic improvements in moral character, a person should aspire to gradually enhance his righteousness. When aiming to ascend step by step, aspiring to reach the highest levels, he must say: When will my deeds reach those of my ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? By focusing on overcoming the evil instinct within the broader desire to ascend gradually, the individual activates a measure of spiritual strength. This leads to the awakening of holiness within and allows the light of life to shine within him.

**Fear and the path to greatness**

**XXXVI**

Weakness and anxiety often serve as signs of a transitional state leading toward greatness, but greatness itself transcends these attributes. This dynamic is characterized by a reversal, transforming weakness into strength and fear into certainty. The path to greatness is marked by constant change, with mental currents flowing like a turbulent and assertive river. Since the soul inherently seeks the constancy of peace, it perpetually encounters unwanted upheaval in its surroundings, embodied in the forms of weakness and fear. However, within the depths of this apparent weakness and fear, even as they appear to dominate, lie dormant reserves of strength and certainty.

**Greatness and excessive concern with details**

**XXXVII**

When a great person excessively involves themselves in the *middah* of details, whether in his study or through excessive concern, he risks diminishing his own virtue, and in such instances, repentance out of love becomes necessary, reconnecting with the greatness of his soul, so that he can refocus on matters that are both great and sublime. It is clear, of course, that he will not make light of any detail, and will always add courage and practical sanctity. The great soul possesses a profound depth, and its moral sense is sharp and piercing, reaching into the depths of the abyss. However, without an enlightening perspective that brings delight and joy from a broader standpoint, there is a risk of succumbing to the threat of anxiety stemming from the endless details. This anxiety can lead to a state of suffering, causing the nullification of valuable pursuits such as Torah study, prayers, and higher intellectual endeavors—each of which holds immense significance. The evil inclination (*yetzer hara*) is not truly overcome within the innermost being of a person except through engagement with the details of the Torah and moral principles. On the other hand, the positive inclination (*yetzer tov*) is fortified through general virtues that manifest after the soul undergoes a process of purification, shedding away its impurities and negative influences.

**Smallness and the call to greatness**

**XXXVIII**

Every sin and iniquity defiles the sacred. The diminished will that stems from the flaws in *middot* is exacerbated by human transgressions, suffocating the holy soul and preventing it from breathing in its sanctified air. Love becomes feeble and constrained, and all associated matters become entangled in its smallness. When discussions arise about the special virtues of the nation in its spirituality and the nobility of its cause, these words are often accepted due to the mental laxity of flattery rather than the genuine recognition of their truth. Therefore, our initial duty lies in demonstrating courage of spirit and elevating thoughts to the extent of clarifying issues. This ensures that what is truly exalted remains elevated in its own right, and the call to greatness becomes an authentic pursuit of true greatness.

**Narrowness in *middot* and concepts**

**XXXIX**

When one focuses solely on spiritual qualities without ascending to a broad, worldly, and free intellectual education, the overall achievement tends to decrease. The *middot* themselves become diminished, and the conceptual understanding may be confined to a narrow scope. While many possessions are derived from this limited perspective, the aspiration should always be to rise to the open space, embracing the realm of greatness and divine pride.

**Beyond *mussar* of *middot***

**XL**

The great soul, which encompasses vast expanses and ascends to lofty heights, transcending the conventional concepts of morality and *middot*, can face a challenge when it descends from its elevated state to engage solely in the content of *middot*. In this descent, its power diminishes gradually until it reaches a point of fading. To recover from this state, it requires supreme repentance until it is watered by the supreme dew of wisdom from which morality naturally branches out.

**Raising smallness to greatness**

**XLI**

Just as it is necessary to trace and correct the root of negative beliefs and thoughts, the same principle applies to positive but lesser beliefs and thoughts. Even if these are inherently good, they may lack the magnitude and enlightenment associated with greatness, so there is a need to elevate them to their root source and illuminate them with the light of greatness. The rise of great character traits and thoughts benefits the entire world, but it is even more advantageous to elevate smaller character traits and thoughts that rise to the brilliance of a greater light. This practice of elevating small things to greatness is continuous, happening at any time and hour. It is the essence of perfect repentance, through which those who were initially righteous can attain the virtues of those who have repented. Similar to the need to raise fallen character traits and teachings, where evil and ugliness are evident, to a source rooted in holiness – because one then realizes that, in truth, they are really lofty thoughts and good *middot* – one must elevate positive thoughts that, although oriented toward holiness, are currently situated at a lower level with evil and chaos connected with them. By connecting them to the lofty ideal of nobility directed solely towards absolute goodness and honesty, their exaltation can increase until reaching the upper world where pure holiness reigns in its might.

***Middot* and the world of thought**

**XLII**

When one contemplates the affairs of the divine, everything is elevated – *middot*, actions, and even the dimensions of existence. The entire cosmos ascends through the dimensions, infused with the joy emanating from the glory of God. This divine radiance is unveiled in the realm of thought, extending through the channels of life to the entire universe. This constitutes the religious practice of righteous individuals who, through their holy thoughts, sustain the world and influence the lives of all living beings. They surpass the entire world with immense superiority, uplifting not only the world itself but also all its inhabitants through the elevated nature of their thoughts. Their profound contemplation imparts a taste of the eternal to all. The inability of ordinary individuals to comprehend the strength of these extraordinary beings in no way diminishes the beauty of their glory. They are vibrant souls, immersed in the abundance of divine love, which comprehensively encompasses all aspects of existence. Their exalted perspective does not require descending into the depths of individual opinions; from their heights, they radiate light upon every high and low, embodying some *middah* of their Creator. As divine thought intensifies within an individual and delves deeper into their self, it brings forth a superior clarity to all their beliefs and actions. This purification is so profound that the brilliance emanating from other moral appearances pales in comparison. The righteous individual who loves God serves as the true foundation of the world, and with their ascent the entire world is elevated, and they sense this elevation from within themselves. Through their flesh, they perceive, and through their soul, they comprehend the rising elevation of the entire world. The radiance present in every action and matter, illuminated by divine light, serves to elevate, sanctify, enhance, refine, and nurture all that is good. The increase of divine thought in the sublime realms of holiness intensifies the appearance of the Holy, causing sparks of goodness to flourish. Every commandment exudes a wondrous, supreme luminosity that refreshes the heart and delights the soul in the splendor of eternal life. From each worldly deed, every movement, and every heartfelt effort, a delightful majesty is revealed, so that “all say ‘Glory’” (Psalms 29:9). The transcendent thoughts of the righteous bring about great honor, and there is no end to the joy of the entire world, that stems from the expansive hearts of the righteous, whose love for life is holy love. This love emanates from resilient and robust souls, reaching toward the source of life itself – “A glorious throne exalted from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary” (Jeremiah 17:12), the majesty of our life.