**An introduction to *Middot***

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In the Bible, the term *middot* is used to quantify 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 Second Temple times, the concept expanded, and Rabbinic Sages began using the term in the context of moral qualities. The common thread between these meanings lies in the notions of precision and definition. Consequently, we can infer that just as we can define a quantitative and physical scale, we must also define a moral and spiritual scale.

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 perpetual and never-ending.

The Rabbinic Sages 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*, 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 recognition, still, their primary purpose is to delineate 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 Rabbinic Sages addressed the apparent contradiction between the two:

But is it actually possible for a person to follow the Divine Presence? But hasn’t it 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 attributes (*middotav*) of the Holy One, Blessed be He (Sota 14a).

Once the decision was made by the Sages 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 Sages unequivocally concluded that individuals should strive to emulate the good deeds and important virtues in which God is exalted as affirmed by Maimonides, who declares that the commandment is: “to imitate His good deeds and exalted traits by which God, may He be exalted, is described.” His source is Sifrei (Ekev 11:22): “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 Sages advocated for prioritizing the emulation of the exalted *middot*, according 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 brought 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 mankind endure, 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. However, these virtues are not merely decisions driven by the fear of external punishment; rather, they resonate with a spiritual need arising from the fundamental desire to live in accordance with the concept of being created “in God’s image.” Participating in trade with accuracy and honesty becomes a moral expression aligned with the spiritual yearning to embody the divine attributes. It goes beyond mere compliance with external rules and regulations; instead, it reflects a genuine pleasure in expressing love for humanity and the world. This profound love is boundless and limitless, although it is guided by specific boundaries and attributes in each moment and situation—mirroring the way God interacts with mankind. 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 the revered Rabbi Kook. It sheds light on the Torah as elucidated by the sages of previous generations, interpreting it as Divine wisdom imparted by the Almighty. It is a blessing and privilege to engage in the study and teaching of this work, fostering a connection and collaboration with God in the exploration of His Torah and the world He has created.**