

Cleanliness | *Nekiyut* | נְקִיּוּת

Cheshbon haNefesh

Let not stain or ugliness be found in your possessions or in your home, and surely not on your body or clothes. (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Lefin of Satanov, *Cheshbon ha-Nefesh*).

The entire Torah is filled with statements asking us to be clean and find our way to spiritual purity, to holiness. As *Avodah Zarah* 20a states, “Cleanliness leads to purity.”

By removing the stains of ugliness, which hold us back from being a receptacle of purity, we can move forward to experience ourselves as living holy lives. Adonai calls us to holiness because Adonai is holy. We are called to live a life of meaning, harmony and connection.

What are the ‘stains’ or ‘ugliness?’ Well, certainly, they can be physical stains. The *gemara* says (*Shabbat* 114b) that a Torah scholar who walks around with a stain on his/her coat is “deserving of the death-sentence at the Hand of God” (*chayav misah*). Extreme language, but the purpose of the statement is to highlight the importance of conveying the benefits of living with Torah and not showing a lack of concern for the world. By showing up with an unclean appearance, according to the *gemara*, we show a lack of respect for ourselves, others and for the Torah itself.

It is important for us to create a positive impression of ourselves as a way to enhance our connection with others. The main concern around our appearance is to find a way to be focused and not over focused on our appearance with the goal of being welcoming to another. In the same vein it is important for us to not be put off by the appearance of others, and to move beyond their physical attributes to gain an essence into their true nature.

As always, it is a balance. In *Cheshbon haNefesh* Rabbi Mendel of Satanov writes, “Don’t say, ‘I am preoccupied with Heavenly matters. How can I waste my time with bodily matters just for the sake of appearances?’ In addition to being concerned with the ‘Heavenly matters,’ it is essential attention that we focus on the important concerns of the world of personal health and wellness as reflected by our appearance.

The Torah tells of the importance of physical rituals as ways to cleanse ourselves on our Jewish spiritual path. This includes washing of the hands, the Kohen washing of the feet and hands, and throughout all aspects of our living, as *Devarim* 23:15 states, “And your encampment shall be holy, and God shall not see in you a foul thing.”

In addition to physical stains, these stains also refer to marks on our being. Many of those stains are found around our work with the other middot (such as lack of humility, lack of patience, and lack of truth), all of which leave stains on the shining presence of our true selves. These stains or darknesses separate us from the others in lives, allowing the imperfections of our being to interfere in the joy of being responsible for each other.

Rabbi Ira F. Stone's Shiur

The middah of *nikiyut* might be better understood as dignity. While we will deal with the idea of *nikiyut* or dignity with regard to the interior life of a person, it would be misleading not to focus here on how seriously and profoundly our tradition takes the idea of *nikiyut* or dignity as regards the exterior life.

In *Cheshbon haNefesh* this concern is explained in a two-fold way. First, that as the soul absorbs the plethora of sensations that comes to it from the outside and gains mastery over them, *nikiyut* emerges as one of the essential elements of this mastery. In this sense, *nikiyut* is an extension of the middah of *seder*. Second, Rav Mendal points out that our appearance can either repel people from us or draw them near to us. We know this because, in fact, we are drawn near to or repelled by people depending on their appearance. A dirty and disheveled appearance might repel us, despite the fact that the person from whom we are repelled might be a great sage or other worthy individual.

If we are repelled by such a person how much more sensitive must we be not to repel others who might benefit from coming into contact with us? If we take this a step further we will recognize that it is precisely our concern to bear the burden of the other which compels us to take *nikiyut* seriously by, on the one hand, not being repelled by those who are dirty or disheveled, recognizing our obligation to respond to them as the people they are under the dirt and dishevelment, and on the other hand assuming the responsibility ourselves not to cause others to be repelled from us. Yet this emphasis on exteriority can lead us into deeper regions of thought. In our shiurim on the previous middot we have been concerned with the formation of the soul.

We have learned that the soul is comprised of a yetzer hara and a yetzer hatov, and that the contraction of the yetzer hara or the “self” clears the space for the yetzer hatov and its subsequent embrace of the other as part and parcel of the make-up of our soul. Thus we learn that ultimately as souls we are made-up of both self and other. The middah of *nikiyut* must now be considered in this process in so far as it addresses the fact that the always-developing soul only exists within an actual body and that only through the actions of that actual body can we know anything about the soul.

We have spoken about the pain that occurs when the self is constricted to allow the other to be embraced into the yetzer hatov. In this context *nikiyut* is an externalization of the constriction of the self. Just as the soul contracts to reveal the yetzer hatov that stands ready to embrace the other, so also *nikiyut* represents the contraction of the self through attention to cleanliness of appearance in order to reveal the externalization of the yetzer hatov that stands ready to greet/embrace the other. Thus uncleanness is an expression of yetzer hara or self-absorption and cleanliness is an expression of yetzer hatov or service of the other.

More importantly, these two actions or dimensions of our development are not separate. The contraction of the yetzer hara and our attention to our appearance are mirror images, if you will, of the same, simultaneous action. The welcoming of others that we signal through a clean and

neat appearance is a reflection of the same and simultaneous expansion of the *yetzer hatov*. We immediately recognize a risk, perhaps identify an irony: attention to the outer facets of our appearance is more conventionally associated with self-absorption than not!

The idea of preening, or adopting an obsessive or ostentatious concern with our appearance does not suggest to us the values that we associate with either the scholar or the sage. This precisely points out the importance and difficulty of *nikiyut*. We have seen that each of the middot take their place of importance in negotiating between *olam hazeh* and *olam haba*, while at the same time they present potential difficulties in our practicing them correctly. In the case of *nikiyut* the importance is clear: the externalization of the contraction of the self in the creation of a soul by which the other is actually made to feel welcome in the embrace of the *yetzer hatov*. The difficulty now presents itself: even as the soul is revealed by the contraction of the self, we have learned already, that there is pain involved in this contraction; a pain that must be suffered.

The middah of *savlanut*, patience or sufferance precedes the middah of *nikiyut* for a reason: Impatient with the pain of contracting the self, people sometimes apply the salve of obsession or ostentation of appearance. Thus, *nikiyut* must be concerned not only with clean and appropriate appearance, but also with balanced and modest appearance. *Nikiyut*, then, means more than simple cleanliness, it means appropriateness. More specifically, it means ascertaining the appropriate external manifestation, culturally conditioned to a certain degree, of an internal contraction of the self and the revelation of the place within us for another.

It is this process, the process of ascertaining the appropriate external manifestation of an internal contraction of the self that impresses upon us the understanding of *nikiyut* in what we would call dignity. At its heart, *nikiyut* requires that we recognize that the process of creating a soul for ourselves, so to speak, is the highest action of our consciousness, the reflection of the pursuit of the Divine as it is manifest in our lives. The manifestation of this process requires that we treat, not ourselves, but the process of creating our souls, with the highest esteem. *Nikiyut* is then one of the manifestations of a complex middah that we will explore in much more detail below, the middah of *kavod*, or honor. Dignity is the quality or state of being worthy, honored, or esteemed and is accompanied by a formal reserve or seriousness of manner, appearance, or language appropriate to the cultivation of a place for the Divine within us.

When we confuse the dignity of ourselves with the dignity of the process of creating a soul we pervert *nikiyut* from cleanliness to ostentation. When we differentiate between the two not only do we master *nikiyut*, but we begin to create the elements of *kavod* that will serve us later in our spiritual development.

While *nikiyut* is concerned with external appearances first, it also refers to cultivating cleanliness or dignity internally as well. What does this mean? What are the “stains” or instances of “ugliness” that can mar the “appearance” of the inner life or soul?

Our inner life is, first and foremost, defined by thoughts. Ugly thoughts, thoughts that stain the soul, must be understood as those thoughts which precisely serve the self at the expense of the other.

When our minds and hearts combine to produce thoughts which aggrandize ourselves as against producing a sense of obligation to welcome the entry of the other, when our thoughts guide us to close that space that we've described as the yetzer hatov in favor of the yetzer hara, then we have sullied our soul. Such interior uncleanness is quite often concretized by the use of unclean language, even when that language is not outwardly articulated. The presence of such language in our mind or on our lips is always a sign of uncleanness despite the fact that it is so ubiquitous as to be considered inoffensive. When we refer to others or the situations for which we hold others responsible with obscene or scatological language, whether spoken or thought, we are participating in the uncleanness of the soul. Such participation can occur, of course, even without the use of such language, but the use of such language is an undeniable sign of such uncleanness of spirit and should not be ignored even if it seems unavoidable.

Meditation

Meditation 1: Focus on external cleanliness

Take a deep breath in. Feel your breath, moving in and moving out. Focus purely on your breath.

Move more deeply into the space where you feel deeply connected as one with the heartbeat of the world. As your heart is beating as you are breathing, so are the other beings around you, so is the very heart of the earth, the heart of the cosmos.

Breathe and feel your heartbeat connecting you and all that is around you.

Look at yourself as though you are in a dream. See yourself from the distance. Approach yourself and as you do take in your full appearance. Look at yourself up, down, front and back. And ask of yourself this simple question: is there anything you have done with your appearance that creates a block between you and your neighbor? Is there any aspect of your appearance that conveys a sense that you are better or worse than your neighbor? Stay in that space for as long as you want. Answer the question and see how you can change your appearance to allow you to be more welcoming to those around you.

When you have finished viewing yourself, allow a vision of a close other to enter your mind. See that person from a distance. Approach that person and look at him or her up, down, front and back. And ask of yourself this simple question: Are there any judgments you are making about his or her appearance that has allowed you to create a separation from that person? Stay in that space for as long as you want. Answer the question and see how you can change your vantage point to allow you to be more welcoming and open to that person.

Bring your consciousness back to the present time and when you are ready bring your focus into the room.

Meditation 2: Focus on internal cleanliness

Take a deep breath in. Feel your breath, moving in and moving out. Focus purely on your breath.

Move more deeply into the space where you feel deeply connected as one with the heartbeat of the world. As your heart is beating as you are breathing, so are the other beings around you, so is the very heart of the earth, the heart of the cosmos.

Breathe and feel your heartbeat connecting you and all that is around you.

Look at yourself as though you are in a dream. See yourself from the distance. As you approach yourself see yourself in a situation in which you were involved in the last week where you were not your best self. Perhaps you were critically judging another. Perhaps you were making yourself feel superior to another. This could have occurred in your mind, even though you did not speak of it. Or, perhaps, you do see yourself in a situation where you were speaking in a negative way or with 'unclean' language about another.

Look at yourself up, down, front and back. And ask of yourself this simple question: how did your behavior separate you from another?

When you have finished viewing yourself, allow a vision of the other who was in the situation with you to enter your mind. See that person from a distance. Approach that person and look at him or her up, down, front and back. Look at the face of the other person involved in this event. See it clearly. And ask yourself this simple question: Were you an instrument of pain? Did you cause another harm?

Stay in that space for as long as you want. Answer the question and see how you could have changed your behavior to be more loving and more supportive of that person.

Bring your consciousness back to the present time and when you are ready bring your focus into the room.

In real life

This is a very easy middah to experience several times in each day. Unconsciously we walk through the world making judgments about ourselves and about others purely through this aspect of physical appearance. These judgments separate us from others either by giving us space to totally avoid someone or by creating particular ways that we address someone. We are most likely to connect with those who look like us, seem likeminded to us, and reflect a similar economic, worldly status to us; and most likely to disconnect from others.

We are also able to separate ourselves from others based on how we have created our own appearance.

Scenario 1: A small thin woman, Betty, sits next to a very large woman, Anne, at a conference that is focused on a topic of spirituality. Sitting next to Anne, Betty is aware of, and put off by, her sloppy attire and her intense smell. Over the next several hours, Betty finds herself sharing some intimate conversation with Anne. Looking deeply into Anne's eyes, she sees the soft and

loving soul that Anne is. She sees beyond Anne's large frame and connects with her in the space that only two souls can share. She does begin to wonder, instead, why Anne has used her body in the way she has chosen to. Is she protecting herself from some prior hurts or against some potential future ones? Does she feel the need to ward off intimacy with others? Or is there, perhaps, some physical health issues that Anne faces that creates her large framework and intense smell? From that place, Betty is also able to begin to see how her initial judgments of Anne's appearance were easily curtailed once she saw the beauty of Anne's "inner" self. Betty wonders who else she has missed seeing the beauty in because she judged and rejected someone based on their appearance.

Scenario 2: Sam, a sophisticated dresser, had a definite way of 'looking' to make his statement about himself. He only wore the best brands. Armani. Polo. Versace. Lacoste. In fact, he preferred the brands that had a logo that told people he had put out the money to purchase those best brands. As an attorney, Sam was often able to flash his expensive clothing, watches, and shoes to demonstrate his success to current and potential clients. When Sam was moved to do some pro bono work to help seniors at his neighborhood law center, Sam did not realize what a disadvantage his clothing created in his ability to have an authentic conversation with his clients. While his clothing might work well for corporate clients who unconsciously measured Sam's ability to help them with the amount he paid for his clothes, the neighborhood seniors saw Sam's fashion statement as a way to make them feel like they had less and were worth less. His appearance conveyed a "slickness" and "focus on himself" that didn't seem like to would leave much room for concern and active listening. After one conversation Sam had with 80-year-old Elsa that changed. As she was leaving, Elsa leaned over and said to him, "You have a really big heart for someone who dresses like he doesn't have any. I never would have thought you could help me so much." In this connection of their souls, Elsa had to overcome her judgment of Sam's appearance. For Sam, as he began to dress in a way that didn't create an immediate sense of superiority, he removed the barriers between him and his senior clients and they were more open and authentic with him from the start.

Pesukim

Pesukim can serve as a reminder of the work you are doing on a particular middah. They are words repeated over and over again and can be used as leverage to stop negative action. Review these traditional Jewish pesukim as well as the secular sayings to use (fully or partially) as interruptives between an 'unmussar like' thought and the actual action.

1. Cleanliness is next to Godliness.
2. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. -*Psalms* 51:10
3. Do not make yourselves detestable. -*Leviticus* 20:25
4. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil. -*Isaiah* 1:16
5. Who can say, "I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin?" -*Proverbs* 20:9

Date:

This week's <i>middah</i> is:	Cleanliness <i>Nekiyut</i> נְקִיּוּת
This <i>middah</i> is about:	Let not stain or ugliness be found in your possessions or in your home, and surely not on your body or clothes. (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Lefin of Satanov, <i>Cheshbon ha-Nefesh</i>).
My mussar phrase (<i>pasuk</i>) is:	_____
My <i>cheshbon</i> time is:	
My <i>chevruta</i> is:	
My mitzvah is:	

My account of this week's <i>mussar</i> work: (See <i>The 10 Steps of Mussar Practice</i> for a fuller explanation.)		
1. I am committed to the study of Mussar for at least thirteen weeks.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
2. On awakening every morning, I remember the <i>middah</i> on which I am currently working.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
3. I have set a specific time and place for daily Mussar work.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
4. I use this checklist to keep track of my work on the week's <i>middah</i> .	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
5. I have a mussar phrase (a <i>pasuk</i>) that reminds me of my <i>middah</i> and repeat it to help me in cultivating that character trait.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
6. I practice mussar <i>cheshbon</i> daily and keep a <i>cheshbon</i> journal.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
7. I keep a "commonplace book."	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
8. I study Torah daily .	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
9. I engage in <i>chevruta</i> at least weekly.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
10. I have added one <i>interruptive mitzvah</i> to my daily practice.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

The middot I worked on this week:			
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Seder</i> (orderliness)	סֵדֶר	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Emet</i> (truthfulness)	אֱמֶת
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Menuchat ha-nefesh</i> (equanimity)	מְנוּחַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Kimutz</i> (frugality)	קִמּוּץ
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Savlanut</i> (patience)	סְבֻלָּנוּת	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Nichutah</i> (calmness)	נִיחוּתָא
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Nikiut</i> (cleanliness)	נְקִיּוּת	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Prishut</i> (separation)	פְּרִישׁוּת
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Charizut</i> (decisiveness)	חֲרִיצוּת	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Histapkut</i> (temperance)	הִסְתַּפְּקוּת
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Zerizut</i> (diligence/zeal)	זְרִיזוּת	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Metinut</i> (deliberation)	מְתִינּוּת
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Anavah</i> (humility)	עֲנָוָה	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Tzniut</i> (modesty)	צְנִיעוּת
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Shtika</i> (silence)	שְׁתִּיקָה	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Bitachon</i> (trust)	בְּטָחוֹן
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Tzedek</i> (righteousness)	צְדָקָה	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Nedivut</i> (generosity)	נְדִבּוּת

Original Middah Worksheet

The middah I am working on is:	Cleanliness	<i>Nekiyut</i>	נקיזות
This middah is about:	“Let no stain or ugliness be found in your possessions or in your home, and surely not on your body or clothes” (Rabbi Mendel of Satanov, <i>Cheshbon ha-Nefesh</i>).		
My mussar phrase is:	_____		
My mussar moment is:			
My hevruta is:			
My mitzvah is:			

My account of this week's Mussar work:				
	Cheshbon/Journal	Torah	Mitzvah	Hevruta
Sunday				
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				

Middot I worked on this week:							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Equanimity	<i>Menuchat ha-nefesh</i>	מנוחת הנפש	<input type="checkbox"/>	Frugality	<i>Keemutz</i>	קמוץ
<input type="checkbox"/>	Patience	<i>Savlanut</i>	סבולנות	<input type="checkbox"/>	Diligence/Zeal	<i>Zerizut</i>	זריזות
<input type="checkbox"/>	Order	<i>Seder</i>	סדר	<input type="checkbox"/>	Silence	<i>Shtikah</i>	שתיקה
<input type="checkbox"/>	Decisiveness	<i>Harizut</i>	חריצות	<input type="checkbox"/>	Calmness	<i>Nichutah</i>	ניחותא
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cleanliness	<i>Nekiyut</i>	נקיזות	<input type="checkbox"/>	Truth	<i>Emet</i>	אמת
<input type="checkbox"/>	Humility	<i>Anavah</i>	ענוה	<input type="checkbox"/>	Separation	<i>Prishut</i>	פרישות
<input type="checkbox"/>	Righteousness	<i>Tzedek</i>	צדק				