

Patience | *Savlanut* | סבִּלְנוּת

Cheshbon Ha-Nefesh

When something bad happens to you and you did not have the power to avoid it, do not aggravate the situation even more through wasted grief. (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Lefin of Satanov, Cheshbon ha-Nefesh).

In Hebrew, the word *savlanut* (patience) corresponds to the root *saval*, which means to bear, to transport a heavy load, or to suffer.

It is inevitable that something bad will happen since that is the nature of life. Sometimes we translate “bad” into being stuck behind someone at the grocery store who needs a price check and we have no choice but to wait. Sometimes “bad” is our experience of a loved one who gets very sick.

In both cases, and actually in all cases of our engagement with the other, we have the choice to either make room for the other(s), creating a *yetzer hatov* opportunity, or to not make room for them. We are part of a large world where we are small players. There are many other players and many things going on at the same time. If we are able to keep this in mind there are some questions we can ask in advance of a situation which may help us to avert being impatient the next time a situation comes up. Can I see that the other people around me? Am I only thinking about me? Am I in control of the situation? If I am not, how can I let it go?

If we do not make room for the other in our lives, we are in our *yetzer hara* and that time is defined as “wasted grief,” when we do not reconcile our feelings with the reality of the situation at hand. When we are in wasted grief we do not allow ourselves to be fully there for the other. On the other hand, real grief occurs when we are present with a situation, creating room for the other and for our own grief.

Rabbi's Shiur

The *middah* of *savlanut* engages us at a different level than the *middot* of *seder* or *menuchat ha-nefesh*, though it presupposes our previous engagement with both of those *middot*. *Seder* and *menuchat ha-nefesh* shape our soul. *Seder* by allowing us to make room for the other and *menuchat ha-nefesh* by allowing the other to fill the space that *seder* makes so that the truth of our soul is revealed to us.

Savlanut addresses what we might call the adventure of the soul moving into the world. This soul, which has taken root within us, is interminably vulnerable. It will encounter, no let's not speak abstractly here, we will encounter impediments to the soul's desire for fulfillment at every turn. These encounters are the source of pain and suffering in our lives. There is much here to explore in this context. We will review the reasons for the soul's vulnerability, explore what we mean by its desire for fulfillment, and discuss the various layers of impediments that the soul encounters. Out of this discussion we will try to fashion an understanding of how *savlanut* functions in our everyday lives.

However, as a preliminary, it is important to know that the root of the word *savlanut* in Hebrew is the word for suffering. Thus *savlanut* should be translated more accurately as “sufferance.” Sufferance and patience are close in meaning to one another, but recognizing the link between suffering, sufferance and patience will help us understand the full range of meanings of this *middah*. *Savlanut* recognizes the fact that at every level, suffering or pain is present in human consciousness and must be taken into account in understanding human behavior. In fact, at the very birth of the soul, so to speak, not unlike the very experience of physical birth, pain and suffering are present. While we have spoken of the contraction of the self in order to make room for the other as the revelation of the soul, we have spoken as if this were somehow a benign movement. It is not.

The revelation of our soul emerges out of a cauldron of violence not dissimilar to the thunder, lightning and quaking that are described as accompanying the moment at Sinai, or more picturesquely described in the Rabbinic *midrash* of the mountain being suspended by a thread over the heads of the people Israel.

Similarly, the kabbalistic idea of *tzimtzum*, is not far removed from the kabbalistic idea of *shevarei ha-kelim*, the breaking of the vessels intended to hold the emanation of the godhead. Violence, pain and suffering are an intrinsic part of the experience of the world. *Savlanut* both recognizes this fact and helps to guide us in the face of this fact. The ability to cultivate patience or sufferance in the face of the smallest inconveniences of life is connected to a much larger and deeper level of spiritual accomplishment.

So we return to our list of questions. What is the source of the soul's vulnerability? Obviously, it is the other! The other (the future) is unpredictable. The other is as potentially as mired in the grip of his or her *yetzer hara* as we (the self) are (is.)

From the perspective of the self that does not disappear in the transformation into a soul, the other is always a potential threat. Only at the level of *hasidut*, which we are not addressing in these *shiuirim*, is it possible to speak about transcending this existential reality. Thus, *savlanut* requires that we experience this threat and nonetheless agree to suffer it.

We will return to this. Let's continue with our questions. What do we mean by the soul's desire for fulfillment? To put it simply, the soul's desire for fulfillment is its desire to eliminate the threat to it. However, this desire operates on two levels (minimally!) On the level of *kibbush*, it desires to minimize the pain implicit in the encounter with the other. On the level of *tikkun*, it desires to transform that pain into pleasure on behalf of the other (this returns us to the subject of *hasidut* which we are not speaking about.)

Finally, our last question: What are the various layers of impediments that trigger this defense mechanism resulting in impatience, which, in the end, is the futile refusal to recognize and deal with suffering? It is in answering this question that we arrive at the everyday choices between patience and impatience. We may be confronted, on the one hand, with a situation as

trivial as waiting in line at the supermarket or as serious as waiting for a loved one (or for ourselves) to recover from a life threatening illness, whether such recovery is expected or not.

In either situation if we are not prepared for the inevitability of suffering, we rebel. This rebellion is characterized by *Cheshbon Ha-Nefesh* as “wasted grief.” This term is suggestive. Grief is our innate response to suffering. It is a process by which we recognize the inevitability of suffering and loss and come to terms with it. Grief is considered wasted precisely when it does not lead to acceptance and reconciliation; when it can’t lead to reconciliation because there has been no acceptance. Worse still, of course, since wasted grief is an act of rebellion, it precipitates further impatience, which, in turn, precipitates more wasted grief and the harm that we do to others by refusing to reconcile ourselves to the inevitable pain that being in relationship with them, even the most fleeting relationship, continues to grow. Every human interaction is a potential threat to our self from the perspective of our *yetzer hara*. But every human interaction is also an opportunity to suffer the birth pangs of the soul. The difference between rebelling against the threat to us and suffering the ongoing birth pangs of our soul is the difference between patience and impatience.

We have often spoken about the fact that every moment presents us with a choice between the *yetzer hara* and the *yetzer hatov*. We have further explained that this choice is a choice between the self and the other. We can now begin to understand more clearly how our *middah* work creates the practical pathway by which we become aware of the choices before us and endeavor to make them. In particular we have seen that the *middah* of *seder* helps us garner the energy that we need to bear the burden of the other; how the *middah* of *menuchat ha-nefesh* helps us to transform our self into a soul by virtue of contracting to make a (metaphorical) place for the other within ourselves, and how this in turn engenders an inevitable suffering that we learn to suffer and eventually will learn to transform from suffering into joy.

The meaning of *savlanut* as sufferance is a derivation from the earlier and deeper meaning of its Hebrew root: to bear a burden. In that sense it is the *middah* par excellence since at all times it serves as a reminder of our obligation to bear the burden of the other. It is therefore, also, the most common and most difficult *middah*. It is the most difficult particularly because without *savlanut* we cannot begin to address ourselves to the rest of the *middot*. As we have already said, lack of *savlanut* is the result of a rebellion of the self against the contraction that accompanies the birth of the soul.

It is precisely the threat of the other in his or her presenting him or herself as *a burden to bear* that is so threatening. Every other is not only a potential burden to bear, but an actual burden to bear. Yet every other is also an essential component in the formation of our own soul. The extent to which we can *suffer* the pain of contracting the self to bear the burden of the other, even in the face of the rebellion of the self, is the measure that we can use to gauge the progress we are making in rediscovering our soul’s potential.

It is the fact that our soul is in constant formation, as we will explain below, that *savlanut* is also the most commonly encountered *middah*. Imagine this as a process that is always at hand.

We walk into the supermarket and in our rush to finish our shopping we find ourselves in a long line made longer by the difficulty someone is having reading the price on a particular item, or by the fact that the card reader is working slowly and someone is having difficulty paying. In each of those cases we are presented with another person who in that very moment has a burden, perhaps many burdens. That person's burden attempts to enter into our consciousness. Is there room for it? Not if we listen to the fearful advice of our self (here we can certainly name that self as *yetzer hara*.)

The incursion of this person *as* a burden into our consciousness presents us with the opportunities to either contract the screaming self and enlarge our soul or to give the self full reign, all but eliminating the soul in that moment. This is the choice that we have often spoken about in *Mussar*. In this analysis we also come to understand that the soul is not a static entity. It is constantly expanding and contracting depending on our ability to either cultivate our *middot* or not.

This then raises some questions regarding the soul itself. If we understand that the soul is a continually expanding or contracting entity and we recognize the difficulties—the pain—that is involved in its expansion over the self, we need to explore why would we try over and over again to expand the soul? In other words, what is our motivation?

In other contexts we have spoken about the essential role that joy plays in *Mussar* theory and practice. In the context of discussing the pain that accompanies the creation of a soul we might conclude that at every moment, faced with this soul-expanding choice, our lives are a constant experience of pain. In fact, there are those who have understood *Mussar* in this way and on account of this understanding there are many who would turn away from *Mussar*. It is, therefore, very important that in light of our analysis we explore the source of joy inherent in the creation of the soul, a joy even in the face of pain.

Rav Simcha Zissel of Kelm, one of the primary students of Rav Israel Salanter, the founder of the modern *Mussar* movement taught in his *magnum opus: Hochma U'Mussar* the following on this question.

A well-known saying of the wise: 'pain and joy are interlaced with one another' — that is, after pain will come joy and the joy will be much greater than if one hadn't experienced the pain before the joy.

Rav Simcha goes on to explicate this saying with reference to the sapphire brickwork that Moses and the elders of Israel saw beneath the throne God. He explains that this brickwork was composed of the pain of the people Israel, concluding that God, literally, sees the world only through the pain of Israel. He goes on to say:

And now: 'When they saw as it were the heavens for clearness,' they were already redeemed. Why did the Torah need to add the phrase 'a pavement of sapphire' as a memorial to the pain of Israel? Only, it would seem, so to speak,

that God had before them the pavement of sapphire in contrast to the very heavens for clearness to raise, as it were, the joy in contrast to this.

Rav Simcha draws the conclusion that the Torah includes the reference to the pavement of sapphire, which he defines as being made up of the pain of Israel, to teach Moses and the elders that only by virtue of the pain they have sustained can they experience and appreciate the joy that the clearness of heaven presupposes.

If we translate this into the language of our *Mussar* work, we can say that Rav Simcha teaches us the following things. First, that it is what we might call the reality of existence that pain and joy are interlaced. Pain does not exist absent joy and joy does not exist absent pain. Second, that what our tradition conceives of as the “Divine view” of the world is none other than the world viewed through the pain and suffering of others, that God, as it were, God’s self can only “see” the world through bearing its burden of pain. Third, and this is the crucial learning, that the more pain we bear the more joy is released. How so? We remember that the *yetzer hatov* is not external to our being. Though it may be overcome by the power of the *yetzer hara*, when the self is constricted to allow for the bearing of the burden of the other, the space that is created into which the other is taken is not empty! It is precisely the “space” of the *yetzer hatov*.

Rav Simcha discovers this through the idea of the “clearness of heaven” that constitutes the Divine view that transcends the sapphire brickwork. We discover this in the experience of bearing the burden of the other. Whether it is while waiting for the check-out person to finish someone else’s order or waiting for the card-reader to be fixed, after and sometimes simultaneous with the pain of the constricting self, we experience the joy of the now expanding *yetzer hatov* as it welcomes the other into its space.

There is no conventional vocabulary to name this experience, but joy, sometimes small and sometimes great, is an experience that we are all at least a little familiar with when we indeed allow ourselves to put the self on hold even for a moment. Therefore, we use our traditional language of *olam haba* to describe this experience. This joy is fragile, but motivational. The more often we experience it, the more we recognize its presence and anticipate its potential presence in every moment, and the less difficult it becomes to suffer the pain of the *yetzer hara*.

Meditation

Get very comfortable. Take a deep breath and let out the energy of your week. Take a deep breath and bring in the new week. Relax your toes, your ankles, your legs. Take another deep breath. Now relax your hands and your arms. Roll your shoulders back and forth and relax them. Make sure you are completely comfortable. Take another deep breath.

This meditation invites you to consider the *middah* of *savlanut*—patience—by experiencing the feelings in your body along with the thoughts in your mind.

Take a deep breath in and a deep breath out. Think through the encounters you had during this week with another and focus in on a time when your patience was tested.

- Replay the scenario in your mind.
- Take another deep breath.
- What happened?
- What are you feeling?
- Do you feel good about how you reacted?
- If so, what did you do that was affirming?
- If not, what was your experience of losing your patience?
- Did you remember to consider what was going on for the other person?
- Were you feeling that your needs were more important than whatever was going on with your other?
- Replay the scenario in your mind. Take a breath.
- If you had another chance to redo the encounter, what would it look like?

When you are ready, open your eyes.

In real life

Scenario 1: A woman is standing in line waiting to check out books from the library. It is uncomfortably cold in the library, the line is long and there is only one person checking out the books. After 10 minutes she is finally the next in line. The person in front of her in line starts to check out and learns that she has a fine and that a book she previously returned is still marked as outstanding in her account. She needs to go back to the shelf to look for it. The woman, who now has been standing for 15 minutes, is beyond herself. She sighs impatiently and begins to contemplate whether or not to ask the librarian to shove aside the other's books and take hers instead. She can feel her blood pressure rising and she begins to boil at the librarian, who herself is looking quite upset and overwhelmed. She decides she can wait no longer and is justified in her anger at the situation. She says to the librarian, "Do I really have to wait here? Just check out my books and let me get out of here." The librarian, politely and apologetically but firmly refuses her request saying that she had already started the check out and it would be difficult to cancel and restart the process. The woman snaps back that this is a waste of her time, leaves her books and storms out.

Scenario 2: A woman is standing in line waiting to check out books from the library. It is uncomfortably cold in the library, the line is long and there is only one person checking out the books. After 10 minutes she is finally the next in line. The person in front of her in line starts to check out and learns that she has a fine and that a book she previously returned is still marked as outstanding in her account. She needs to go back to the shelf to look for it. The woman, who now has been standing for 15 minutes, has a philosophy about waiting. As a Mussar student, she first of all does not want to bear the burden of the other. Secondly, she does not want to participate in any aspect of wasted grief. She understands that this is really beyond her control and most likely beyond the control of the librarian and the person who is probably upset with having a book she returned still marked as outstanding. She recognizes her capacity for impatience and

anger in this situation and decides to take hold of her experience by opening up one of the books she was checking out and starting to read. In a very short amount of time, the person joyfully returned from the stacks with the book in question in her hands. The woman felt good about her Mussar practice, having shared that moment in joy about the found book and holding the burden of the librarian without causing additional pain.

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 pesukim as well as the secular saying to use (fully or partially) as interruptives between an ‘unmussar like’ thought and the actual action.

“Woe to the pampered one who has never been trained to be patient. Either today or in the future he is destined to sip from the cup of affliction.” –Rabbi M.M. Leffin , *Cheshbon Ha-Nefesh*

“Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret-it leads only to evil.” – *Psalms 37:8*

“Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.” –*Psalms 27:14*

“He that can have patience can have what he will.” –Benjamin Franklin

Cheshbon

This is a very easy *middah* to experience several times in each day. We often walk through the world with an impatience for others’ needs taking over the space of our own. This lack of patience separates us from others by making our own needs primary over the burden of the others. It is a difficult *middah* because we often feel entitled to our impatience without any real regard for what the situation is around us.

In your *cheshbon*/journaling practice, consider the following:

1. How did your work on *savlanut* help you make space for another?
2. How did your encounter with *savlanut* affect another?
3. How did your working to perfect *savlanut* help you to recognize when a person is acting out of his or her own burden? Did you help bear it or add to it?
4. Think of a situation in which not being able to exercise *savlanut* made you aware of the presence of your own *yetzer hara*. What did you learn about your *yetzer hara*?
5. Think of a situation in which being able to exercise *savlanut* made you aware of the presence of your own *yetzer hatov*. What did you learn about your *yetzer hatov*?
6. What other *middot* came into play in your attempt to perfect the *middah* of *savlanut*?

Mussar Worksheet— Patience | Savlanut | סבֿלנות

Date:

This week's <i>middah</i> is:	Patience <i>Savlanut</i> סבֿלנות
This <i>middah</i> is about:	When something bad happens to you and you did not have the power to avoid it, do not aggravate the situation even more through wasted grief. (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)	סִדָּר	<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)	סבֿלנות	<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)	עֲנוּה	<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

