

Separation | *Prishut* | פְּרִישׁוּת

Cheshbon ha-Nefesh

“Strengthen yourself so that you can stop lewd thoughts. Draw close to your spouse only when your mind is free, occupied only with thoughts of fulfilling your conjugal duties and procreating.” Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Satanov, *Cheshbon ha-Nefesh*.

Rav Mendel teaches that *prishut* is one of the most difficult *middot* to actualize. It requires that one has already integrated the teachings of the 12 previous *middot* as each of them is required to successfully cultivate this *middot*.

The very first word in the definition above, strengthen, is a key word in utilizing this *middot*. What does it mean to strengthen the mind? The human mind wanders in thought. How can we stop the wandering so we can be present to the other either as lover or caretaker?

Rav Mendel of Satanov outlines the four-step process of separation:

1. Conception—succumbing to lustful thoughts when they come on unexpectedly. This stage is a result of the associative thought process, over which we have no control. Rav Mendel says while we have no control over conception, we do have control over the next three stages.
2. Gestation - indulging in thoughts and allowing them to increase one's desire. The antidote to this is Torah study or reengaging the mind in something that is productive. Be decisive here. Do not be idle. Once you have redirected your thought, Rav Mendel says the trait of *seder* (order) will continue to help you.
3. Birth- manifesting the thoughts through words or actions. If you have birthed thoughts then seek equanimity.
4. Growth - thoughts leading one to actually sin. If you have indulged in your thoughts, then remember God and cleave to God in your process of *cheshbon ha-nefesh* so that you will have the strength to grow from this experience.

While Rev Mendel focuses on lewd thoughts and behavior, Rabbi Stone broadens our understanding of this *middot* as does *Ramchal* in chapter 13 of *Mesillat Yesharim*. Rabbi Stone underscores the urgency of *kibbush* in matters of *prishut*. According to Maimonides, *prishut* is about channeling energy from our basic instincts for sexual relations or even prohibited food to that of the intellect. When we focus on cultivating wisdom, we have brought *kedusha* (holiness) into the relationship.

Rabbi's Ira Stone's Shiur on Separation | *Prishut* | פְּרִישׁוּת

Prishut is being defined as “radical disinterestedness,” a difficult, complex and challenging *middah* that assumes that the person working on it has already gone through all of the 12 *middot* covered from the beginning. Such a person does not have to have achieved a spiritual transformation from, say *tzaddik* to *hasid*, however he or she should have begun to create a personal identity that is no longer defined in terms only of self, but rather in terms of self and

other, namely a soul. *Prishut* requires a soul to grapple with it. Like *nichutah*, *prishut* directs us to meditate on our actions as they are undertaken to serve the other. Unlike *nichutah*, in *prishut* the struggle to remove any stain of self-righteousness, any desire for praise or reward, is no longer the issue.

Rather, the energy of *kibbush*, restraining the *yetzer hara* provides us with an experience of perfect satisfaction such that what the *yetzer hara* craves is not reward or praise but precisely “invisibility.” What the self desires for its satisfaction is not to be noticed! It is in that light that we approach not only *cheshbon ha-nefesh* and the definition of *prishut* we find there, but also much of the literature including *Mesillat Yesharim* regarding this *middah*.

The context in which each of these great sages approach this *middah* is related to issues of intimacy, sexuality and marital fidelity. And, in fact, to put it bluntly, matters of sexual intimacy are the last bastions of self-absorption that even the most assiduous *Mussar* practitioner has difficulty avoiding.

Sexual intimacy requires making the self vulnerable in a way that is different and more radical than almost any human act. In this state of vulnerability, naked and exposed, the *yetzer hara* emerges at its strongest in order to protect us. The form this “protection” will take will vary widely from person to person.

It can be as seemingly benign as craving praise and reward for our sexual performance, a violation of *nichutah*, to the much more serious and unfortunately not uncommon imposition of ourselves in place of the other, the effacing of the other by our desire, which results in various forms of sexual oppression.

These forms of sexual oppression are exaggerated in those people who are often precisely striving to achieve the type of “invisibility” we are discussing. The danger of attempting to achieve “radical disinterestedness” before one is prepared spiritually to do so can result in a *yetzer hara* reaction with serious consequences. Thus our sages focus their attention on sexual intimacy in regard to the *middah* of *prishut*, almost defining it entirely in those terms, because it is in that sphere that it most often appears as a challenge to those on the spiritual path.

While it is true that we can still understand the arena for assessing our behavior in regard to *prishut* connected to sexual intimacy, and, in fact, given the sexual oppression that is exhibited in channels of contemporary popular culture, it is most certainly still an appropriate area of *cheshbon*, it should not be limited to that arena. On the contrary, in a broader sense, *prishut* defines an arena for assessing our relationships with others: the often equally intimate relationship of caregiving.

In caregiving an intimacy is also established and a vulnerability exposed within which our actions may be judged in terms of *prishut* or “radical disinterestedness.” The arena of caregiving can be expanded to include not only instances in which we are actually caring for another person who is dependent upon us for that care, but to our relationship as caregiver to every other person with whom we are in relationship.

This wider understanding of giving care is, in fact, infinitely extended such that *prishut* is the *middah* that describes our relationship to the Infinite Other upon whose care we depend and Who depends upon our care. This is expressed in the fact that the word *prishut* itself is a rabbinic rendering of a concept of separation that appears in the Torah not as *prishut* but as *kedusha*.

It is of interest that the same focus on both our caring for others generally, and concern for care in sexual intimacy is found in the book of Leviticus, the biblical book most associated with the concept of *kedusha*.

“Radical disinterestedness” is not an action but a consequence. We do not and cannot will ourselves to be “radically disinterested.” Rather, the work that we do in creating for ourselves results in the attainment of “radical disinterestedness.” It is the proof, if you will, that we have indeed succeeded in creating a soul, and more importantly, that we have succeeded in maintaining it.

Therefore, we must understand *prishut* by reviewing yet again the steps that are involved with this task, the task of life itself: the task of transforming our personal identity from self to soul. We begin by remembering that we are not responsible for our own creation. Rather, we come into being beholden to another, indebted, as it were, to the other. In being, our consciousness is formed as the expression of the tension between our *yetzer hara*, our drive to preserve our self, and our *yetzer hatov*, our equally indigenous drive to serve the other to whom we are beholden. Therefore, what we know as “our identity” is the “place” where this tension is enacted.

When this “place” is filled entirely by the *yetzer hara*, our consciousness is totally self-absorbed. Were it to be filled entirely by another, we could not exist. But when it is filled with the *yetzer hatov* it is not filled by the other but by service to the other and this service to the other turns out to fill the deepest desires of the *yetzer hara* through the joy it affords us.

The self does not disappear but is most deeply engaged through its service to another such that as a self it becomes invisible, or radically disinterested—disinterested in itself. It no longer craves praise or reward, it no longer thinks of itself per se, but is fulfilled invisibly by the service of the other. This is the accomplishment of what we have also called *tikkun*. The soul of such a person now holds both self and other. The self fills the place of consciousness invisibly and the other fills the place of consciousness proper.

The process by which this *tikkun* is achieved is the work of *cheshbon ha-nefesh*. Our meditation of each of the *middot* in turn contributes to the creation of an inner environment in which this transformation can occur. In these *middot* we begin to experience the joy of *tikkun* that is the goal of our work. We learn that in working through *prishut* we are enacting *kedusha*, holiness.

Meditation

Make yourself comfortable. Close your eyes and take a deep breath through your nostrils (if you are able) as the air from the nostrils into the lungs is filtered, cleaner and warmer. Breathe in and breathe out deeply three times. Move deeper into your breathing and your awareness of your breathing.

As you are breathing in and out look at yourself this past week. Focus on an encounter with a close other. This is an encounter where you physically touched someone. This could be a sexual, sensual or platonic encounter. It could be touching someone's hand, a hug or more. When you touched this person what were you thinking about? Were you mindfully touching? Did you get distracted and touch someone but had your mind on something else? If you got distracted, what were you thinking about?

Now look at your other in the face and ask yourself these questions:

- How did my preoccupation with my thoughts separate me from my other?
- Could I have given this person more attention?
- Did this person need more attention?
- What was in my way from being present with my other?
- What was I afraid of?

Stay in this space for another minute and when you are ready bring your attention back to the room.

In Real Life

Scenario 1: Renee and Randy have been married for seven years. They both have very demanding full time jobs, Renee is a neurologist and Randy is a pediatric social worker. They also have three children. Their time alone is very limited. They are often too tired after the kids go to sleep to do anything other than clean up from dinner and get lunches made for the next day. They know that they need to work on intimacy so they scheduled a few hours off one morning after the kids are in school to be together. They figured even if they spent the time kissing that would be an improvement over the past few months of barely hugging. As Renee and Randy sit on the couch, Randy's work cell phone rings. She answers it and talks on it for the next 20 minutes. Randy is secretly relieved to have an excuse not to be intimate. She is too scared to be vulnerable.

Scenario 2: Renee and Randy have been married for seven years. They both have very demanding full time jobs, Renee is a neurologist and Randy is a pediatric social worker. They also have three children. Their time along is very limited. They are often too tired after the kids go to sleep to do anything other than clean up from dinner and get lunches made for the next day. They know that they need to work on intimacy so they scheduled a few hours off one morning after the kids are in school to be together. They figured even if they spent the time kissing that

would be an improvement over the past few months of barely hugging. Both Renee and Randy let their office's know that they are on scheduled vacation leave, they put these messages on their answering machines and on their emails. Renee and Randy are aware that between the kids and their jobs, it is very difficult for them to turn off their brains so that they can be fully present for one another. They also know the longer they are apart physically, mentally and spiritually, the harder it is to reconnect. As two people with a *Mussar* consciousness, they start with the *middah* of *seder*, of order, since they know the best way to be present with one another is to get everything in order. They had a wonderful morning together.

Pesukim

A *pasuk* is a scriptural verse. It is a good practice to find a *pasuk* that reminds you of your *middah* and repeat it (or sing it, if possible) to help in cultivating that character trait.

The Hebrew word *prishut* does not appear in scripture. It is used in rabbinic literature mostly to refer to levitical purity (Jastrow, 1228). Here are some other words from scripture that mean *separate, differentiate, and consecrate*.

"Separate the children of Israel from their uncleanness." Leviticus 15:31

"I am the Lord your God who has set you apart from the other peoples." Leviticus 20:24

"Discretion will protect you, understanding will guard you." Proverbs 2:11

Cheshbon

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

1. How did your work on *prishut* help you make space for another?
2. How did your encounter with *prishut* affect another?
3. How did your working to perfect *prishut* 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 *prishut* 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 *prishut* 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 *prishut*?

Mussar Worksheet—Separation | Prishut | פְּרִישׁוּת

Date:

This week's <i>middah</i> is:	Separation <i>Prishut</i> פְּרִישׁוּת
This <i>middah</i> is about:	“Strengthen yourself so that you can stop lewd thoughts. Draw close to your spouse only when your mind is free, occupied only with thoughts of fulfilling your conjugal duties and procreating.” (Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Satanov, <i>Cheshbon HaNefesh</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 <i>middot</i> I worked on this week:			
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Seder</i> (orderliness)	סֵדֵר	<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)	נִקְיִיּוּת	<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)	בְּטַחוּן
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Tzedek</i> (righteousness)	צְדָקָה	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Nedivut</i> (generosity)	נְדִיבוּת

Original Mussar Worksheet—Separation | Prishut | פְּרִישׁוּת

The <i>middah</i> I am working on is:	Separation	<i>Prishut</i>	פְּרִישׁוּת
This <i>middah</i> is about:	<p><i>“Strengthen yourself so that you can stop lewd thoughts. Draw close to your spouse only when your mind is free, occupied only with thoughts of fulfilling your conjugal duties and procreating.”</i> (Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Satanov, <i>Cheshbon HaNefesh</i>).</p>		
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>	מְנוּחַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ	<input type="checkbox"/>	Frugality	<i>Kimmutz</i>	קִמּוּץ
<input type="checkbox"/>	Patience	<i>Savlanut</i>	סְבֻלָּנוּת	<input type="checkbox"/>	Diligence/Zeal	<i>Zerizut</i>	זְרִיזוּת
<input type="checkbox"/>	Order	<i>Seder</i>	סֵדֶר	<input type="checkbox"/>	Silence	<i>Shtikah</i>	שְׁתִּיקָה
<input type="checkbox"/>	Decisiveness	<i>Harizut</i>	חֲרִיצוּת	<input type="checkbox"/>	Calmness	<i>Nichutah</i>	נִיחוּתָא
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cleanliness	<i>Nekiyut</i>	נְקִיּוּת	<input type="checkbox"/>	Truth	<i>Emet</i>	אֱמֶת
<input type="checkbox"/>	Humility	<i>Anavah</i>	עֲנָוָה	<input type="checkbox"/>	Separation	<i>Prishut</i>	פְּרִישׁוּת
<input type="checkbox"/>	Righteousness	<i>Tzedek</i>	צְדָקָה				