



Facilitator/Educator Tips on How Use This Resource

1. Review the material ahead of time to ensure you have a grasp on the Mussar concepts, as this curriculum dives deeply into a Mussar perspective and study of *middot*, or “soul traits.”
2. It is recommended that you project the PDF for this first lesson (if possible) as you discuss each slide with your teen group, using the suggested prompts on Slide 3. There are additional prompts on each slide to also guide conversations.
3. We encourage that you invite discussion not only about the content, but also about how the chosen images/pictures relate to the learning. Another option is to have teens journal about the prompts or pair up in *chevruta* to discuss. Mussar’s foundational practices encourage journaling and discussion with others.
4. Discuss how the selected quotes on the final slide resonate with the everyday lives of your teens, in addition to how they relate to their Mussar learning to the spiritual practice.



Challenges and Choices: Introduction to Mussar for Teens

Welcome to *Challenges and Choices: A Jewish Teen's Guide to a Balanced Life!*

Just as the caterpillar slowly changes and transforms into a butterfly,
we invite you to begin your personal journey of growth and transformation through Mussar.

Who are you now, and who do you want to become?



Discuss the prompts below to unpack the Mussar texts and images that follow

1. Mussar teaches us how to become a ***mensch*** – a good person – or at the very least, a better version of ourselves. What kinds of personal qualities or character traits belong to a *mensch* – to a “good, whole, holy, or balanced” person?
2. What do you believe is your greatest strength, personal quality, or characteristic? How might you use your strongest positive quality to guide you through hard times?
3. What new or improved attitudes or habits would you like to create – or break? (Or another way to ask: What personal qualities or characteristics would you like to improve upon or develop? What kind of person do you “wish to be?” What is on your “soul curriculum?”)
4. If you improved those attitudes or habits, or developed those characteristics, how do you think your life would change? What would be different?



**The Mussar tradition began over
1,100 years ago and continues
today.**

**Some people think of it as
“ethical instruction”**

(a path to improve ourselves)

and others as think of it as

“Jewish mindfulness”

*(a practice for bringing our hearts and minds
into alignment)*

1. What do you already know about Mussar?
2. What do you think of when you hear “ethical” and/or “mindfulness?”





Mussar is practical life guidance for becoming the best version of ourselves we can be.

Mussar encourages us to see and reveal our natural "inner light", by removing the internal "dusty" layers built up by life experience, and clearing the way for the most authentic, holy, and unique version of ourselves to shine through.

1. What experiences have added to your internal "dusty life layers?"
2. Where/who else do you turn to for life guidance?



The real focus of Mussar is YOU!

What is your unique, personal “soul curriculum”, and what tools can you put in your personal “toolkit” to help deal with everyday challenges and choices?

**Mussar learning and understanding encompasses:
mind-learning (intellectual)
heart-learning (emotional), and
soul-learning (spiritual)**

1. How do you feel about focusing on yourself? Why might it be important to focus on yourself?
2. What do you confidently know in your “mind”, versus in your “heart”, versus in your “soul?”





Mussar sees that we are each born with all the *middot* (character traits).

What makes us unique is the degree - or **measure** - of each particular trait within our soul.

In fact, the word *middah* translates to “measure.”

GRATITUDE
 PEACE-OF-MIND
 PATIENCE ENVY
 HONOR ENTHUSIASM
 SILENCE
 TRUST
 LOVINGKINDNESS
 RESPONSIBILITY
 HUMILITY



Now, it's time to put what you've learned about Mussar into practice using The Range, one tool for your Mussar toolkit!

The Range is a way of measuring, assessing, and then balancing a particular *middah* you are focusing on. For example, everyone has the trait of patience/*savlanut*, however some of get impatient easily, whereas for others, it may take an extraordinary situation to get us even a little impatient.

Patience /*Savlanut* / סְבִלְנוּת: The Range

Check your *middot* measure....



Passivity

Patience

Alacrity

Impatience



Mussar practice encourages us to notice and assess – ***without judgment*** – when we show up with “too much” or “too little” of a particular *middah*.

We ask: is our level of patience “right” or “appropriate” for the given situation? If not, we have a **choice to make about how we show up.**

Using the Range below for patience/*savlanut*, reflect and discuss:

- When was a time when you were balanced?
- When are times when being at the extreme ends are appropriate?
- When was a time you were at one of the extreme ends of the patience Range?

Patience /*Savlanut* / סְבִלְנוּת: The Range

Check your *middot* measure....



Passivity

Patience

Alacrity

Impatience



THE GREATEST SOUND IN THE COSMOS IS THAT OF SOMEONE CHANGING THEMSELVES AND GROWING FROM IT.

(RABBI YISRAEL SALANTER)

- Reflect on a time in your life when you changed and grew as a person, emotionally, spiritually, or psychologically?
- What did that experience feel like? What did you learn?

MUSSAR IS MAKING THE HEART GRASP WHAT THE MIND ALREADY KNOWS.

(RABBI ELIYAHU LOPIAN)

- Reflect on a time when your heart and mind were in alignment. What was that like? How did it make you feel?
- What does it feel like when your heart and mind are out of balance with each other? How might bringing them together change your experience?

