Mussar (מוסר): Another Jewish Approach to the Environment

1. Review—The Halakhic Approach to the Environment

Turning Values into Action

Uncovering the Values within the Mitzvot

* "Six years you shall sow your land, and gather in its yield; but in the seventh you shall let it rest and lie fallow. Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave let the beasts of the field eat..." *(Exodus 23:10-11)*
* Six years you may sow your field, and six years you may prune your vineyard, and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of the Lord: you shall not sow your field, nor prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. But you may eat whatever the land during its sabbath will produce - you, your male and female slaves, the hired and bound laborers who live with you, and your cattle and the beasts in your land may eat all its yield." *(Leviticus 25: 3-7)*
* The land must not be sold forever: for the land is Mine: for you are strangers and residents with Me. Throughout the land you possess, you must provide redemption of the land. (Leviticus 25:23-24)
* When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, **you shall not destroy (** **לא תשחית** ) its trees by wielding an axe against them. You may eat from them, but you shall not cut them down. Are the trees in the field human, that they should be besieged by you? Only the trees that you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, that you may build siege works against the city that makes war with you, until it falls. (Deuteronomy 20:19-20)

1. **Mussar**
   * Definitions:
     + - ***Mussar*** offers concrete guidelines to live a meaningful and ethical life
       - ***Middot*** are the qualities that help one achieve a meaningful and ethical life and to build spirituality.
   * History
     + Jewish ethical instruction begins in *Mishlei* (Proverbs) and is a thread within Jewish thought throughout post-Biblical Jewish texts
     + First work of *Mussar* attributed to Rabbi Bahya ibn Paquda from 11th century Spain (Saragossa). Work is called *Duties of the Heart*.
     + Founder of modern *Mussar*: Rabbi Israel Salanter from 19th century Lithuania.
2. **Source Sheet**

**Text 1: A Version of *Middot* (Qualities)**

1. Equanimity / *Menuhat Ha-nefesh*.

2. Patience / *Savlanut*.

3. Order / *Seder*.

4. Decisiveness / *Haritzut*.

5. Cleanliness / *Nekiyut*.

6. Humility / *Anavah*.

7. Righteousness and Justice / *Tzedek*.

8. Frugality / *Kimmutz*.

9. Diligence / *Zerizut*.

10. Silence / *Shetikah*.

11. Calmness / *Nihuta*.

12. Truth / *Emet*.

13. Breadth / Revacha (seeing the big picture)

**Text 2: Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 7:13**

רְאֵה אֶת מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי מִי יוּכַל לְתַקֵּן אֵת אֲשֶׁר עִוְּתוֹ, בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁבָּרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן, נְטָלוֹ וְהֶחֱזִירוֹ עַל כָּל אִילָנֵי גַּן עֵדֶן, וְאָמַר לוֹ, רְאֵה מַעֲשַׂי כַּמָּה נָאִים וּמְשֻׁבָּחִין הֵן, וְכָל מַה שֶּׁבָּרָאתִי בִּשְׁבִילְךָ בָּרָאתִי, תֵּן דַּעְתְּךָ שֶׁלֹא תְקַלְקֵל וְתַחֲרִיב אֶת עוֹלָמִי, שֶׁאִם קִלְקַלְתָּ אֵין מִי שֶׁיְתַקֵּן אַחֲרֶיךָ

"God led Adam around all the trees of the Garden of Eden. And God said to Adam: 'See My works, how good and praiseworthy they are?! And all that I have created, I made for you. [But,] be mindful then that you do not spoil and destroy My world - for if you spoil it, there is no one after you to repair it.'"

Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 7:13; ca. 8th Century C.E.)

**Questions to Consider**

* What ethical imperative is embedded in this text?
* What quality or qualities (*middah)* would one need to develop to follow this ethical imperative?
* Should we be focused on our topic of the environment now—during the pandemic?