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Letter from the Rabbi

Perhaps you have noticed that the second Lunch and Learn in the calendar each month is devoted to Mussar. Perhaps you are not able to attend the Lunch and Learn sessions and have wondered what this Mussar is about. Mussar is a Jewish ethical and spiritual practice that centers on the concept of middot (singular middah), or measures. Middot are character traits. We practice Mussar in order to move closer to the ideal balance of each middah.

I've been thinking lately about trust. We think of trust as a positive value – and it is – but as with all the middot, it is possible to have either too much trust or too little.

It is a Jewish value to trust God. Is it possible to trust God too much? Yes, it is. Some might believe that God will always take care of us. They might refuse to leave their house when a wildfire is approaching because they believe God will miraculously intervene to save them. This is trusting God too much. On the other hand, trusting God too little might result in believing that only bad things will ever happen to us.

So, too, we can trust other people too much or too little. We should not give a stranger the keys to our house or leave our doors unlocked. But the other extreme, never inviting anyone in lest they see what we have, is to trust too little.

Trusting relationships are built over time. This is true of communities as well as of individuals. Those in a community need to be able to trust the goodwill of others, and to trust that all are working toward common goals. It takes time, attention, and effort to build strong relationships and healthy communities. But it is well worth the effort.

Mussar instructs us to be aware of our habits. In what circumstances do we trust too much? In which do we trust too little? The ideal varies from

circumstance to circumstance, and from individual to individual. By paying attention to this middah and all the middot, we bring our lives into harmony and create stronger and happier communities.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Barbara L. Block

Letter from the President

Trigger warning: TIME'S UP!

I am not using these terms flippantly, I know they both represent important issues. At a recent Sisterhood meeting, I made a knee-jerk error in judgment. I asked the sisters to consider signing up for the Holiday Committee's cleanup crew. And I was reminded in clear, unambiguous terms that the year is 2018 and women are not default kitchen workers. Reminded by a number of voices, and using more colorful terms. I have identified as a feminist since I first learned the term, but I made the mistake of not thinking before making my request. And here I publicly apologize to my sisters.

On the other hand, I have always been aware that in this congregation one is as likely to see men in the kitchen as women. Most of our volunteer groups are mixed as well. For example, I see men and women toiling and sweating in the garden together all the time.

The trigger warning part of this is a reminder. It's difficult to know, sometimes, when we have said or done something that hurts or offends others. But sometimes those who are quickest to take offense can be the same people that turn around and step on others' feelings. So how do we navigate our lives, especially in a congregation of people with mixed backgrounds, public policy ideals, and personalities?

I suggest a return to civility. The examples in government and the public arena have modeled an increasing lack of civil behavior recently. We all

know examples of people who think those who disagree with their opinions are either evil or stupid and don't mind saying so. But most of us were raised with behavioral models that included a willingness to treat others with the respect we want to receive.

And what could be more Jewish than avoiding doing to others that which is abhorrent to us?

June Weiss