

tion he started in 2004. Some of Morinis' students went on to do their own teaching, among them Rabbi Pamela Wax, who added Mussar programming as spiritual care coordinator of the Jewish Healing Center at the Westchester, New York Jewish Community Services.

For the first time Mussar was attracting non-Orthodox Jews, among them Jews who'd embraced Eastern practices such as meditation and yoga or had not found a discipline for personal development in the Jewish sphere. In Mussar they were discovering an authentically Jewish spiritual path, and one that didn't require knowledge of Hebrew or a strong background in religious texts.

It's been more than four years since Rabbi Nancy Wechsler-Azen introduced Mussar to Congregation Beth Shalom in Carmichael. "Mussar students have

since become part of the temple leadership," says Rabbi Nancy, as she's called, and "have greater capacity for listening during temple business matters." Plus, "with the built-in understanding and support for practicing Mussar, [when a problem arises], instead of an immediate reaction, there tends to be more silence and contemplation before talking." Like the effects of Mussar itself, the change often is subtle, but it "makes a difference in the overall tone of the meeting."

In Fall 2007 Rabbi Wechsler-Azen's husband and Beth Shalom co-spiritual leader, Rabbi David Wechsler-Azen, created an all-men's group called "Spiritual Growth for Guys: Mussar for Men." The group of seven, which meets at the temple one Sunday night each month, *continued on page 77*

10 TEACHINGS TO LIVE BY

1. "A good Jew is not one who looks out for another person's soul and his own stomach, but rather the other person's stomach and his own soul."
—Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1810–1883), founder of the Mussar movement
2. "A person's primary mission in the world is to purify and elevate the soul."
—Rabbi Yechezkiel Levenstein (1895–1974), Mussar supervisor of the Mir Yeshiva
3. "Take time, be exact, unclutter the mind."—Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv (1824–1898), founder of the Kelm branch of Mussar
4. "When one thinks deeply about the world, one understands everything differently. One sees that one's purpose is to elevate oneself and thereby the entire world too. Contemplation can transform a person!"—Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1892–1953), Mussar supervisor of the Ponevezh Yeshiva
5. "The person of understanding will always search for [wisdom] to the best of his abilities until he uncovers it, reveals it and draws it out of this heart, like one would to get at water in the depths of the earth."—Rabbi Bachya ibn Paquda, author of *The Duties of the Heart*, written in 1040
6. "As long as one lives a life of calmness and tranquility in the service of God, it is clear that he is remote from true service."—Rabbi Yisrael Salanter
7. "The Maharal of Prague [Rabbi Judah Loeb, d. 1609] created a golem, and this was a great wonder. But how much more wonderful to transform a corporeal human being into a mensch!"—Rabbi Yisrael Salanter
8. "How are our personalities, which need so much rectifying and setting straight, going to be rectified and set straight if we do not apply ourselves to the task with a great persistence?"—Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1707–1746), author of *The Path of the Just*, written in 1740
9. "The problem with people is that they want to change overnight and have a good night's sleep that night too."—Rabbi Yosef Yozel Hurwitz (1849–1919), founder of the Novarodock branch of Mussar
10. "It is the work of a lifetime. And that's why you were given a lifetime in which to do it."—Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv

Humility

BY ELLEN BERK

Recently, my son's best friend, who is not of drinking age, decided to help himself to a bottle of vodka with another friend and my son while we were having dinner with his parents—a "thank you" dinner for taking the boy with us on a ski trip. Discovering the empty vodka bottle which this boy had left in the kitchen, I asked him: *what happened to the vodka?*



"Now I observe my emotions rather than allow them to run wild."

It was a very uncomfortable situation. His parents seemed to diminish the seriousness of drinking an entire bottle of vodka under our noses.

In the past I might have yelled at them. I might have also walked away from the situation seething with anger. But through my Mussar practice I have cultivated a greater degree of compassion for other people's struggles. I also put time between my initial feelings and my response. So, in this instance I restrained myself. Later, I told the mother of my concern for her son's well-being. In addition I talked calmly to my son about his conflicts with a friend who was changing because of alcohol consumption.

Mussar has helped me to turn potentially hot situations into workable situations by teaching me how to observe my emotions rather than allowing them to run wild. In this manner, I can honor the image of God within me and around me. □

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