

practice. Every day I spent time visualizing an open hand, an image that for me embodies generosity. Sitting quietly, I envisioned that open hand in my mind's eye until the image became neon-bright. After several week-long installments, I had laid down enough traces of the image on my soul. Now, whenever I encounter a situation in which I have the option to be generous (or not), up comes this image of the open hand inspiring me to give. I had altered my impulse.



What are the next steps to bringing Mussar into your life?

- Review the questions and practices suggested in my Study/Discussion Guide to Mussar available at [www.reformjudaismmag.org](http://www.reformjudaismmag.org).
- Choose one of these traits and do the suggested practice for one week. Along the way, reflect on your experience:

- Generosity: Do three generous acts every day.
- Honor: Greet everyone you

meet with words of real interest.

- Patience: Be strong in holding back from reactivity when forced to wait.
- Gratitude: Go out of your way to express thanks to all who do things for you.

• Read an ancient Mussar text, like *The Path of the Just* by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1740) or *The Duties of the Heart* by Rabbi Bachya ibn Paquda (1080), or a modern one, such as *Strive for Truth!* by Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler.

• Take a distance learning course offered through The Mussar Institute, [www.mussarinstitute.org](http://www.mussarinstitute.org).

• Talk to your rabbi or education director about starting a Mussar group. See "How To Bring Mussar to Your Synagogue: 5 Practical Steps" (p. 72) and visit The Mussar Institute's website for additional resources.

• Form a Mussar *chevruta* partnership (studying in pairs) with friends or congregants. To join an existing group of fellow seekers contact The Mussar Institute.

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## The Mussar Revival

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challenges the men to get better and better in their interactions, says Rabbi David, as he's called. "It's a safe forum to talk about issues they never discuss, like their relationships to others, to themselves, and to God."

Across the continent, New York City attorney Gary Shaffer teaches a Mussar class at Congregation Beth Elohim in Brooklyn (see his article, "Freedom," p.71). Often Shaffer sends emails to students between sessions reminding them to focus on their *middah*, in part because they are not following the Mussar practice of pairing into *chevruta* (study partners) who regularly check in on one another's progress. This underscores what Shaffer believes is Mussar's challenge to Reform Jews: making time for it. "We don't necessarily lead a Jewish-centric life as the Orthodox do. If we've got kids, they're playing soccer, baseball, and basketball, maybe taking music lessons, all deemed important, and we've got our own busy lives."

Mussar's traditional response to this time challenge has been to educate children in the practice. Reform educators are doing just that. Rabbi Nancy has woven a "*middah* of the day" into the temple religious school from pre-K to seventh grade complete with basic teacher training in Mussar and lesson plans. Last fall, religious school principal Jeffrey Agron of Congregation Bet Breira in Miami, Florida began teaching a Mussar course to fifteen students in the tenth-grade Confirmation class, dividing the students into small groups to discuss soul traits like patience (needed when you're waiting in line at a store with a slow cashier or dealing with younger siblings). Agron, co-president of The Mussar Institute, is now working on a formal Mussar teen curriculum to present to the National Association of Temple Educators.

The Mussar effort pays dividends, says Rabbi Pamela Wax. "My assumption is that I was put on Earth to be the best 'me' I can be. Mussar is a way I attain holiness and draw myself closer to what God expects of me." □

# Study Practice Grow... On the Path of Mussar

**Elevate your inner life, one trait at a time.**

To begin your journey into Mussar, or start a Mussar group at your temple, visit [www.mussarinstitute.org](http://www.mussarinstitute.org)

**Mussar Kallah VI**  
Sunday, November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2008  
New York, NY  
at The JCC in Manhattan

Join us at this annual gathering of Mussar students and teachers.

**For information and to register go to:**  
[www.mussarinstitute.org/learning-kallah.htm](http://www.mussarinstitute.org/learning-kallah.htm)

