

**Mussar Practice Group  
Congregation Neve Shalom  
Week Four: Into *Every Day Holiness***

**Opening Chant:**

לא עליך המלאכה לגמור, ולא אתה בן חורין לבטל ממנה

*Lo alecha ham'la-cha ligmor, v'lo atah ven chorine livatel mimena*

You are not obligated to finish the work, neither are you free to abandon it.

-Mishna Avot 2:16

**Another Metaphor:**



I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free – Michelangelo

Questions:

1. How would you describe this creative process?
2. Where does it start? When is it done?
3. For whom is the sculpture created? For the artist? For the people who view it?  
For the marble?
4. How does that quotation guide us to view the sculptures below?



Alberto Giacometti



Henry Moore

What is the analogy between this conversation and our exploration of Mussar?

How does it help us understand the following passage cited in *Everyday Holiness*?  
“God is certainly capable of making people, and all of creation absolutely complete. Furthermore, it would have made much more sense for God to have done so, because insofar as God God’s self is perfect in every way, it is fitting that God’s works should also be totally perfect. But in God’s great wisdom, God ruled it better to leave to people the completion of their own creation. So God cut short God’s own trait of perfection, and out of God’s greatness and goodness withheld God’s self from God’s greatness in these creations and made these creations incomplete. This was the way God wanted them made, according to God’s sublime plan. (Rabbi Moshe Hayim Luzzato, *Da’at Tevunot Discerning Knowledge* cited on page 14 of *Everyday Holiness*)

**And now to the Text!**

What were your impressions?

Did you find anything surprising after our introductory conversations?

Are there ideas or concepts that you understand better after your reading?

**Some Ideas that Struck Me:**

1. The starting point for understanding Mussar is the verse in the Torah that tells us: “You shall be holy.” . . . *our goal should be to become as spiritually refined and elevated as is possible.* (page 11)
2. While the goal of holiness is the same for everyone, the path each of us has to follow in pursuit of that goal is unique, as each of us is unique. (page 12)
3. The geography of the soul:
  - a. *Neshama*: the holy and pure core of our souls
  - b. *Ruach*: the source within the soul of animation and vigor
  - c. *Nefesh*: The element of the soul and our character that is most visible to others. The nefesh is described as the aggregate of our *middot*, or characteristics, attributes or measures. We cultivate our *nefesh* by balancing our *middot*.
  - d. The truth is not that we *have* souls, but rather that we *are* souls.
4. The *Yetzer Ha’Ra* is anything that would cause us to answer to our baser motivations and distract us from making the higher, more correct choices when we reach a point at which a decision must be made. It is and always be a part of us and provide us with opportunities to keep growing.
5. Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian defines Mussar as “Making the heart feel what the intellect understands.” (page 30)
6. The practices of meditation, silence and retreat and journaling are designed to reveal what is hidden within ourselves to our conscious minds.
7. The practices of chanting, contemplation and visualization are designed to imprint external, experiential learning on to our consciousness.
8. All of these practices are to prepare us for the that takes place every time we are faced with making a decision.