

BUILDING JEWISH ETHICAL CHARACTER

Edited by:

Dr. Joseph Kaminetsky
National Director
Torah Umesorah, National Society for Hebrew Day Schools

and

Rabbi Murray I. Friedman
Associate Editor
The Jewish Parent

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III

The Fryer Foundation

Middos Curriculum

Program Objectives of the *Middos* Curriculum

1. Teach the language of *middos*—moral behavior: *chessed* (kindness), *rachamim* (mercy), etc.
2. Present models of rich moral personalities and situations.
3. Teach the student to deal analytically and critically with a behavioral situation.
4. Teach the student that moral principles are spelled out in terms of precise behavior and are guided by *halochah*; morality and legality are synonymous.
5. Develop a moral imagination; behavior should provoke observation, inquiry and speculation; learn how situations in the social environment come about.
6. Develop an awareness, sensitivity and empathy for moral behavior through perceiving alternate ways of behaving, learning to weigh the alternatives and predicting their immediate and remote outcomes.
7. Teach student to perceive and describe his own feelings in given situations.
8. Teach to identify the feelings of people involved in a given situation and perceive how they struggle with their emotions.
9. Provide teacher with experiences in gaining self-understanding.
10. Develop the student's power of self-expression.
11. Develop awareness that inquiry about behavior and moral decision-making are painstaking tasks.

12. Help student to learn to trust his own ability in observing and deciding behavioral situations even if he never experienced the particular situation; guide him in the transfer from the particular situation to the broad behavioral picture.
13. Develop an internal sensitivity "apparatus" which should automatically respond to behavioral situations in uncovering, detecting and spotlighting the moral issues involved in a situation.
14. Encourage ongoing teacher-student and/or student-student discussion interaction.

The Launching of the *Middos* Curriculum

Dr. Louis Nulman

Because we live in times when our system of moral values is being challenged in the broad community, the question of moral education takes on a deep sense of urgency. In order to deal with this critical problem on a nation-wide basis two questions arise: What kind of moral values are we to teach? Secondly, which methods of instruction will prove to be most effective?

For Torah-minded Jews, there is unquestionably a consensus regarding the content of the *middos* (broadly: character education) instruction for our homes and schools. What remains unresolved is the complicated problem of the process or methodology to be used in teaching and communicating Torah-based ethical norms to the contemporary Jewish child who is growing up in an environment which militates against our Torah system of ethical values.

Why is there such a gap in our knowledge of teaching *middos* to our Day School children? Despite the fact that historically we have so vast a *mussar* literature, we nevertheless seem to have been unable to clearly formulate a plan of methodology.

In recent years we have literally been witnessing a revolution in American education. We have come to realize that mastery of skills and factual information alone affords the child limited opportunities for intellectual development. We are now challenged to teach the child the principles underlying the structure of subject-matter, critical analysis, productive thinking and the like.

The Jewish Parent, January 1969.

Of course, Torah *chinuch* has always been interested in *meaningful* instruction. Children were *consistently* asked to “dig deeply” in the study of Chumash, Rashi and Gemara. What then happens when we focus our attention on the subject of *middos*—human behavior? Are we to be analytical and weigh evidence only in matters which are cognitive or should we also apply the same rigorous approach in the matter of *middos*?

There is a tendency on the part of many to simplify behavior and the thought process which relate to it. In this connection, Dr. Joshua A. Fishman offers a very significant observation:¹

There seems to be a real difference between analytic, differentiated, and directed thinking or reasoning on the one hand, and the artistic, emotional, uncritical, memory-and-recognition thinking, and stereotyping on the other. In stereotyping it almost seems as though the individual either judges not at all, or does so only via well-worn, dependable, swiftly traversable channels which require a bare minimum of defining, distinguishing, inducing, weighing of evidence or any other of the so-called higher mental processes.

In 1966, the late Dr. Samuel A. Fryer of Santa Monica made possible the establishment of an educational foundation to deal specifically with the subject of strengthening *middos* instruction in the nation's Hebrew Day Schools. The recently published new Comprehensive Curriculum for *middos*—Character Education—contains the Hebrew text *B'Ikvoseihem*, the English Edition *In Their Footsteps*, the *Teacher's Guide* and *Taped Model Lessons*. This curriculum, developed by the Samuel A. Fryer Educational Research Foundation, grew out of extensive research and experimentation. Dr. Herman Axelrod, Shraga Silverstein and the writer formed a working team for this project. The curriculum itself concentrates primarily on the area of *middos* instruction methodology. Although valuable textual materials have been developed for this curriculum, the primary thrust is on the effective use of these materials.

Our new curriculum is anchored in the great tradition of the *Ba'alei Mussar*, who for centuries underscored the need for applying the rigorous standards of *iyun* and *histaklus*—depth analysis and critical study—in *middos* and *mussar* instruction. Furthermore, the program is based on the principles of effective teaching which demands teacher-student interaction resulting in the stu-

dent self-discovery process. The *Teacher's Guide* provides a full treatment of the philosophy and methodology underlying this program.

Of course, our schools and homes have taught and continue to teach *middos* in a variety of ways—through the Chumash, *Novi*, Gemara lesson, the *mussar shmues*, the parent and teacher models, and special *middos* projects.

The Fryer Foundation *middos* curriculum, however, adds a new dimension to this immense area of educational concern. In essence, our curriculum is designed to provide a wide range of opportunities for the student to develop decision-making skills involving ethical problems.

The following story, taken from *B'Ikvoseihem* and *In Their Footsteps*, is used by the teacher for a *middos* lesson. The selected “think” questions, used by the skillful teacher, sharpen the in-depth understanding of the setting.

A Considerate Host

The great Torah scholars have always been particular about the mitzvah of *hachnosas orchim*—receiving guests. Not only did they invite guests into their homes, but they would also hover over them like our Father Abraham in order to be of service. They spared no expense to provide their guests with food, drink, lodging, and even kind, sympathetic words, so that their guests would feel as comfortable as though they were in their own homes.

Once, on the evening of *Pesach*, Rabbi Akiva Eiger invited many guests to share his Seder table. The table was prepared for the reading of the Haggadah, and, in accordance with custom, a large goblet of wine was placed before each of the guests. Suddenly, one guest accidentally brushed against his goblet, overturning it, and spilling the wine over the clean, white tablecloth.

Immediately, Reb Akiva, without being seen, tipped the table so his own goblet overturned, spilling wine on his end of the cloth. “Too bad,” he remarked, “the table just isn't standing straight.”

Beyond the Story

1. How can you explain the obligation of a great man to serve a lesser man, as in the mitzvah of welcoming—*hachnosas orchim*?

2. How do we see from this story that what would otherwise be two sins (*ba'al tashchis*) or to lie—"The table is not standing straight"—were permitted, so as not to embarrass the guest?
2. If you were one of the guests present at the table, would you have been permitted to do what Reb Akiva Eiger did?
4. Should Reb Akiva Eiger have acted as he did even if the guests realized why he was doing so?
5. If a guest came to your house, what are some of the things you could do to make him feel at home?

Now that we have an experimental character education program, the next phase of our work demands that we take this curriculum out of the laboratory and move it into the school. It is, therefore, essential that during the current school year we concentrate on a program of teacher-training and classroom experimentation.

Already a select corps of teachers in grades 6-8 in schools around the country have volunteered to work extensively with our materials. These individuals, committed to flexibility in experimentation with innovative methodology and materials, will be the "ambassadors" for the program.

"Master" teachers will be totally involved in this program by carefully reviewing curriculum texts, the *Teacher's Guide* and taped model lessons; attending in-service workshops periodically; experimenting with materials in the classroom on a regular basis; and reporting regularly on progress, and student and parent reactions. As the teacher-training program progresses, each of the schools served by a "master" teacher will become nationally known as a *Laboratory for the Middos Curriculum*.

Elements of the Comprehensive Program

During the initial stage of teacher-training and classroom experimentation, the *middos* program will revolve around formal instruction and group discussion in the classroom. The program will be expanded to include group counseling in small groups, socio-drama or role playing and individual counseling.

If we are to succeed with the teaching of *middos* to children, the parents must be totally involved in the process of character education. Suitable materials will be prepared for parent discussion and counseling sessions. Parents will also be provided with a Guide which will assist them in understanding the character education program in which their children participate.

II

Issues In Middos Or Character Education

A number of issues must be carefully considered before we can effectively plan a program of research, demonstration, training and dissemination in the area of *middos* or character education.

The following opinions, findings and hypotheses reflect the thinking of a number of *Roshei Hayeshivos*, Day School principals, teachers, psychologists and guidance specialists.

1. Definition of *middos*.

We are troubled by the exact definition of *middos*.

- a. Are we dealing exclusively with human conduct and behavior, or are we talking about traits, attitudes, values, etc.?
- b. In what way do *middos* differ from *deios*? The *Rambam* uses the word *deios* to describe *middos* (See *Rambam, Hilchos Deios*).
- c. Do *middos* relate only to *bein odom lachaveiro* relationships or do *middos* from our frame of reference also include *y'gias hatorah*, and *darkei halimud*? A principal recently reported in his school bulletin that he chose the subject of *hiddur b'mitzvos* for the *middoh* of the month.
- d. Are we talking about *middos* which are Halachically based and therefore in the domain of *mitzvoh* and *aveiroh* or are we also talking about *nimusim* (etiquette)?

Rabbeinu Menachem Hameiri in the following statement clearly indicates that we should be concerned with *middos* in both categories:

A person should continuously adorn himself with good traits and should not be indifferent even in those matters which do not involve a *mitzvoh* or *aveiroh*. (*Seifer HaMiddos*)

- e. What is the relationship between *middos* and *mussar*? We certainly can identify *ba'alei middos* who were not necessarily reared in the world of *mussar*?

2. The Development of A Middos Curriculum

Historically, we have been unable to identify the existence of a formal *middos* program in European schools for students below the age of 13.

One may assume that a formal curriculum in *middos* was unnecessary since the home and general environment provided such training and experience.

It is reported a *middos* curriculum was developed by *Der Alter* of Kelm, (Zal).

The author of *Cheshbon Hanefesh* tells us that formal guidance in *middos* should begin at age 13. Serious study, however, should begin at age 18.

If you want to train your child, then you must be diligent and begin when he reaches the age of 13, from the time that his traits begin to emerge and become recognizable at their maturity or their shortcomings. Then you must observe him continuously for five years in order to perceive in detail all the faults in his traits and note them one by one for future reference. When he reaches the age of 18, then you can evaluate him and prepare him for the rectification of his traits, and to deliver into his hand the tablets from which he may learn to train himself. (Page 26)

At the present time, there is no graded, systematic program of *middos* instruction in the Hebrew Day Schools of our nation.

A majority of principals want to see a formal *middos* program developed. Which specific *middos* are to be taught? At what grade levels should these *middos* be taught? Is it possible to structure a three year cycle curriculum of *middos* for elementary Yeshivos?

A study should be made of the *middos* programs in the Israeli schools.

3. *Middos* and Behavior Change

Can a program of *middos* effect behavior change? Apparently, such an objective could be realized.

From the words of the *Rambam* it would seem that behavior change can be effectuated:

One should not teach Torah except to a qualified pupil, to one whose deeds find favor or to one who is ingenuous. But if he was following an improper path, he must be returned to goodness and led in the righteous path, and be examined; then he may be brought into the *Beis Hamidros* and be instructed. (Hilchos Talmud Torah, 4:1)

Note the phrase: "he must be returned to goodness and led in the righteous path."

4. Corrective *Middos*

It is agreed that all schools are concerned with the teaching of

middos. When students misbehave, the school regularly reprimands, disciplines, etc. This is certainly a form of "corrective *middos* instruction."

Although all schools engage in this "corrective" type of instruction, there is no agreement, however, as to how a formal and direct program of *middos* should be structured.

5. *Hilchos Middos*

Generally, students in our day schools lack a systematic knowledge of the *halochos* of *middos*.

Rabbi Israel Salanter, *Zal*, used the term *chochmas hamussar* and the Chofetz Chaim, *Zal*, spoke of *mitzvos hamussar* in describing the *halochoh* aspect of *mussar* study.

6. The Teacher's Role

The teacher plays a major role in the *middos* program. Some feel the teacher is the *only* one who can communicate *middos*.

Several of our colleagues feel we must develop a program of teacher training in the area of *middos*.

7. Curriculum Materials

Assuming the competent teacher and essential instructional materials, *middos* could be taught via Chumash and other subject matter as Prophets and Gemara.

8. Measuring Behavior

From the words of the *Rambam* "and he is tested" (quoted in No. 3), it appears there was a testing program for *middos*.

Today, in our Day Schools, we do not know of instruments which could measure behavioral development of *middos*. Currently, researchers are experimenting with the "projective method" approach. Some feel we can measure behavior through observation. The Nevahrdok Yeshivos in Europe concentrated on *middos* programs which included rigorous guidance, observation, field experience, etc.

9. Activities In *Middos*

All agree that activities, situations (*p'ulos*) can strengthen the *middos* program. Some feel this is the only way we can achieve our goal.

10. *Middos* Vs. The Environment

Can we inculcate *middos* in our children when the environment is in opposition to those values? Can we expect children to walk in the school halls properly when we actually encourage running in halls because of scheduled brief recesses and lunch hours?

Is it true that out-of-town children really are more *eidel*—greater *ba'alei middos*—than New York children? If so, why?

The Teaching of *Middos* in Jewish Schools

Dr. Herman Axelrod

Middos and *mussar* have been taught directly and indirectly in our schools and Yeshivos for centuries. The formal instruction in the classroom was based on the study of Chumash-Rashi, Mishnah, and Gemara, with emphasis on the *mo'or shebatorah*—the “light” of the Torah—the mitzvah, the *middoh* and the ethical concept. The informal education was provided by the daily experiences and practices in the school, the synagogue and the home, with teachers and parents serving as identification figures for the child. While knowledge of Torah was of paramount importance, the two-fold purpose of Torah education as expressed by *Chazal* was never overlooked: “Great is study for it leads to the performance of the mitzvos” and righteous living.

When Jews lived in Torah-centered communities these aims were realized because the teachings of the Written and the Oral Law were carried over into everyday life—in the home, the marketplace and in all social and communal activities. There was not need then for particular emphasis on the direct inculcation of *middos* and special training in *mussar* because ethical conduct was a natural corollary or concomitant of Torah living.

But Jewish life in Russia and Poland during the 19th century did not stand still. Due to pressures from without and from within, Jewish life and education could not resist the demand for change in the schools and in the community. One way of meeting the challenge of the times was to strengthen the Jewish personality and to fortify the will of the individual to continue the traditional way of life unswervingly and without compromise.

“Teacher’s Guide,” The Fryer Foundation *Middos* Program.

It was Rabbi Israel Salanter of Lithuania who sensed the need for *sh’leimus*—wholesomeness—even in the Yeshiva education of his time. He therefore advocated training in *mussar* to augment the intensive study of Talmud. It was incongruous to him to find a *ben torah* fully versed in the *dinim* of the *Shulchan Aruch* and yet deficient in personal qualities—humility, self-control and generosity. Rabbi Israel’s ideas began a movement which spread to the Lithuanian and Polish yeshivos despite the opposition of several contemporary *g’dolim*. The impact of the *mussar* movement upon Torah education and Jewish life is felt even today, a century later, in the great institutions of learning in Israel as well as in the Diaspora.

Our generation has suffered a moral decline because of the many social and economic changes in Jewish life, bringing exposure to a secular world, to a secular culture, inimical to the Torah way of life. Furthermore, with the breakdown of the traditional Jewish home, and the permissive attitude on the part of parents toward moral and ethical conduct, there is less motivation for the teaching of moral values, and little carry-over from the classroom to the home and the community. The busy parent, who can spare very little time for his children, has relinquished his role as a moral guide, and has thrown the entire responsibility for character education on the shoulders of the school—secular and religious. It is needless to assert that if the schools of today cannot deal effectively with the problems of educational achievement, how effective can they be in the realm of character education and personality development.

And yet, the need for a new approach to the teaching of ethical values and moral conduct was never as great as it is today. We all realize that classroom teaching alone will not suffice. We all realize that ethical education must involve all the capacities of the child—intellectual, emotional, and social. We all realize that parents must re-assume their role as teachers and guides since the foundations of character and personality are laid not in the school but in the home.

The problem before us is how to mobilize all of our teaching and training resources and direct them toward our objectives. How can we make the teaching of Torah more effective and more concerned with ethical values and ethical conduct?

How can we utilize some of the newer methods of teaching and training such as small group discussion, sensitivity training, group dynamics, role playing, and socio-drama, to bring about a greater involvement of our children in the learning process. How

can we utilize audio-visual aids and other technical media to make our instruction more vivid and more meaningful?

The program which follows is an attempt to direct all of our educational efforts—formal and informal, individual and group, in the school and in the home, to the teaching of Torah ethics—*middos* and *mussar*. It involves everyone who is concerned with the character development of the child—the parent, the teacher and the rabbi. This program outlines an approach and indicates guidelines for further study and implementation.

A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM FOR THE TEACHING OF MIDDOS

This program is designed for the upper grades of the Jewish Day School (Grades 6-7-8) and embraces six educational activities:

1. Formal Instruction in the classroom
2. Group Discussion in the classroom
3. Group Counseling in small groups
4. Socio-Drama or Role Playing
5. Individual Counseling
6. Parent Group Counseling

1. FORMAL INSTRUCTION IN THE CLASSROOM

The first step in the teaching of *middos* to a pre-adolescent group involved the understanding of ethical ideas and concepts presented not in abstract form, but in terms of daily living experiences. Clear ideas and insights are essential and serve as a basis for the acquisition of ideals and values. For this purpose a special textbook has been prepared which will serve as a guide for the direct instruction. This text—*B'Kvoseihem—In Their Footsteps*—contains simple stories and vignettes relating to the ethical conduct and attitudes of the great rabbis who lived during the last three centuries. The stories deal with the following ten *middos*:

Love of Torah	Charity
Love of Israel	Kindness
Service of the Heart	Trust in G-d
Humility	Admonition
Compassion	Repentance

Through the direct instruction by a competent teacher, the child should learn the meaning of ethical terms and expressions in Hebrew. He should acquire ethical concepts and gain an understanding of the Torah life, thoughts and feelings of the rabbis.

These learnings will be reinforced by questions, exercises and discussion.

2. GROUP DISCUSSION IN THE CLASSROOM

In the classroom the child becomes involved on a cognitive and conceptual level, but the acquisition of verbal knowledge does not necessarily imply insight and sensitivity nor does it lead to changes in behavior. Generally there is little carry-over from knowing what is right to doing what is right.

Training in *middos* and ethics which should lead to desirable conduct requires greater and deeper involvement on the part of the child. If we want Torah values to become internalized and experienced, it is necessary to involve the child on an emotional and social level.

There are several ways of achieving this involvement. One of them is group discussion in the classroom led by the classroom teacher. In group discussion pupils will have the opportunity to explore the values, ideas, perceptions, and problem situations, and as a result acquire new attitudes and new skills in human relations. Such exploring and evaluating often help to remove some emotional obstacles to learning.

In group discussion the pupils will be motivated to bring in other co-related ideas and concepts learned from the *Tanach*, Talmud as well as from their school and home experiences.

The teacher who helps the pupils feel, think, and struggle with their own thoughts and feelings will not only make them more sensitive to the feelings of others, but will encourage them to assume responsibility for their own conduct.

It must be pointed out that group discussion is most effective with small groups because when the group is large often some members tend to take over the discussion and the others become primarily listeners.

3. GROUPS COUNSELING IN SMALL GROUPS

To achieve far greater and deeper involvement than classroom discussion and in order to reach each individual, small group counseling is recommended. This can be accomplished by organizing groups of 10-15 pupils under the leadership of a Torah counselor who has received training in counseling and group dynamics. In a small group arranged in a semicircle the children are able to inter-communicate with each other in an informal atmosphere in which there is no authoritarian figure, no formal questioning, no apprehension of marks or punishment, and no tension. In a relaxed setting the discussion of the ethical con-

cepts and the problem situations will elicit more self-expression, deeper insight and greater identification.

In a small group feelings of isolation are reduced and talking made easy when the members find that others have problems too and express feelings that are not unlike their own. The shy child loses his self-consciousness; the tense child is relieved of his feelings of anxiety.

In small group counseling individuals explore and analyze their problems together so that they may understand them better, learn to cope with them, and learn to make valid choices and decisions.

Research has shown that small group counseling provides realistic and life-like situations which are conducive to modifying the personal habits and attitudes of the group members. The individuals become involved in relationships with their peers and often accept ideas and suggestions by their fellow members which they would not accept when proposed by adults, even by their own parents.

Small group counseling makes it possible to introduce other techniques of group dynamics such as role playing or socio-drama and sensitivity training.

4. SOCIO-DRAMA OR ROLE PLAYING

In recent years socio-drama has been used as an effective device in the teaching of the social studies. It is an extension of dramatic play and should not be confused with psycho-drama which is a clinical and therapeutic method of dealing with personal problems.

Socio-drama is a discussion method combined with a drama method. The group watches a few of its fellow members play out through unrehearsed improvisation the roles in some real life problems. Each enactment is followed by discussion and evaluation which may lead to further re-enactment.

The spontaneous acting out of concrete, meaningful life-like situations gives the participants an opportunity to portray their own feelings, behavior and attitudes. It helps them to develop self-confidence in situations previously unknown or feared.

Playing a role before a group makes the individual self-conscious in a new way. It helps him develop a sensitivity to himself as well as to the feelings and welfare of others, and enables him to clarify his own values in terms of ethical behavior.

By acting out some of the stories from the text the pupils will in many instances become aware of the conflict between the

Torah values and the values of their social group which are greatly influenced by their environment—the home, television, movies, friends, etc. By gaining deeper insight into the *middos* of the rabbis, it is hoped that they will acquire the Torah values as their own, and apply them in their day-to-day experiences.

5. INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING

Individual counseling will help to complement and supplement group counseling. Some children will be able to profit from individual counseling only after they learn to voice their feelings in the supportive atmosphere of the group situation. Furthermore, many of them will be stimulated to work out in the individual counseling sessions conflicts of which they became aware through group counseling.

Individual counseling will be of great help to many Day School children who receive an intensive religious education in Torah and mitzvos, but experience personal problems and conflicts at home. These may relate to religious practices at home, to their relations with parents who may not be very observant, to their relations with siblings and friends. Some of these problems can be discussed in group sessions, but specific personal problems can be discussed in an individual counseling session with an understanding Torah counselor.

The counselor may deem it necessary to confer with parents and teachers in order to help the child gain a better understanding and make a better adjustment at home and at school.

6. PARENT GROUP COUNSELING

Any program of ethical education which does not include the active participation of the parents is incomplete, shallow and ineffective. It need not be re-iterated that parents, as identification figures, occupy a pivotal role in the character development of their children.

The mass media of parent education programs such as books, lectures and seminars are effective to a limited extent. However, when we are concerned with religious values and ethical conduct, greater involvement and greater participation are essential. This can be accomplished by small group counseling in living rooms where many of the techniques of group dynamics can be applied on an adult level.

The Role of the Teacher and Torah Counselor

One cannot overestimate the importance of the teacher's personality in the teaching of *middos*. It is through his daily conduct, his attitudes, and his relationship to the children that the program will become meaningful and real to the children. He

represents to them a model of a Torah personality whose speech and habits should reflect the very *middos* that he is trying to inculcate in his children.

Both the teacher and the Torah counselor will need orientation about the aims and procedures of this program. The Torah counselor will need training in the techniques of individual and group counseling with particular emphasis on ethical training and character development.

Basic Guidelines for the Program

1. *Middos* and mitzvos are inter-related and inter-twined; a *middos* lesson or group counseling session is in reality a Torah session.
2. While the classroom instruction may be conducted in Hebrew or English the group session should be conducted in the native language in order to evoke the participation of every individual and to insure the fullest degree of self-expression without any impediment.
3. Each group session will be a structured session—that is, a planned session with a central theme. It is definitely not a free or rambling session. When the discussion gets “off the track” the counselor will skillfully and tactfully re-direct it to the main theme.
4. If free expression is to be encouraged, the individual must be given a chance to complete his thought without interruption, even if it appears that the view expressed is contrary to Torah teachings. After the individual has finished, the counselor tactfully presents the Torah view without disparaging remarks or embarrassment to the individual.
5. The value of group discussion and counseling lies in the fact that it trains the individual to relate to others, to be tolerant, and to respect the opinions of others.
6. The success of the group session will depend on the skill of the teacher or counselor to establish rapport with the group. He must not dominate the group, nor resort to preaching or lecturing.
7. If the central theme is, for example, humility, the session should start with the material taught in the classroom on this topic from the book *B'l kvoseihem* and the thought questions that accompany the lesson as indicated in the *Teacher's Guide*. In the ensuing discussion, other related ideas and concepts may be presented, e.g., the humility of Mosheh Rabbeinu and Hillel.

Implementation of Program

The implementation of this comprehensive program will require the following organization:

1. Workshop for the training of Torah counselors.
2. Workshop for the training of parents as group counselors.
3. Publication of reading materials for counselors and parents.
4. Publication of tapes and other audio-visual materials.
5. Preparation of a manual or guide for teachers and counselors.

Rationale of *Middos*: Character Instruction

Rabbi Shraga Silverstein

At the First Annual Lecture of the Samuel A. Fryer Educational Research Foundation, Rabbi Mordecai Gifter said:¹

In the development of character we are dealing with the soul of individuals. "*Lokeiach n'foshos chochom*"—to capture the soul is an act of great wisdom. If we shall set for ourselves the task of appraising our overall purpose in the context of "the children who learn Torah" the Almighty will help us find the road to the heart of the child entrusted to us so that ultimately it will become "*chacham leiv yikach mitzvos*"—a heart perfected in the wisdom of ethical and moral living and yearning to express itself in the commandments of G-d.

A close scrutiny of the conclusion of Horav Gifter's statement uncovers what might be called a "*middos* triangle," three basic components of a *middos*-education program. The teacher must:

1. "find the road to the heart of the child," i.e., employ the teaching method most effective in reaching the child, so that
2. the child's heart will be "perfected in the wisdom of ethical and moral living," as a result of which
3. it will yearn to "express itself in the commandments of G-d."

Reduced to its simplest terms, the philosophy of this *middos* program is as follows: Good *teaching* can so affect a child's *thinking* that his *behavior* will be changed for the better.

"Teacher's Guide," The Fryer Foundation *Middos* Program.

Thought and Action

It may readily be seen that the critical assumption underlying this approach is that thinking can influence behavior, or, as it has been phrased elsewhere, "So far we have proceeded from the point of view that man's moral norms and moral behavior patterns are *learned*. This point of view implies that moral behavior, like all behavior, is subject to the principles and laws of the learning process."² Secular philosophy and psychology have not yet come to terms with themselves on the acceptance or rejection of this assumption. Philosophy because of its deterministic streak would deny man's control over his behavior. Psychology because of its difficulty in devising instrument of measurement and evaluation tends to doubt that such transfer from thinking to behavior does indeed take place. Though confusion pervades the secularists on this issue, it has always been taken as an article of faith (and, it might be added, or empirical cognition) among us Jews that "As a man thinks, so is he." This has made us the people of the Book, but also, and far more significantly, in the sense that we are shaped and molded by the Book. This truth has ever been implicitly acknowledged amongst us by father teaching son, Rabbi teaching disciple, and spiritual leader teaching his nation through works of ethical instruction.

Upon closer perusal, Rabbi Gifter's words will be found to be an echo of the words of that giant of the *mussar* tradition, Rabbi Moshe Chayim Luzzato, *Zal*:³

... It follows, then that any benefit to be obtained from these remarks is not to be derived from hearing them but once, for most likely you will find that you have learned little, after hearing, that you did not know before. Its benefit is to be derived, rather, through review and persistent study, by which one is reminded of those things which, by nature, he is prone to forget and through which he will take to hear the obligation that he tends to overlook.

Let us emphasize, "He will take to heart the obligation that he tends to overlook" and he will *act* differently.

The Rationale of *Middos* Instruction

Thought determines action. To say that this is an article of faith is far from saying that it is an article of *blind* faith. To say that good *teaching* can so affect a child's *thinking* that his

behavior will be changed for the better is not empty phraseology. In the *middos* context, it embodies the following rationale:

1. Man has free will.
2. Man must choose good and shun evil.
3. The clearer a man's idea of what is good, the more likely he is to choose it.
4. The clearer a man's idea of what is evil, the more likely he is to shun it.
5. Ideas are conveyed through teaching.
6. The more effective the teaching, the clearer the idea conveyed to the student, the greater the likelihood that the student's conduct will be governed by the idea.

This holds especially true of Torah learning. "*Hamo'or sheboh machzir l'mutov*"—"Its (Torah's) light returns a man to the good";¹ this is the underlying idea of "*V'yodato hayom, vahasheivosoh el l'vovechoh*"—"And you shall; know today and return it to your hearts"⁵—the truths of Torah, once known, work upon a man's heart and turn it towards the good.

Teaching Middos: The Method

This pilot project most directly concerns itself with the first element of the *middos* triangle—the effectiveness of teaching. It draws upon various sources of instruction (each comprising a unit in itself) and utilizes a wide distribution of student groups, ranging from the early elementary school grades through high school. The object throughout has been to demonstrate how a teaching method, almost universally regarded as the most effective of its kind, can be implemented. This method is based on student-teacher interaction resulting in student self-discovery. In our text we shall encounter actual taped recording of classroom sessions, each accompanied by typewritten and running commentaries on methodology and implementation. It is hoped that this will enable teachers to learn how this method can be used as the ideal instrument for the transmission of learnings in the area of *middos*.

This is not to say that such teachings has never been done before. Indeed, it has been and it is being done (but unfortunately by far too few). In the teaching of Gemara and related subjects, this method's governing principle of elicitation of learning from the student rather than dictation by the teacher renders it the ideal instructional vehicle. But for the teaching of *middos* not enough teachers are using this method. For even where *middos* is taught, there seems to be an almost irresistible desire to turn from teaching to preaching, and preaching (even where it is

not beset by the innumerable digressions which almost inevitably accompany it) is *not* "the road to the heart of the child."

Reaching the Child

In *middos* instruction, what, exactly, do we have in mind by "student-teacher interaction resulting in student self-discovery"?

We are looking for in-depth discussions between teacher and students, initiated by carefully thought-out probing questions, and pursued on the *student's* level of response. Our ultimate end is that the student gains an awareness of who he really is and what he really believes in with respect to issues that are central to the formation of a realistic, integrated value system. We are concerned with the creation of a student self-image against which the youngster is able to observe himself objectively so that he might evaluate, criticize, and correct himself. Although high ideals and aspirations are wonderful in themselves, our greatest educational error in the past has been to assume that they will work by themselves. But there is no such thing as a cure without a patient. And that is precisely what we have lost sight of. We have been prescribing moral panaceas wholesale, without giving adequate thought to the *individuals* for whom they are being prescribed. It is their own peculiar makeup which must in the final analysis be the arbiter of what will constitute a cure for them. In a sense, then, we must descend from our moral ivory towers and start speaking to our students again. This is not to say that we must give them free rein and allow them to be the architects of their own fate. Far from it—Torah rules. But Torah was made for individuals and it can be made to talk to individuals. And to the teacher of *middos*, that is what teaching should mean—leading, directing, guiding the individual student to recognize himself and to see that *self* as being spoken to by Torah.

As an educational method, perhaps the following citations will convey, if not the letter of the child-centered approach (a task relegated to the units which follow), then, at least, some of its spirit:

The *only* method that works in favor of molding mature, dependable character is first to give people—whether children or adults—reason to feel an *incentive* to behave ethically, and then to *guide* them intelligently, patiently, and with growing freedom to make and test their own decisions. This way works; *none* of the other

methods of child rearing or of reformation breeds more than unthinking, rigid compliance at best—and many methods breed savagely hostile revenge behavior.⁶

Parents were classified into two groups, each with different disciplinary goals and techniques. One group consisted of parents who were primarily interested that their children take personal responsibility for their misbehavior. These parents usually relied on psychologically oriented disciplinary techniques, made frequent use of reasoning, and expected their children to make some kind of restitution for their misdeeds. A second group consisted of parents whose primary goal was the extinction or elimination of their children's undesirable behavior. To achieve this they relied primarily on physical punishment and verbal assault. The data of this study suggest that the children of this latter group of parents developed an externally oriented conscience, in which the child feels bad, confesses or makes amends primarily because he fears that his misbehavior has been or will be discovered. The children of the first group of parents, however, appeared to have a more internally oriented conscience, in which the child experiences guilt and the need to make amends irrespective of whether others know or may know of his misconduct. To use David Riesman's typology we may refer to the latter as youngsters with an inner-directed conscience, and to the former as youngsters with an other-directed conscience. In another study it was found that when parents are arbitrary in the demands which they make of their children, when they fail to provide reasons and explanations, their children seem less able to resist temptation. In the same study it was also found that children who rely primarily on external rather than internal cues for their notions of right and wrong, are less able to resist temptation. Finally, working with older subjects, the author found that individuals with an other-directed conscience are more likely to engage in anti-social behavior than those with an inner-directed conscience!

First, the school builds emotional readiness by making the child secure. Second, it reinforces his desire "to be good." Third, it teaches him to see ethical conflicts as problems to be solved intelligently. Then, while this growth is continuing, the school provides opportunities

to deal with such conflicts and gain experience in solving them. Any school program presents some occasions for ethical learning. The fifth aspect of building character is to translate the experiences into conscious generalizations. The verbal summary may be brief and simple with young children; with older ones there will be occasions for discussing complex dilemmas. Out of this thinking they will create properly complex philosophies of life. . . .

A person who learns to reason about his conduct and learns what he holds most dear can adapt his character to new strains and new uncertainties.

Pilot Projects in the Teaching of Middos

This is the essential philosophy behind the "student-centered" approach to the teaching of *middos*. But how does one get down to the brass tacks of it, the actual teaching? This is the purpose of these pilot projects—to rescue an idea from the oblivion of its paper tomb, where, as experience has shown, it would probably die a slow, lingering death, and to make it live by using it, by showing that it can take root in the classroom as well as on paper, and, most important of all, by analyzing *how* to use it, so that others can insure its continued life by bringing it into *their* classrooms and extracting from it its full instructional potential.

Briefly, then, this is what these pilot projects offer:

1. Typewritten transcripts of actual classroom sessions, each containing unit introductions and a running analysis of methodology and questioning technique in the implementation of the student-teacher interaction approach.
2. The taped recordings of these sessions, each centered about a particular unit of *middos* instruction utilizing a different source medium (e.g. the story, *pisgomim*, *Olomeinu*, current events problems, etc.)

Middos—An Attitude

It goes without saying that these units do not cover the entire gamut of *middos* source material. *Middos* is not an isolated "subject." It is not a conveniently sequential building block structure that one can label step one and step two. It is an attitude, an approach, and as such, all of experience is its province. It is rather the object of these projects, enforced by an adequate and realistic program of teacher training, to serve as a point of departure for teachers to create and conduct their own lessons using the methodological and subject-matter resources of these

units in conjunction with our vast literary *mussar* heritage and along with all the instructional aids at their command, such as tape-recorders, film-strips, opaque or overhead projectors, and the like. To the extent that this is accomplished, to this extent will these pilot projects have served the purpose for which they were intended.

NOTES

1. Rabbi Mordecai Gifter, "The Philosophy and Structure of the Middos Program. *The Jewish Parent*, 18:4 (June, 1967), p. 33.
2. Aaron Wolfe Siegman, *Moral Learning and Religion* (Unpublished Manuscript), p. 10.
3. Preface, *M'silas Y'shorim*.
4. *Y'rushalmi Chagigah* 1:7.
5. Deuteronomy 4:39.
6. Robert F. Peck and Robert J. Havighurst, *The Psychology of Character Development*. John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1964, p. 194.
7. Siegman, Op. Cit., pp. 8-9.
8. Lee Cronbach, as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 194.

Experiment at Camp Dora Golding

Rabbi David Mykoff

"Rabbi, what will I do with him?"—the anxious father appealed to the principal. "It isn't only the signing of my name on his report card that's so hard to take. He lies. He cheats. And no amount of lectures or punishment seems to do any good." The man sadly studied his hands for a moment. Then he shot a penetrating look at the principal: "Rabbi, my son has attended your Yeshiva almost all his young life. Why has it had so little effect on the way he behaves?"

The principal sat quietly for some moments. "Possibly, the lectures or punishments may be an invalid approach to this problem. Could it be that your son has tuned you out?"

"Now that," lit up the father, "is exactly what I wanted to say to you. The type of preaching he's exposed to in this school rolls right off his back. I doesn't seem to have any reality to him. Stories of *G'dolim* and *Shabbos* and *Kiddush Hashem* are important, I know. But they are not him. He idolizes but he doesn't identify. Now I ask this: In his seven hours a day for four years here, what moral instruction has he ever received on his personal level?"

The principal in the hot seat of this confrontation is the head of one of the largest Yeshivos in New York. It was in a subsequent consultation that he was able to inform the parent that a new ethics program for the inculcation of moral values had been formulated by Torah Umesorah. Sponsored by the Fryer Foundation and headed by Dr. Louis Nulman, this program has as its goal the teaching of moral sensitivity through meaningful group

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discussion, growing out of the specially prepared text, *In Their Footsteps*, by Dr. Herman Axelrod. Briefly, a *middos* session consists of the telling of an incident from the life of one of our *g'dolim*, a group discussion of the values, a weighing of alternative approaches and their application to the young group participants' lives.

This *middos* program, through the discussion and evaluation of the actions of the Torah "greats," teaches that ethical principles are not vague romantic generalities but rather specific manners of behavior guided by *halochah* (Torah law).

Children become aware and sensitized to *middos*. They learn to weigh and evaluate their own actions, just as they weigh and evaluate the actions of others. They develop an awareness that every person and situation has an inherent moral value, and they acquire facility in perceiving alternate ways of behavior.

The discovery—discussion technique used in the *middos* session with the teacher conducting the class through questions strengthens the learning. The student is actively involved in solving the problem and he is "figuring out" the answer on his own. Even when the response comes from one of his peers, it is far more readily accepted by the student than the teacher's answer. The student learns to think analytically and critically about behavior through student-student interaction. The result is a change in the child's value system through his interaction with the verbalized attitudes of his peers.

"Are you going to introduce this program in our Yeshiva?" inquired the parent eagerly.

He was told that there were too many problems involved to make it practical.

And this might well have been the end in terms of what this Yeshiva has to offer by way of a solution to the problem of the young boy in question.

Provisionally, however, that very boy spent his past summer at Camp Dora Golding in Deal, N.J., where the new Fryer Foundation *middos* program was being conducted on an experimental basis for the duration of the entire summer session with campers ranging in age from eight to fourteen years, comprising about half of the camp population.

The Foundation recently issued a paper of emerging objectives. A discussion of some of the points on their list will help crystallize the general thinking involved.

Recent research has led educators to the conclusion that the ability to apply new concepts is closely related to the ability of

expressing these concepts. If a person can name and identify an idea, he is more likely to understand its applications. Children who have been exposed to and have dealt with the language of *middos* will not only achieve better understanding of terms such as *chessed* and *rachamim* (loving-kindness and mercy), but will be far more likely to apply this understanding to their own situations. Thus language development has been recognized as a tool of concept development and growth.

In the *middos* program this concept of development and growth is achieved through one of the most dynamic weapons in a teacher's arsenal: the story. Small children enjoy stories, identify with the characters, and through their playing the role of the hero in their imaginations come to emulate their behavior and values. A teacher knows that there is a total kind of acceptance of stories in the first and second grades. But in the third or fourth grades it is not uncommon for a child to ask, "Is it a true story?" By fifth or sixth grade, the average child has a mental compartment where he stores most of the tales he hears. The problem is that by then this compartment is a bit crowded. Here, the Vilna Gaon shares dry crust with Goldilocks, and the Seven Dwarfs dance around the Kotzker Rebbe, and their influence becomes at best a minor factor in the determination of the child's behavior.

Yet, there exists a very simple technique of which the *middos* program takes full advantage to make any story meaningful. When the student is forced to think through a situation and to evaluate it in terms of himself, when the teacher stops to question the principles and values involved, it becomes extremely real. Why did the Gaon act or react as he did? What else might he have done? Then the question, "What should you do?" impresses the realism of the situation on the child and teaches him how to apply his newly acquired knowledge to his daily life. Thus the child not only acquires models of rich moral personalities through the stories in *In Their Footsteps*, but he also learns—through the subsequent discussions—that the guidelines to our behavior are found in *halochah*, what some of these are, and their personal significance to him in his daily conduct.

These are some of the high points of the objectives of the program as conducted in a normal classroom situation. What was new last summer was the format of a summer camp as the environment for these experiences.

Educationally, there is much to be said for a camp situation as a vehicle for this training in moral sensitivity. The totality of control over the environment allows consistency and repetition of

an unparalleled nature in the child's learning experiences. His waking, *davening*, eating, learning, playing and sleeping are all under the eye of one individual and together with a restricted group counselor, who, in addition, serves as a living example of what he's trying to teach. Thus, the child not only learns about patterns of behavior, both in theory as well as in practice, but his ensuing conduct is followed through on a 24-hour-per-day basis. Thus, the totality of the environment—the learning and the doing—was insured.

Another plus of the summer situation is the camper-counselor relationship, which is far more intimate than the student-*rebbe* relationship and there is none of the artificiality of school where the good child must adopt the interests and values of his teachers if he is to succeed. One reason for this is that the counselor is much closer to the peer level of the child than the teacher. He is a participant in the ball game and the swim. He is the arbitrator of the pillow fight and often settles a disagreement in the way the kids do—physically. Therefore, his discussions with his group are less inhibited and the conclusions often more personal. And, unlike the teacher's, the teachings of the counselor—he being in sole charge of the children in his bunk—cannot be contradicted by any other authority, such as the parents.

In practice, however, there were some other problems with our set-up. None of our counselors were truly experienced teachers and not all were capable of functioning in this program. Another drawback was the time limitation; the average camper was at camp for a period of only three weeks and just 45 minutes a day were devoted to the formal instruction based on the text, *In Their Footsteps*. They had also not had any previous exposure to the material other than one demonstration lesson before camp opened, and another such lesson during the first week of camp.

Problems were discussed at staff meetings and at individual sessions throughout the summer.

The program succeeded beyond all our anticipations. Although value changes understandably defy accurate measurement, because of their intangible elements, the change of atmosphere in camp was so marked that no measuring tools were really needed. The administration, the counselors and the campers all felt it. Even parents took the trouble to discuss it.

Let any principal or teacher ask himself when was the last time that half a dozen parents showed interest in the educational aspects of a program he initiated. Let any parent ask himself when he last found his children exposed to an educational ex-

perience that motivated him to express their appreciation to the school. And when, above all, was the last time a teacher found his material being discussed by his students with their families? It doesn't happen often. And if it happens in a non-school setting, as it did at Camp Dora Golding last summer, then we really have hold of something worthwhile.

The change in the atmosphere at our camp last year differed primarily in that the aggression and hostility which dominate the normal all boys' camp just did not exist. For example: Normally, during a ball game, when an error is committed, the members of the team begin to criticize and even insult the bobbler. But what was happening at our camp last year was entirely different. When an error was committed in a ball game at Camp Dora Golding last summer, it was followed by either embarrassed looks from the other team mates or by words of encouragement. Even in those situations in which one team member did utter some disparaging comment, the rest of the team would immediately begin to shout: "*Middos, middos!*"

Another example: In former years at camp, there were at least two or three incidents per day, serious enough to reach the program director, of children picking on each other or teasing one of the weaker ones. By the time the third trip was in session last year at Camp Dora Golding, the incidence of such disturbances was practically nil.

And there were some unexpected benefits as well. The program did a great deal for the counselors themselves. For one thing it heightened their sense of responsibility toward their charges. This, in turn, helped to strengthen and improve their relationship with their campers. Which, in turn, encouraged the children to express feelings and emotions that revealed them in a light in which the counselors had heretofore not seen them. All of which encouraged a great deal of growth in some of the counselors. Aside from this, a high level of tolerance was achieved by counselors and campers alike toward two severely emotionally disturbed children in camp, which was very likely due to our emphasis on *middos*.

What set the final tone in camp and really demonstrated the effectiveness of the program was the color war, which, as is usual, took place during the third trip. Traditionally, while the head counselor calls for good sportsmanship, he does all in his power to encourage the fierce competition that always ensues. Camp Dora Golding, however, had a *r'difas sholom* (pursuit of peace). The competition format was the same as for any color war, but

instead of giving points for winning, more points were awarded for *middos tovos* (ethical behavior) or *g'millas chessed* (loving-kindness) than for winning the game. The children were caught in a bind. They wanted to win, yet they could gain more points by admitting a truth about a hit or an out. Thus, *r'difoh* held to a quiet level the emotions that normally accompany the color war competition and helped end the season with an awareness of *middos*.

Staff members and counselors expressed the opinion that they had never participated in any program that had made so vital an impression and so significant a contribution to life at camp.

Yet, if we were to seek testimonials, then there is perhaps no more dynamic episode than the one which concludes the incident that began this article. The father, visiting the camp after his son had gone home, reported a conversation that his son had with his wife upon his return from camp. The mother had asked the boy which activity at camp had been the most enjoyable. "*Middos*," answered the boy. And then he confided, "I'm not going to cheat any more. You're really not allowed to. I learned it at camp."

In conclusion, we would like to share one of the many letters we received:

I am writing to let you know how much Mrs. Winter and I appreciated the new program of *middos* instruction at Camp Dora Golding this year. It has made a very profound impression on our son, Ari. To me, it has always been a source of annoyance that the Hebrew Day School does not see fit to include such a program in its curriculum. At best, the child can only get this training in the home, and in many cases this proves inadequate. Whether it is because of today's tremendous social problems or the lack of parental know-how, many children are growing up totally unprepared to make the proper choices.

It is gratifying that the directors of the camp have given this program an important place in the overall learning picture at camp. The importance of learning good Jewish character traits cannot be over-emphasized. In my son's case, it was able to make him adopt one specific principle that we have been trying to teach him for over a year. Children must be *taught* even in such informal and intangible areas as character training.

Special commendation should go to the counselor (one of the very few who live up to the title). Apparently this style of teaching together with his leadership and enthusiasm got through very well. The fact that he set good personal example helped to amplify his message.

We hope that the success of this program will lead you to establish it firmly as part of camp life at Camp Dora Golding. We also hope that the Yeshivos and Day Schools, upon seeing this success, will be encouraged to introduce this or similar character building programs in their courses of instruction.

Signed—Seymour Winter