**Mountain Solid**

**Water Reflecting**

**Flower Fresh**

**Space Free**

–Thich Nhat Hanh

So many middot are available in this chant. The mood of this recording first leans toward *Yirah*/Awe and *Menuchat Hanefesh*/Calm Soul. Then the mood suddenly leaps to *Simchah*/Joy, with shouting and dancing. I hope you can ride this chant to Calm Soul, to Spaciousness, to a Joyful Spirit of Life (*Ruach Chayim*).

This poem’s visual imagery transports us to nature scenes. We might restore our *Ruach Chayim,* a Spirit of Aliveness, by imagining a relaxing walk among these natural phenomena—mountain, water, flower, and space. We might restore our *Menuchat Hanefesh*, Calm Soul, Equanimity, by emulating the descriptions—solid, reflecting (calm, still), fresh, and free. We might continue all the way to Joy, *Simchah*. We might use this imagery to strengthen the middah of *Yirah*, Awe. As I have repeatedly chanted these words, they have unfolded and blossomed again and again, revealing even more petals of Mussar wisdom.

Usually I prefer Jewish sources for my Mussar chanting, yet sometimes words from another tradition beautifully express our middot (which, after all, are universal human traits). Though Thich Nhat Hanh taught as a Zen master, the poem’s imagery also resonates with traditional Jewish sources. That resonance inspired me to add more lyrics as a Jewish commentary, and influenced the several moods of the recording.

First Unfolding:

**Nature Imagery to Middot**

**Mountain Solid.** Equanimity, a calm soul, requires *Bitaḥon/*Trust. When I trust in the One Above, I can be solid like a mountain. Whatever storm blows around me might affect the surface, but the mountain as a whole remains grounded, stable, and strong. How can I reconnect with the Source of my strength?

**Water Reflecting.** The surface of water reflects an image. If the water is calm, it reflects things as they are. If the water is disturbed, the reflection is distorted. With Equanimity, I can reflect the world as it actually is (Truth/*Emet*) rather than reflecting my own fears or wishes—or fears presented in the media. Am I calm and still? How could I settle my mind and emotions? If even a small stone of falsehood, mistake, or fear disturbs the surface, then I’m likely to see everything through a distorted mirror—and truth recedes even further. Truth can lead to Equanimity, and conversely, Equanimity can help to preserve Truth.

**Flower, Fresh.** When I’m fatigued, whether physically, mentally, or emotionally, it’s harder to maintain a Calm Soul. How could I refresh my body, mind, and soul? Can I imagine myself as fresh as a newly blossoming flower? Could I restore that fresh state, and so regain Equanimity?

**Space Free.** Agitation or exhaustion can blind me to available choices, restricting my ability to act, as if confining me in prison. Calm is like flying through open space, eyes clear and discerning—I am free to choose my direction and steer into a right path of action. Can I imagine flying calmly through open space? Does that vantage reveal new perspectives?

Second Unfolding:

**Imagery in Jewish Sources**

Chanting the poem brought to mind the following Jewish sources, which in turn inspired additional lyrics in the latter part of the recorded song.

**Mountain Solid.** Mountains symbolize solidity, stability, strength, and dependability. Is it any wonder that many Jewish encounters with the Divine occur on mountains (for example, Mt. Moriah, Mt. Horeb, Mt. Nevo)?

“I lift my eyes to the *mountains*, from where will my help come? My help comes from Hashem, Maker of heaven and earth.” (Ps 121:1–2) Ibn Ezra explains that people “instinctively lift their eyes when seeking help,” but David immediately recognizes that most reliable Helper is the Maker of mountains.

**Water Reflecting.** David sings this exact imagery: the One Above “leads me beside *calm waters*, restores my soul…” (Ps. 23:2–3) Sometimes seeing a true reflection of the world (*Emet*) is enough to refresh my shriveled soul-flower.

**Flower Fresh.** “The righteous will *flower* like a date palm… Planted in the house of Hashem, in the courtyards of our God they *flower*. They bear fruit in old age, vigorous and *fresh* they will be*.*” (Ps. 92:13–15) Sometimes I need a different kind of Truth to refresh my soul—planting myself in a spiritual courtyard. I can reconnect with the One Above through Torah, prayer, acts of Kindness/*Ḥesed*, and other mitzvot.

**Space Free.** “To open blind eyes, To bring prisoners *out from the dungeon*, those who sit in darkness *from confinement*.” (Isa. 42:7)

“Blessed are You…Who opens the eyes of the blind…

Blessed are You…Who *releases the bound*.” (Siddur, Morning Blessings)

Sometimes we are already free to leave our cell, if only we could see the open door. The remedy is to look with fresh eyes, or with fresh imagination.

Third Unfolding:

**Mnemonic for Mussar Tools**

After making those Jewish sources explicit, we can refold the poem to the original eight words, and the chant becomes a concentrated middah mnemonic. I can chant it to take my physical, emotional, and spiritual pulse; to reorient my attitude; to regain Equanimity; and to correct my course.

Do I feel **mountain solid**? Can I anchor myself to the One Above, and so become more solid? Could prayer be that anchor?

**Water reflecting.** Am I responding to a clear and true picture, or a distorted image of the world? Check my breathing, my pulse. What’s disturbing the calm lake? Can practicing Silence/*Shtikah*, perhaps by restricting my media intake, promote inner stillness? Can restful waters of Torah calm me? A moment of prayer? Quiet time with my journal?

Am I **flower fresh**, or parched and fatigued? What would refresh me? Breathing in silence? Washing my face? Walking outdoors? Song? Immersing in the joy of Shabbat? Connecting with a friend?

**Space free.** Are my choices really as constrained as they seem? Or do I actually have much more open space and freedom to maneuver? Can I open my eyes to more than I currently see?

Fourth Unfolding:

**Hitlamdut and Mussar Aspirations**

Learning from every encounter, *Hitlamdut*, is a key Mussar practice. What other Mussar can I learn from this poem? Which of my aspirations can it propel? How else can it promote a Spirit of Aliveness, *Ruach Chayim*?

**Mountain solid.** Trust/Bitachon. Kindness/*Ḥesed.* Start with an unmovable foundation. Facing a world filled with cruelty I might *feel* powerless, but at least I can still show kindness to others. When I speak and act with kindness, I am stand solidly upon the unshakeable Source of Kindness. At the same time, I use the power I *do* have to decrease cruelty and increase kindness—as Gandhi famously put it, to *be* the change I want to see in the world.

**Water reflecting.** Stillness/Silence/*Shitikah*. Can I still the wind that fuels the storm? While it’s important to be informed, I don’t need to hear bad news over and over again—and I certainly don’t need to repeat it to everyone I meet. The truth is that the world also contains much good and light. When I can quiet the gale that disturbs my mind and emotions, I can mirror that truth more clearly. Maybe then I can replace that destructive and deadening wind with a Spirit of Aliveness/*Ruach Chayim* blowing through my world.

**Flower fresh.** Joy/*Simchah*. Flowers show that a plant is alive and able to regenerate. Flowers can spark joy within us. What flower can I produce to spark joy in others? Do I first need to rekindle joy in myself? When I use my creativity to make something beautiful or useful, I refresh myself and others.

**Space free.** Spaciousness/*Harvachah*. Freedom/*Cherut*. Even when the world seems bleak, I am free to choose my attitude, words, and actions. Against cruelty, lies, violence, grief, and duress, I want to choose words and actions that promote Kindness, Stillness, Joy, and Freedom. When I do, I infuse my world with hope.

**Middot**

Spirit of Aliveness רוּח חיים *Ruach Chayim*

Equanimity, Calm Soul מנוּחת הנפשׁ *Menuchat Hanefesh*

Trust בטחוֹן *Bitachon*

Strength גבוּרה *Gvurah*

Stillness, Silence שׁתיקה *Shitikah*

Truth, Honesty אמת Emet

Kindness חסד Ḥesed

Joy שׂמחה *Simchah*

Spaciousness הרוָחה *Harvachah*

Freedom חרוּת Cherut

Awe יראה Yirah

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For sheet music, chords, and more, please visit this song’s web page at [www.MussarBlues.com/Mountain-Solid](http://www.MussarBlues.com/Mountain-Solid)

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