



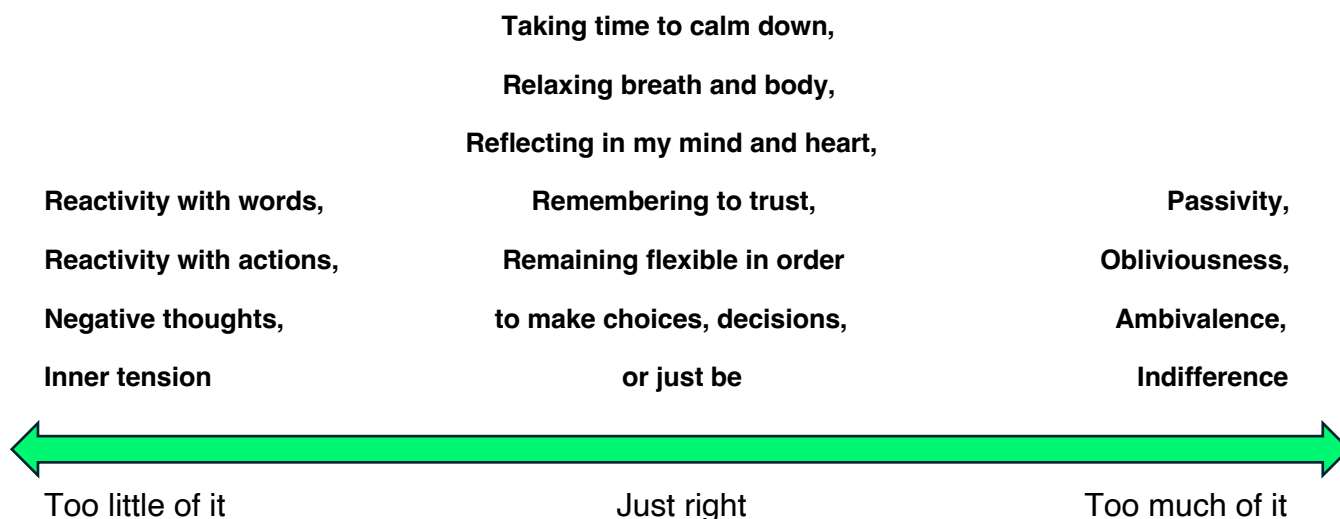
Ruach Chaim Living with Spirit
Lifting Up our Lives in Trying Times

Mussar Gathering - January 26, 2025

How *Menuchat Ha'Nefesh* Uplifts our Spirit through Challenging Times

By Carolina Martinez

Let's Begin with the range for Equanimity / *Menuchat HaNefesh*:



Teaching 1 (from Rav Itamar Shwartz)

"The concept of *menuchat ha'nefesh* [equanimity]—'serenity of the soul'—is a necessary power we will need in order to build our soul In our generation especially, the very lifestyle that people lead is often the opposite of *menuchat hanefesh* *Menucha* does not mean to be slothful or to be sleeplike. It is rather to be in touch with a root power in the soul. (It is our daily work.)

There are three inner kinds of *menuchat ha'nefesh* / serenity which the soul can reach [towards and find]:

- The soul can find **serenity in the *Ein Sof* (Infinite) of Hashem,**
- It can find **serenity in the *Shechinah* (Hashem's Holy Presence),**
- and it can find **serenity when one finds the root of [one's] own soul (*shoresch ha'neshamah*).**



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A soul finds Serenity when one finds the root of [one's] own soul.

... the *Maharal* explains it [as the *menucha* of gathering together one's parts], but ...the Alter of Kelm [taught that] this kind of *menucha* is otherwise known as **shalom** (peace) When a person is scattered and [his, hers, their] 'branches' have no 'root' to them, [he, she, they] cannot feel any shalom (peace) in [his, hers, their] life 'Peace' is only achieved when a person has a root that unifies all [his, her, their] many aspects.

... the Talmud says about a [parent] and [a child], or teacher and student, who learn with each other and debate with each other. They begin as enemies but eventually come to love each other. Each person is allowed to keep [one's] own opinion yet still be at peace with [one's] opponent. This is the idea of peace.

Another example of peace is what we find by Aharon HaKohen, who would make peace between two people who were quarrelling. Instead of disproving each person, he let each person remain with his opinion yet be at peace with each other. Peace doesn't come and negate each person's view; rather, each person is allowed to remain with his opinion, without ruining the peace between them. Peace is called the 'vessel which contains blessing.' Peace is only a 'vessel,' not a root, yet it can be a tool for bringing things together. When something is unified under peace, it is at peace, even though it hasn't been [necessarily] connected to its root.

There are many different forces within our soul – many 'branches.' When a person knows how to use each ability of [one's] soul properly, ... [one] will be able to have serenity / *menucha* But without that, he, [she, they] lives constantly with inner contradictions ... this causes a person to feel an inner turmoil. The classic example is a person ... whose thoughts often digress to either the future or the past, where [he, she, they] is never focused on the present moment. A person really needs to be in the here and now

When a person spaces out like this, there are inner forces in [his, hers, their] soul that are at a contradiction with each other.

Another lack of *menuchat hanefesh*, ... is when a person's soul experiences contradicting emotions. In the soul, there are many forces that can oppose each other. A person's soul has feelings that expand, such as the feeling of happiness and enthusiasm, and feelings that contract, such as sadness and laziness. Each emotion has a rightful time when it should be used. When a person doesn't use each ability properly, there is clashing within the soul, and then there won't be any [serenity].



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Any person, as long as [he, she, they] can think clearly, [he, she, they] can catch thoughts and realize that [he, she, they] isn't focusing on the present moment. But it's hard to be aware of what's going on inside one's soul, because the soul is hidden from us. And when a person doesn't understand [one's] soul's abilities, [it is easy to misuse] them in the wrong place and in the wrong time – and this clashing of the soul's abilities is a lack of *menuchat hanefesh*.

Once a person has reached *menuchat hanefesh*, [one] will find that as soon as [that person] experiences anything that will take [him, her, they] away from it, [that person] will not want to engage in that action.

Compare this to a person when a fly is buzzing around [his, her, their] head. [This person] doesn't look for reasons of why [he, she, they] should chase away the fly. [This person] simply chases away the fly because it is a nuisance ...

Once a person feels what *menuchat hanefesh* is, [that person] will naturally get away from the things that are [bothersome] Anyone who feels what *menuchat hanefesh* is will naturally avoid anything that creates a disturbance [One] recognizes that the things which bother ... are not suitable ... to be involved with. There are no given rules to this, being that the situation can change, and what bothered ... one day might not bother ... sometime later if [one] were to do it.

Any action which takes away our *menuchat hanefesh* is an action that we need to avoid doing.

Actions that let us remain with [it], by contrast, are actions that we may be involved with ...

...there are two types of acts that take away our *menuchat hanefesh* –

1. Actions that are complete disturbances to us, which make it very hard for us to get back [serenity] afterwards.
2. Actions that are only minimally bothersome, which temporarily take away our [serenity,] but which we can return to [serenity] soon after doing them..."



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Teaching 2

Rabbi Ira Stone teaches: The term “rise above” in Hebrew uses the verb *leitgaber*, which means to “strengthen yourself in order to make an effort.” This definition also raises the thoughts about “events that are inconsequential — both bad and good.” How do we identify such events? In a more general way, events are not really “good” or “bad” or “inconsequential” in themselves. It is we who give them those self-based valuations.

Teaching 3

As Rabbi Chaim Friedlander (*Sifsei Chaim, Middos V'Avodas Hashem, Vol. II, p. 15*) explains, “having *menuchas ha'nefesh* means **being fully focused on the present** – not thinking about what happened in the past, or planning what to do in the future. It means that at every moment you are focused entirely on what you're doing **now** – not looking forward and not looking back. Focusing fully on the *bracha* / blessing we are saying and not thinking about where we have to go in 10 minutes. Listening fully to our friends and not checking our emails at the same time.”

Teaching 4

As the Vilna Gaon writes: “When a person is learning Torah, he should imagine as if he alone is the **only person** in the world, this 1 hour is [his, her, their] **only hour** to live, and this 1 page of *gemara* is the **only page** [he, she, they] needs to learn. If a person focuses totally on the present like this, he will be successful in his learning. The power of *Menuchat Ha'nefesh* doesn't just apply to learning, but applies to all our *mitzvos* and activities as well. If we cook for Shabbos with *Menuchat HaNefesh*, we can have the mental space and energy to do it with joy. If we listen to our friends with *Menuchat HaNefesh*, it will be a great *chesed* and help them feel appreciated and respected. If we say blessings with *Menuchas HaNefesh*, we can savor every word and have the patience to enunciate every word clearly.”



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Journaling

Pick one question to answer in depth for yourself:

1. How can I find serenity in the Infinite One? How do I connect if I have faith or if I do not? What activities connect me to the Source of all Life?
2. What activities and attitudes help me feel centered, present, and peaceful?
3. What strategy can I use to go from an upset or euphoric state to one towards the middle, based on acknowledgement that life has peaks and valleys?
4. What is at the root of my soul (think of positive aspects of myself)?
5. What behaviors support the most serenity/ balance/ *menuchat hanefesh* with others, while remaining true to myself?

Discuss these questions with the group after journaling time.



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Taking to Heart Practice (to complete at home)

Make a list with two colors of pen or pencil, of the conditions which support your *Menuchat HaNefesh*, and the conditions which disrupt, remove, or block you from feeling *Menuchat HaNefesh* (see example below):

Conditions for Menuchat HaNefesh

Kindness and gentleness **to myself and others**

Positive Self Talk
prayer, focus phrases, kabbalot intentions
reframing the story with just the facts

Calming, relaxing activities
Routine: exercise, listening to music, making art, reading, piano,
healthy meals/snacks, petting/cuddling with pets, cooking, dancing,
cleaning, organizing writing, organizing, studying

Listening without judgment
open to new perspectives

Focusing on present, not future or past

creating vision boards, visualizing purpose and joy
surrounding myself with loving, affirming
friends and family and situations

Distress tolerance activities
soothing tastes (healthy foods, dessert, moderate portions)
soothing music (Jazz, Jewish, Classical, Soul/Motown, Ragtime)
soothing activities for the eyes (museums, collage, painting, drawing,
coloring books, Pinterest)
soothing activities for the mind (puzzles, word finds, NY Times puzzles,
Solitaire, board and card games with friends, researching/studying,
genealogy, writing novel) **Mussar study-seichel, ratzon, dimyon**
exercise and yoga, mindfulness
cleaning and organizing

Purposeful activities toward growth and goals
To do lists, menu planning, checklists
budgeting, saving money, paying bills

**What Disrupts, Removes, Blocks
Menuchat HaNefesh**

Lighting the flame of reactivity, worry, and fear
staying in anger, regret, or fear too long
being in the company of people who cling to negativity
Catastrophizing, ruminating
seeing only one possibility
not planning for future and purpose and joy
thinking I am the only one who is right
not keeping to a schedule and routines
not going to bed on time, not wearing CPAP or nightguard = poor sleep
not feeling seen, valued

invalidating self talk unreasonable expectations
giving up instead of persevering **INACTION**
regressing into **LAZINESS AND DISORGANIZATION**
isolation too much screen time and TV
WORRYING ABOUT THINGS OUT OF MY CONTROL
worrying too much about friends and family
racism, demeaning and oppressive or aggressive behavior
...letting it bring me down
Worrying about what other people think
about my choices, thoughts, images, words, and behavior
spending money recklessly
resentment and intolerance



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Focus Phrases for Practice at Home

1. "Rise above the good and the bad, for neither are worthy of distracting your equanimity / *menuchat ha'nefesh*." (Rabbi Menachem Lefin)
2. "Be still and witness." (Alan Morinis)
3. "We are as great as the challenges we have the courage to undertake." (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks)
4. "A person who has mastered peace of mind has gained everything. (The Alter of Kelm)
5. "I don't think of all the misery, but of all the beauty that remains." (Anne Frank)
6. "If you believe breaking is possible, believe fixing is possible." (Rabbi Nachman of Breslov)

Closing

"Do our homes hold the holiness that we strive for? Does our work allow us the opportunity to be challenged and fulfilled, to feel actualized? Are our relationships being realized in their deepest capacity? Are we giving enough time and energy and attention to our inner lives, in the midst of the whirlwinds forever swirling outside of ourselves?"

— Rebecca Minkus-Lieberman

"The antidote to *pizzur ha-nefesh* [feeling scattered, unfocused, fragmented] is an internal state called *menuchat ha-nefesh*, a gathering in and settling of soul that supports greater focus, equanimity, balance, and contentment."

— Rabbi Sam Feinsmith

Share one thing that you can take into your life from today's session.