



Week 6

בושה

This guided learning sheet explores the *middah* of *busha*—inhibition. Each source is accompanied by explanation and discussion questions to facilitate personal reflection and group dialogue.

The first box of questions in color below are general questions about participants' experience of working on *middot* and remain the same from week to week. These questions are a helpful tool to check in and reflect on growth over time, in a consistent manner. Though the questions remain the same each week, the answers will naturally change depending on which *middah* is being explored. You may choose to start or end your learning session with these questions. The rest of questions are specifically related to the *middah* of the week and are interspersed throughout the session to deepen the conversation.

General questions when reflecting on the *middah* of the week:

General questions remain the same from week to week and are helpful tools to reflect on growth over time. The answers will vastly change depending on the *middah* of the week.

1. What did I learn about myself this week?
2. What felt difficult when working on this *middah*?
3. What felt natural or easy when working on this *middah*?
4. How has practicing this *middah* improved your life or how does it have the potential to impact your life?
5. Does anyone in the group have a story of how this *middah* came up in a real situation (this week or beyond)? How did you respond?
6. Does anyone in the group have insights, advice or tips to keep in mind when working on this *middah* going forward?

Source #1

In the story of Bereishit, we are told that Adam and Chava were not wearing clothing and “ולא יתבששו” (they were not ashamed), from the root word “busha.”

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch on Bereishit 2:25

So that בושש (*boshesh*), an active form of the word, means to disappoint expectations and בוש (*bosh*) in the קל (*kal*), intransitive, to feel oneself disappointed in one’s expectations. But really, at bottom, that is: shame. It is the feeling of one who has fallen short, has not come up to his expectations of himself. When someone has not attained that which he should be, finds that he is not what he ought to be, then he feels ashamed of himself. This feeling that G-d has implanted in Man, which at once comes over him when he becomes conscious of his shortcoming, is the greatest gift which the Grace of G-d has given mankind of whom He probably knew quite well that he would often not come up to what he was meant to be... Thus G-d has entrusted every man to himself, has implanted in every man the ideal by which to judge himself.

Takeaway: *Busha is not merely humiliation or embarrassment, but an inner awareness that one has not lived up to one’s own values and potential.*

Discuss:

1. When do you think a person tends to feel ashamed of oneself? Is this positive or negative?
2. Can you imagine a scenario in which this might be negative? Can you imagine a situation in which it becomes unhealthy or destructive?
3. Rav Hirsch describes *busha* as a gift from Hashem rather than simply a *middah*. Why might that distinction matter? Why is it important to perceive it as one or the other?
4. Based on your understanding of *busha* according to Rav Hirsch, what can one work on to strengthen this *middah*?

Busha is middah which thus requires its being used in proper proportion, but it is also a gift from Hashem. It is the feeling of disappointment borne from the expectations of self. When expectations are realistic, failure to actualize them can generate a feeling of busha that becomes motivating. Healthy expectations of self encourage one to reach for and maintain standards.

Busha is often felt when there is a gap between expectation and reality. So long as that busha tends to be motivating—as uncomfortable as it is—it is still positive. Without such expectations of self, one may not be motivated to achieve those standards, and may not experience the healthy, albeit painful, disappointment of failing to meet expectations.

In summary: Busha emerges when there is a gap between expectation and reality. When expectations are healthy and realistic, busha can motivate a person to grow. Without standards or expectations, a person may lose the drive to improve. Healthy busha is uncomfortable, but it pushes a person toward becoming who they are meant to be.

Source #2

Busha is a quality that is intrinsically linked to maturity:

ספר אהל יעקב ולאה דף 179

הילד גדל מתחילתו ללא בושה. תינוק מרגיש רק את עצמו ואינו בוש בשום דבר מגונה. הסביבה צריכה לגדל בילד את מידת הבושה. הבושה היא העדר הכבוד, ולכן אם אין מכבדים ילד, לא תתפתח אצלו מידת הבושה

From the beginning, a child grows up without inhibition. A child only senses himself and is not embarrassed in front of anything offensive. The environment must raise the *middah* of *busha*, inhibition, within the child. *Busha* is a lack of respect, and therefore, if we do not respect a child, the trait of *busha* will not be opened/properly developed.

Takeaway: *A child does not have the same natural inhibition as an adult. This middah of busha is fostered by an increased general sense of self as well as self-respect. The greater the sense of self-respect and value, the more one will be inhibited to act in a way that is beneath one's dignity.*

Discuss:

1. Why is it that a greater sense of self leads to an enhanced *middah* of *busha*?
2. Do you think a child's feeling of inhibition or embarrassment in front of others represents the *middah* of *busha* in its ideal form? Why or why not?
3. What implications does this have for our own development of this *middah*?
4. What do you think is the difference between healthy inhibition and insecurity?

Contrary to the common association of busha with lowly humiliation and disgrace, healthy busha stems from a personal sense of value and respect. As discussed above, busha is most often experienced in the gap between who I know I am and the way I am perceived; or, in the gap between who I know I am and the behavior facing me.

Children (especially teenagers) often experience feelings of embarrassment that often stem more from insecurity and lack of confidence than from a grounded sense of self-worth. As a child grows in his or her sense of self, they will feel inhibited in front of others. The more we develop a healthy sense of self and knowledge of our greatness, the more we will experience busha as a healthy indicator of when something is beneath us. Busha, inhibition, will then motivate toward proper behavior rather than deflate us.

In summary: People often associate busha with humiliation or low self-esteem. However, this source presents the opposite perspective. Healthy busha grows out of self-respect. Healthy busha develops from a sense of dignity and self-worth. The more a person respects themselves and recognizes their value, the more they will feel inhibited from acting beneath that dignity.

Source #3

Pirkei Avot presents an apparent contradiction about the middah of עזות, boldness/brazeness, which also stands in contrast to the middah of busha:

פרקי אבות ה:כ

יהודה בן תימא אומר, הוי עז כנמר, וקל כנשר, ורץ כצבי, וגבור כארי, לעשות רצון אביה שבשמים. הוא היה אומר, עז פנים לגיהנם, ובשת פנים לגן עדן. יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלוקינו שתבנה עירך במהרה בימינו ותן חלקנו בתורתך

Yehudah ben Teima, "Be bold like a leopard, light like an eagle, swift like a deer, and strong like a lion to do the will of your Father in Heaven." He would also say: "The brazen go to *Gehinnom*, and those with 'boshet panim' (a sense of shame) go to *Gan Eden*."

Takeaway: *Using the same word, עז, the Mishnah seems to present boldness as both positive and negative. In contrast, it teaches that a person characterized by busha merits Gan Eden.*

Discuss:

1. Can you suggest an explanation for the apparent contradiction in the Mishnah?
2. When might brazeness/boldness be positive and when might it be negative?
3. Why do you think it is important to balance boldness/brazeness (עזות פנים) and inhibition/embarrassment (בשת פנים)?
5. Do you find one to be easier or harder for you (boldness/brazeness vs. inhibition/embarrassment)? Do you think the same is true for most people? Why is this important to acknowledge?

Every middah exists on a continuum. Human beings are created with tendencies towards one end of the continuum or another in any given middah. Some people naturally lean toward excessive inhibition, while others lean toward brazenness. The goal is not to eliminate one side entirely, but to balance them appropriately.

Rav Menachem Mordechai Frankel Teumim explains in his commentary Be'er Avot that there are in fact two types of עזות, brazenness. The one referenced in the beginning of the Mishnah, which encourages it, is the עזות that gives a person the strength to stand up for what is right in the face of others who may mock him. This is the brazenness which allows a person to pause a meeting because time is running out to daven, to pull out of a conversation in which a person is being discussed negatively, or to stand up for someone being bullied. The brazenness referenced towards the end of the Mishnah is a brazenness that manifests negatively. Not only does such a person push aside and upset others with his arrogant behavior, but he also prevents himself from feeling the busha that would otherwise inhibit him from inappropriate behavior. It is motivated by a feeling that "I'm not embarrassed in front of anyone." Such a person blocks the tool given to us to inhibit negative behaviors.

In summary: There is brazenness that indicates an arrogance of sorts which may stem from insecurity. It is behavior that tends to push people aside and therefore push people away. On

the other hand, there is brazenness that, if channeled properly, can motivate a person to stand firm for what is right, despite public opinion. Healthy inhibition restrains destructive behavior, while healthy boldness empowers a person to do what is right despite social pressure. The job of a person is to try to balance himself so that each middah is measured out properly and used appropriately, in a given situation.

Source #4

Each morning in the berachot before Shema, we make a request pertaining to busha:

ברכות קריאת שמע

והאר עינינו בתורתך ודבק לבנו במצותיך ויחד לבבנו לאהבה וליראה את שמך ולא נבוש לעולם ועד

Enlighten our eyes in Your Torah, attach our hearts to Your commandments, unify our hearts to love and fear Your Name, and may we never be ashamed forever.

Takeaway: After all of our discussion regarding the advantages of busha, we find ourselves asking not to experience busha at all. Perhaps there are desirable and less desirable forms of busha.

Discuss:

1. Do you think the *busha* referenced here is the same as the *busha* discussed thus far? If they are different, why might the same word be used in both instances?
2. Under what circumstances would you consider *busha* to be positive or negative?
3. Under what circumstances might inhibition or embarrassment be spiritually damaging?
4. Has fear of embarrassment ever prevented your spiritual growth?

Busha, inhibition, is a middah gifted to us by Hashem to help inhibit negative behaviors. Built off a feeling of dignity and respect, it encourages us to maintain high standards and expectations for ourselves. This inhibition or embarrassment can manifest negatively, though, when it prevents us from doing what is right out of fear of what others might think.

In summary: Positively-channeled busha inhibits wrongdoing. Negatively-channeled busha inhibits goodness. We daven to be free of the negatively-channeled form of busha, which can prevent a person from doing what is right or growing spiritually.

Source #5

After the words "כי בשם קדוש הגדול" *may we never be ashamed*" the berachah continues, "כי בשם קדוש הגדול, והנורא בטחנו, because in Your holy, great, awesome Name we trust". Rav Chaim Friedlander explains why this trust is directly related to the concept above:

רינת חיים, ר' חיים פרידלנדר, דף קעה

"כי בשם קדוש הגדול והנורא בטחנו" – המשך לנאמר: "ולא נבוש לעולם ועד", מדוע לא נבוש? כי אנחנו בוטחים "בשם קדוש הגדול והנורא", אנו בוטחים בזה בגלל שאנו מבינים ומשוכנעים שזהו הערך האמיתי היחיד ורק עליו אפשר לסמוך ולבטוח.

"For in Your great, holy, and awesome Name" continues from the phrase "and may we never be ashamed" Why will we not be ashamed? Because we place our trust in 'Your great, holy, and awe-inspiring Name.' We trust in this because we understand and are convinced that this is the only true Value, and the only One can truly rely on and place confidence in."

Takeaway: *The words expressing our trust in Hashem flow directly from the words expressing that we will not be ashamed or inhibited. When we recognize that Hashem is the only true Source upon Whom to rely, we are less controlled by the fear of others' power, opinions, or reactions.*

Discuss:

1. What might *busha* have to do with *bitachon*, trust in Hashem?
2. How might the practice of placing one's trust in things or people other than Hashem lead one to experience *busha* (inhibition/embarrassment/insecurity)?
3. How does clarity about "what really matters" influence inhibition or embarrassment?
4. How might trust in Hashem strengthen confidence?
5. How can a person better develop this sort of confidence?

When a person trusts Hashem, they are not embarrassed to act correctly, nor are they inhibited from doing what is right. The more we anchor ourselves in the knowledge of what is real and true, and the more we rely on Hashem alone, the more we recognize that He is, in fact, the only One upon Whom to rely. Relying on things other than Hashem (ex: power, public opinion, or wealth) can ultimately leave a person feeling ashamed when those things fail to provide the security or meaning they seemed to promise. The more clearly we understand what truly matters and Whose approval we are really seeking, the more our actions become aligned with our values.

In summary: When a person internalizes that Hashem is the ultimate Source of provision, value and support, they become less afraid of human judgment. The more a person places trust in Hashem, the less they become controlled by the approval, opinions, or status granted by others. Purposeful busha remains and unhelpful busha begins to fade.

Source #6

In addition to the impact of busha in this world, our final source explains how busha may influence our experience of the World to Come:

רינת חיים, ר' חיים פרידלנדר, דף קעה

אין בושתו של עולם הזה כלום נגד בושתו של עולם הבא על כן אמר ולא נבוש לעולם ועד

The shame of this world is insignificant compared to the shame of the World to Come. Therefore we pray, "May we never be ashamed forever."

Takeaway: *Perhaps we are not only praying about the experience of busha in our present reality, but also about the long-term impact of busha.*

Discuss:

1. Why do you think *busha* in this world pales in comparison to the *busha* of the World to Come?
2. How might this awareness actually be motivating? Do you think it is healthy to live with this awareness?
3. Can you think of a way that this might be done other than by intensifying fear of punishment? How can awareness of accountability become motivating rather than frightening?
4. How can a person maintain clarity about the World to Come and our eternal values while living in a world full of distractions and external pressures?

As Jews, we do not view our existence in this world as an end unto itself. Rather, we view this world as a pathway to the World to Come. The greater our awareness of the reality of the World to Come, the more significantly it motivates us. Our present world can be quite distracting. As a result, we tend to place higher value on the feedback of people in this world rather than on the Divine feedback we will receive at the end of our lifetime.

If only we lived with clarity of the temporary nature of this world; we would place greater value on the impression we make on Hashem and less on the impression we make on others. This is not intended to breed anxiety or intense fear of punishment that overshadows our understanding of Hashem's love for us. It is intended to help us remain focused on our priorities so we do not regret wasted time or experiences later on. Fear of Heaven that paralyzes us is not what Hashem wants. Fear of Heaven that motivates us, and allows for busha that inhibits us appropriately, is a level to strive for.

In summary: Judaism does not encourage fear that paralyzes a person. Rather, awareness of accountability is meant to help a person focus on what truly matters. Once a person has such awareness, healthy busha motivates one towards growth, responsibility, and purpose.