

WHAT IS MUSSAR?

by Rabbi Ephraim D. Becker, Ph.D.

A reader writes:

Would you please define the word Mussar - thank you! (a ticking shrink)

Dear Reader (I couldn't resist leaving in all those lovely stars from your message)

Mussar is typically defined as ethical teachings. That is, the field of mussar is devoted to character and behavioral improvement. This includes a very broad range of strategies and approaches to such improvement. There are various "schools" of mussar (each with its special history and great personalities) which are characterized by particular emphases, each of which are rooted in traditional Torah thought. The Genesis on-line bookstore should be able to get you some good reading on the subject. Hillel Goldberg has written extensively and well on the subject, both for lay and scholarly audiences. The major classical texts of mussar have also been translated and are also available for purchase on-line; Path of the Just; Ways of the Righteous; Duties of the Heart; etc. I'll ask the fine folks at Project Genesis to put a footnote on this posting describing how you can order any of these titles.

My apologies for not putting that explanation in earlier.

Best wishes.