

Notes from the book:

The Jewish Spiritual Path of Mussar: Everyday Holiness

by Alan Morinis

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Contents:

Introduction to Mussar

Soul Traits:

Generosity	Gratitude
Order	Patience
Equanimity	Compassion
Humility	Faith

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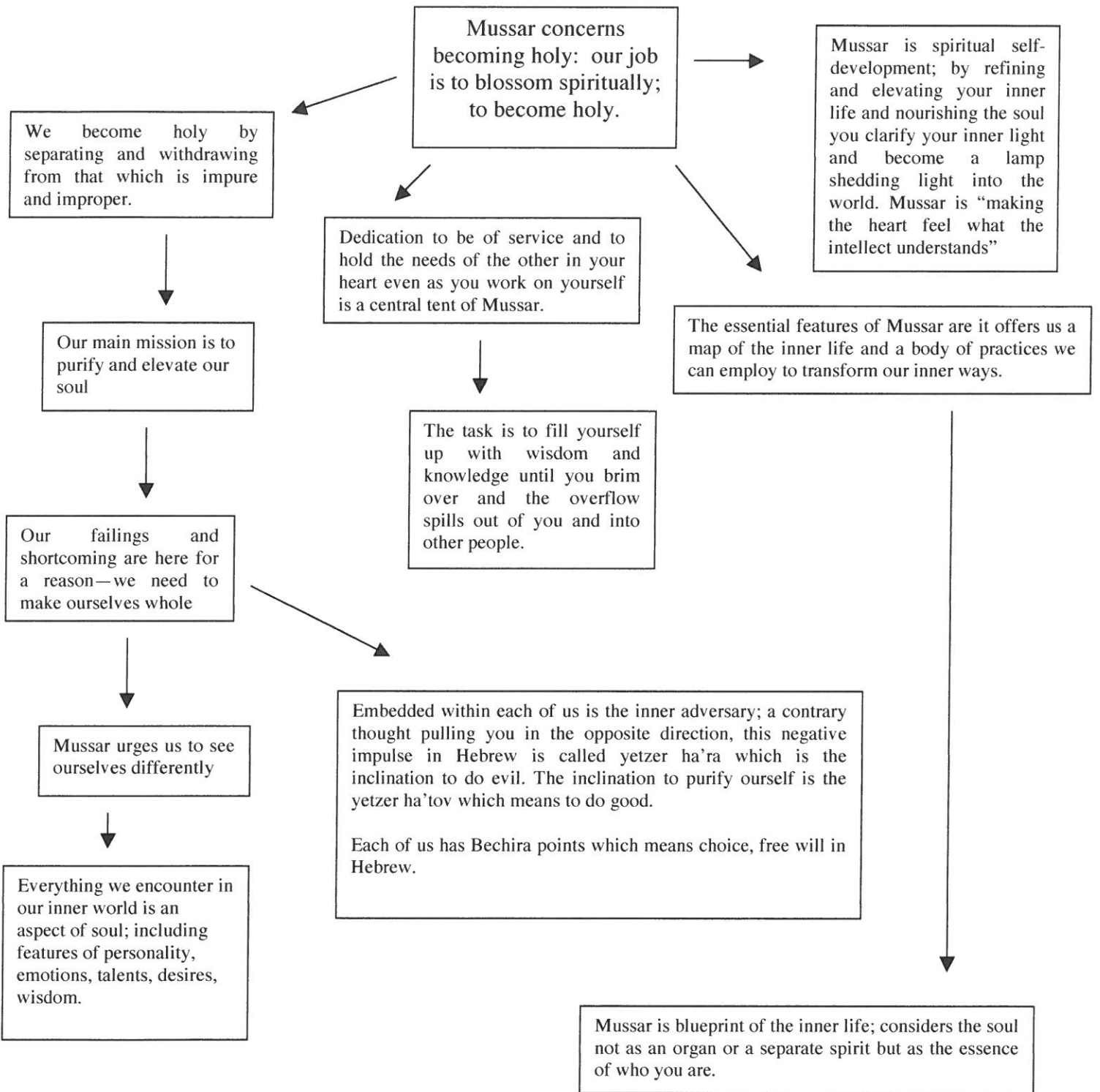
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The Levy Launch is a center providing organizations with management and strategy consultation to improve organizational performance through systematic analysis of existing organizational problems and developing specific plans for improvement. Our consultants will initiate and guide change processes, design systems and structures to support and manage change and implement technology. We offer corporate training, coaching and corporate education. The center's corporate development workshops include team building, leadership training and increasing managerial effectiveness. In addition, we offer self-improvement workshops. Organizations investing and making a commitment to offer their employee's personal development workshops attract more qualified workers, improve morale, enhance job satisfaction, develop competencies, and create inclusive work environments. In addition, corporations maximizing on opportunities to provide their employees with self-improvement workshops convey a sincere commitment to develop and empower their employees to achieve their fullest potential in relation to their personal and career pursuits.

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Gratitude

Gratitude defined as awakening to the good and giving thanks.

Yehuda is a Hebrew name which means "I am grateful" and the name Jew derives from Yehudi – the people of Yehuda; this means gratitude is intrinsic to being Jewish

In Hebrew it means recognizing the good.: realizing the good is already there; practicing gratitude means being fully aware of the good that is already yours

Gratitude can't coexist with arrogance, resentment and selfishness

Practicing gratitude heightens our awareness of the gifts we already possess; we relieve ourselves of the exhausting pursuit of things we lack; it frees us from compulsive grasping and gives us back our lives

Recognizing the good affirms life; it then allows your heart to set free and soar and sing a song of life

When gratitude is well established, it is a sign of a heart that has been made right and whole

We tend to focus on the deficiencies of life and neglect to see the good that counterbalances them

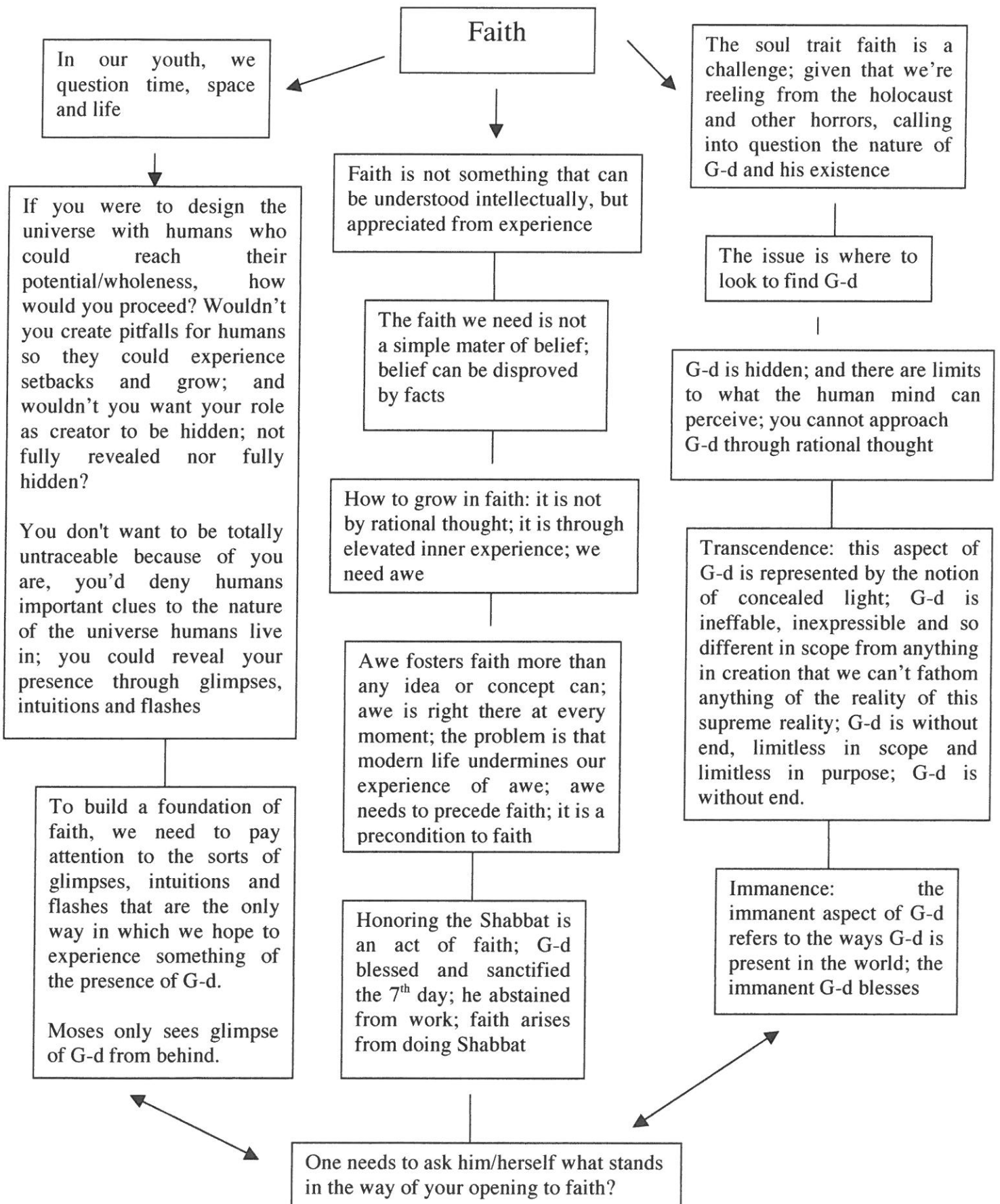
There is no limit to what we don't have; our lives will be inevitably be filled with endless dissatisfaction

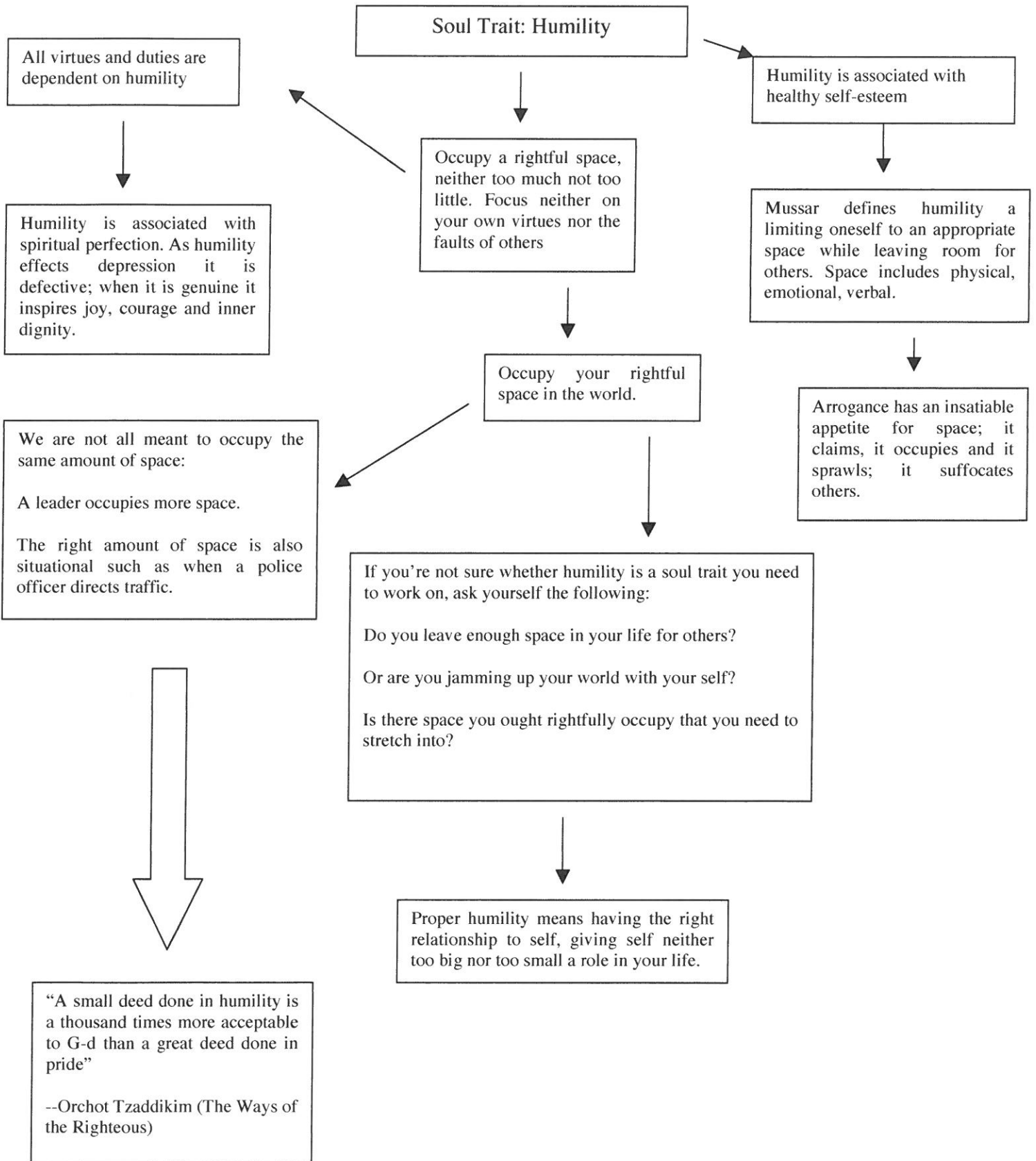
We tend to live our lives mired in our feeling of deprivation.

No one has to look far to find someone who has more money, or is taller, more handsome or luckier in other ways.

Comparing like this can create bitterness in the soul, as we poison ourselves with judgment, grasping and self-recrimination.

Cultivating gratitude counterbalances this tendency.





Equanimity: rise above the good and the bad

Equanimity is the inner balance that coexists with a world and experience that accepts turbulence and turmoil

Tests: we are tested; understand and accept the testing nature of life; it is essential to the cultivation of equanimity; when you're tested is when you're thrown off inner balance

Spiritual practice is supposed to make us more calm.

Equanimity is a quality of being centered in yourself and sensitive to the forces working around you; to avoid being vulnerable and being tossed around

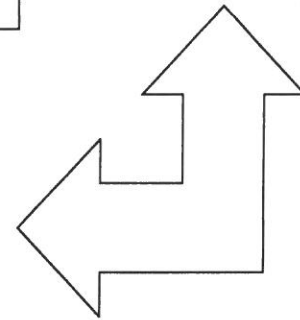
Calmness of the soul is described as a kind of independence.

Life provides the situations to mold character and cleanse the soul; we meet tests of life and our challenge is to draw closer to G-d and each other by being tested.

Cultivate an inner attitude that creates some distance between the stimulus that comes at us and our reactions to it.

Success can sometimes be more of a challenge than failure; a run of success can lift a person on waves of elation, spurring a sense of invincibility; intoxicating arrogance and dangerous greed will feed on success much more effectively than failure; this is well known in the business and political world.

Rabbi Steinsaltz describes the Jewish spiritual experience as a constant beckoning to the light.



The essence of a person of faith is equanimity.

The Jewish approach to life considers the man who has stopped going; who has a feeling of completion, of peace, of a great light from above that has brought him to rest—to be someone who has lost his way. Only he whom the light continues to beckon; for whom the light is as distant as ever, only he can be considered to have received some sort of response.

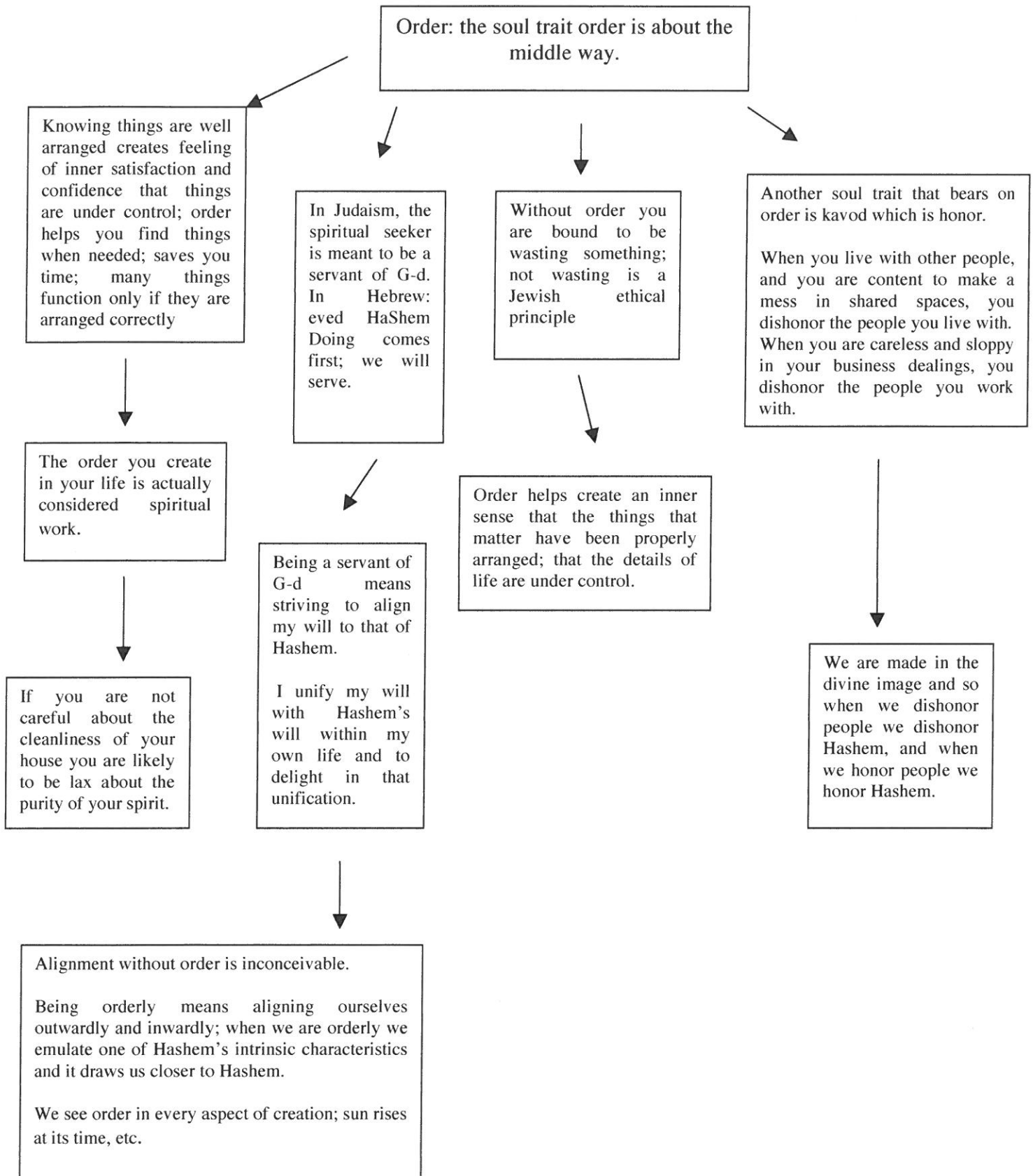
We tend to be very pious and G-d fearing as long as there is nothing difficult challenging our will power.

Distancing Yourself

Mussar advises us to distance ourselves from pride and anger. Distancing doesn't mean you should never get angry, proud, jealous—this is unrealistic. The emphasis is on how we respond to what we feel.

Distancing means 2 things:

- 1) We stay physically far from people who are angry, proud, etc.
- 2) We are being directed to develop some inner distance from the experience of our own anger, pride and other incendiary soul traits.



Soul Trait: Generosity

Remember: the goal of Mussar practice is to fulfill our potential to live as holy souls

Two types of generosity

The first is the giving that comes because your heart is so moved without the flicker of a thought your hand rushes into your pocket to give.

In the Torah—this is called t'rumah which means gift.

It's a movement of the soul.

The human heart is naturally inclined to give. When our hearts are closed off—we suffer from a spiritual ailment called timtum ha'lev

The key is to be on the lookout for rationalizations that exempt you from being generous.

Do not sacrifice the ways of the heart for the needs of the ego.

The ego tends to look on life in terms of scarcity and ownership.

If I am to win—someone else must lose.

Rabbi Salanter said “the spiritual is higher than the physical, but the physical needs of another are an obligation of my spiritual life”

G-d needs nothing and yet gives abundantly; in this way G-d is a giver.

You can be generous with money and also with your time, energy and possessions.

The second type of generosity is called tzedakah: which is obligated giving; acts that come from a commitment whether or not the heart is moved to act in that way.

Tzedakah also means charity, justice, righteousness and fairness. It is a commandment and one is obligated to give 10% of their annual income.

The law says that even the poor person who receives charity is obligated to give tzedakah because the poor should not be denied the joy and reward that comes from performing a mitzvah

The Ba'al Shem Tov said that in hell, people sit around a great banquet table piled high with food. Each person is given a fork six feet in length, far too long for them to maneuver into their mouths. They are starving.

In heaven—people sit around exactly the same banquet table, but each feeds the person across the table—and all are filled.

Patience

Patience means enduring and tolerating; it may bring us elements of suffering

Patience is also about bearing

Impatience seldom makes things happen faster or better; usually causes us grief.

Patience is a tool we can use to help us endure when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances we did not choose and could not avoid.

Why should everything go our way—considering how small we are and how many other agendas and needs are always involved. When we do hold in sight how integrated we are within the grand schemes that make up and sustain the world, we see ourselves situated amid the large wheels turning and rivers flowing, moved by hands that are not our own.

When confronted with injustice or the needs of the suffering of another where our actions can make a difference, we have no business patiently taking our time.

Can you remember situations that tend to try your patience?

Compassion: moral precepts of Judaism demand we be compassionate to every soul

Rachamim:
Hebrew word for compassion

G-d included the attribute of compassion as an essential feature of creation alongside judgment

Compassion means closeness; soul trait of compassion means very, very close to another; we aren't separate from the other

The soul trait of compassion defined as the inner experience of touching another being so close that you no longer see the other as separate from you

Compassion emerges when you lower your barrier; when you don't isolate your sense of self

We need to be told to walk in G-d's footsteps by acting to cultivate compassion in our hearts

We more easily perceive our separation than our oneness with others; we slip into judgment more easily than compassion

The primary barrier to being compassionate is the sense that you and I are separate from each other

What turns empathy into compassion?
Inner qualities only reach a state of wholeness or sh'lemut when they become action

Compassion comes in 2 forms:

- 1) compassion in the form of compassion: when our feeling along with the other leads us to act kindly and gently: redemption of the Jews from slavery in Egypt is an example
- 2) compassion in the form of judgment: our shared feeling with the other calls for action that is firm or maybe harsh; an example is the eviction of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden; G-d could have eliminated them from the world—but He didn't and by exiling us from the Garden of Eden, G-d puts us in a world where human imperfection is tolerated and so made it possible for us to survive.