

# TEVET

## An Early Prescription for a Very Contemporary Issue

In the first decade of the 19th century, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Lefin of Satanov wrote a text entitled *Cheshbon Ha-Nefesh*, Moral Accounting. Rabbi Menachem Mendel was a renowned Mussar leader – the movement that created guidelines and literature for teaching individuals how to live an ethical and virtuous life. His book is thought to be based in part on the ethical program prescribed by Benjamin Franklin in his *Autobiography* [of Benjamin Franklin, circa 1770-1790].



Menachem Mendel encouraged individuals to keep a journal on cultivating 18 attributes of behavior that would encourage ethical behavior. If he were alive today he would most likely advocate that following these principles would foster internal harmony, and thus help to reduce stress.

The 18 principles (*middot*) as defined by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Lefin of Satanov:

- |                       |                       |                  |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1. Equanimity         | 7. righteousness      | 13. separation   |
| 2. tolerance/patience | 8. economic stability | 14. temperance   |
| 3. orderliness        | 9. zeal               | 15. deliberation |
| 4. decisiveness       | 10. silence           | 16. modesty      |
| 5. cleanliness        | 11. calmness          | 17. trust        |
| 6. humility           | 12. truth             | 18. generosity   |

### Activities

Make a list, prioritizing these 18 principles as they reflect your life now.

- How might you re-prioritize these principles to create greater balance and reduce stress?
- Which of these principles are the easiest for you?
- Which are the most difficult?
- How might the absence of some of these principles affect your health?

Following Rabbi Mendel of Satanov's suggestion, keep a journal on your commitment to incorporating these principles in your life. What are the challenges? What are the successes?

You can read the 1812 original work of Reb Mendel in *Cheshbon ha-Nefesh* (translated by Dovid Landesman, Feldheim Publishers, New York, 1995)