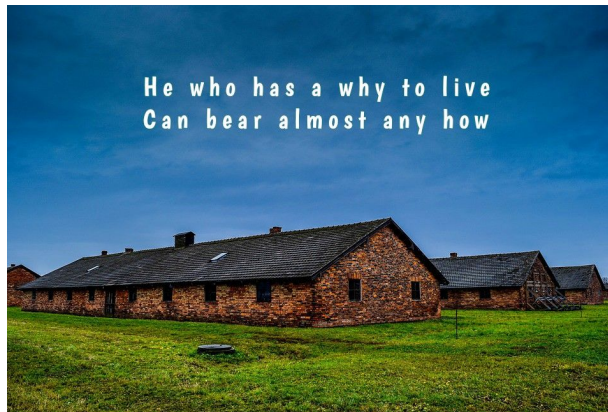


Beyond “What's wrong with you?” The Lubavitcher Rebbe and Victor Frankel, on Human Potential



Part 1 - Must Teshuva be depressing?

ועוד שנית ידאג. אולי הוא מקצר בחובת התשובה בצער ובמרירות ובצום ובבכי. וגם כי הרבה צער והרבה בכה יזחל ויירא אולי לעומת זה הרבה אשמה. ולא השלים חוקו את כל ענותו ואשר יבכה בצום נפשו ועוד שנית ידאג. אולי הוא מקצר בחובת התשובה בצער ובמרירות ובצום ובבכי. וגם כי הרבה צער והרבה בכה יזחל ויירא אולי לעומת זה הרבה אשמה. ולא השלים חוקו את כל ענותו ואשר יבכה בצום נפשו

And he must worry too, lest he has fallen short in repentance; in suffering, bitterness, fasting, and weeping. And although he may have suffered and wept much, he must tremble and fear that he may have sinned over and against this and that with all of his suffering, weeping, and fasting, he has not paid his debt.

Rabenu Yona, Sharei Teshuva

One need only ask psychiatrists what happens to patients who are methodically subjected to the torments of repentance, states of contrition, and fits of redemption.... In the wake of repentance and redemption training we find tremendous epileptic epidemics...; as another aftereffect we encounter terrible paralyses and protracted states of depression.

Friedrich Nietzsche

וימה היא התשובה. הוא שיעזב החטא חטאו ויסירו ממחשבתו ויגמר בלבו שלא יעשה עוד שגגות (ישעיה נה ז) "יעזב רשע דרכו" וגו'. וכן יתנחם על שעבר שגגות (ירמיה לא יח) "כי אחרי שובי נחמתי". ויעיד עליו יודע תעלומות שלא ישוב לזה החטא לעולם

What is repentance? The sinner shall cease sinning, and remove sin from his thoughts, and wholeheartedly conclude not to revert back to it, even as it is said: "Let the wicked forsake his

way" (Is. 55.7); so, too, shall he be remorseful on what was past, even as it is said: "Surely after that I was turned, I repented" (Jer. 31. 19). In addition thereto he should take to witness Him Who knoweth all secrets that forever he will not turn to repeat that sin again

Rambam Hilchot Teshuva 2

The healthy awareness of knowing and working on what he wants to change, even if not yet successful, falls under the category of constructive guilt. As soon as Yaakov pivots and views himself as a "failure" for struggling to make those important changes in his life, Yaakov enters into the domain of destructive guilt. He attacks himself for being unable to succeed at overcoming his desires, and becomes frustrated and angry at himself, identifying with his failures.

He becomes less focused on his original goals and behaviors and concentrates more on his inability and failure to change. He begins to feel hopeless about the future, his ability to move forward and behave consistently with what he believes is appropriate. At this point, in addition to his original struggle with changing his target behavior, Yaakov now faces the additional challenge of feeling like a hopeless failure who may as well stop trying to improve. This vicious cycle, which we work with in the Counseling Center, understandably makes teshuva seem hopeless and overwhelming, instead of exciting and inspiring

Avi Muschel, PsyD and Martin Galla, PhD, Yeshiva University Counseling Center

שלא יהא בעיני עצמו רשע שאינו יכול לחזור בתשובה, שנמצא זה מתיאש לבו מן התשובה, ואם באת לידו עבירה הותרה לו לפי שמעלה על דעתו שהיא קלה כנגד החמורות שעבר עליהן

A person should not be wicked in his own eyes for then he will not be able to do teshuvah (lit. return), as he will have already lost hope of ever doing so. When faced with the possibility of committing a transgression it would seem permissible to him since, after all, it is no worse than the bad things he has already done.

Rabenu Yona, Pirkei Avot

In order for a person to grow in his avodas Hashem he certainly needs to introspect and to be capable of self scrutiny and self criticism. Yet many gedolim have warned of the spiritual damage that can result from excessive self-criticism. How can one tell if the self-criticism is excessive? Rav Michel Yehuda Lefkowitz provides us with a very clear and concise barometer with which to ascertain if our aspirations and self-criticism is excessive or not. If these feelings in fact help us grow then it's a sign that they emanate from an emotionally and spiritually healthy source. But if they result in excessive pressure and frustration then it's a clear sign that it's the work of the yetzer harah

Dr Benzion Sorotzkin

Teshuvah is a natural product of health and maturity: The desire for teshuvah is a person's most healthy spiritual desire. A healthy soul in a healthy body is compelled to achieve the great bliss of teshuvah, experiencing in it the greatest natural pleasure.

Rav Kook, Orot Teshuva

Part 2 - The Lubavitcher Rebbe and Victor Frankl

How surprised Marguerite was when the Rebbe asked her if she could do for him a favor. The Rebbe wanted her to visit two people in Vienna on his behalf. One of them was Dr. Viktor Frankl, who headed the Vienna Policlinic of Neurology.

"Please send Dr. Frankl my regards. And pass the following message on to him: that I said that he should be strong and continue his work, with complete resolve. No matter what, he should not give up. If he remains strong and committed, he will certainly prevail."

Arranging a meeting with Frankl was no simple task. Arriving at the clinic, she was told that the professor hadn't shown up in two weeks. With effort, though, Marguerite found Frankl's home address and made her way there. Marguerite knocked on the door, and it was opened by a woman. The first thing she caught sight of in the home was a cross, hanging prominently on the wall. (In 1947 Frankl married his second wife, Eleonore Katharina Schwindt, a devout Catholic.) Taken aback, and already wondering whether this was a mistake, if perhaps this wasn't the person the Rebbe had wanted her to visit, she nevertheless asked whether there was a Herr Professor Frankl in the house.

Marguerite was asked to wait. Minutes later, a slightly annoyed-looking and apparently uninterested Dr. Frankl appeared. Marguerite, feeling very self-conscious, told him that she had regards for him "from Rabbi Schneerson of Brooklyn, New York."

Marguerite steeled herself and continued: "Rabbi Schneerson, known as the Lubavitcher Rebbe, sent a message for you: Remain strong! Continue your work with complete resolve. Don't give up. Ultimately you will prevail."

The hitherto apathetic doctor suddenly transformed before a shocked Marguerite's eyes. Tears filled his eyes. After composing himself somewhat he thanked Marguerite, and in the course of the ensuing conversation he told her that he had been planning to abandon

his efforts to fight on behalf of his theory and philosophy, and actually was considering departing Vienna—but now he would reconsider...

Haddon Klingberg, author of *When Life Calls Out To Us: the love and lifework of Viktor and Elly Frankl*, the only authorized biography of Viktor and Eleonore ("Elly"), writes:

"...after his death I asked Elly if he actually made these prayers every day. 'Absolutely. He never missed a day. Every morning for more than fifty years. But nobody knew this.' As they traveled the globe Viktor took the phylacteries with them, and everywhere, every morning, he prayed. He uttered memorized words of Jewish prayers and Psalms...

Indeed, Frankl's non-Jewish son-in-law confirmed this fact to me: "My father-in-law would close himself off in a room every day for a little while. Once I opened the door and saw him with black boxes on his head and hand. He was annoyed about my intruding on his privacy. When he was taken to the hospital, however, his practice of putting on tefillin became public."

I've often wondered why the Rebbe took an interest in the success of Viktor Frankl, a secular and intermarried Jew, and sought him out to offer encouragement and support. It would seem that the Rebbe did this not only out of personal concern for Frankl's welfare, but also in order to advance a philosophy which he felt ultimately fosters belief in G-d, a spiritual perspective, and good values. The fact that this constitutes the real cure to a suffering soul is something the Rebbe repeatedly taught us.

Rabbi Jacob Biderman

Part 3 - Man's Search For Meaning

The experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action... We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way. And there were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision – a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom.

I remember two cases of would-be suicide, which bore a striking similarity to each other. Both men had talked of their intentions to commit suicide. Both used the typical argument —they had nothing more to expect from life. In both cases it was a question of getting them to realize that life was still expecting something from them; something in the future was expected of them. We found, in fact, that for the one it was his child whom he adored and who was waiting for him in a foreign country. For the other it was a thing, not a person. This man was a scientist and had written a series of books which still needed to be finished. His work could not be done by anyone else, any more than another person could ever take the place of the father in his child's affections.

This uniqueness and singleness which distinguishes each individual and gives a meaning to his existence has a bearing on creative work as much as it does on human love. When the impossibility of replacing a person is realized, it allows the responsibility which a man has for his existence and its continuance to appear in all its magnitude. A man who becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears toward a human being who affectionately waits for him, or to an unfinished work, will never be able to throw away his life. He knows the "why" for his existence, and will be able to bear almost any "how."

Victor Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning*

"We are reminded again of that remark of Goethe's which we have already quoted, and which we called the finest maxim for any kind of psychotherapy: "If we take people as they are, we make them worse. If we treat them as if they were what they ought to be, we help them to become what they are capable of becoming."

Viktor E. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*

What changed me, professionally and existentially, was my second major yechidut – face-to-face conversation, – with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, in January 1978. To my surprise, he vetoed all my career options: economist, lawyer, academic, even becoming a rabbi in the United States. My task, he said, was to train rabbis. There were too few people in Britain going into the rabbinate and it was my mission to change that. I tell this story for a reason: to illustrate the difference between a gift and a vocation, between what we are good at and what we are called on to do.

The man who did more than anyone to bring this idea back in recent times was Viktor Frankl, the psychotherapist who survived Auschwitz. There in the camp he dedicated

himself to giving people the will to live. He did so by getting them to see that their lives were not finished, that they still had a task to perform, and that therefore they had a reason to survive until the war was over.

Frankl believed that “Every human person constitutes something unique; each situation in life occurs only once. The concrete task of any person is relative to this uniqueness and singularity.”[5] The essence of the task, he argued, is that it is self-transcending. It comes from outside the self and challenges us to live beyond mere self-interest. To discover such a task is to find that life – my life – has meaning and purpose.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

“א-להי, עד שלא נוצרתי איני כדאי. ועכשיו שנוצרתי כאלו לא נוצרתי.”

“My God, before I was formed, I was of no worth. And now that I have been formed, it is as if I was not formed.”

“Before I was formed, I was of no worth.” Clearly, before I was born I was not needed in this world. “I was of no worth” – nothing required my existence, there was no mission for me to fulfill. Since I was not yet needed in the world, I was not born in an earlier generation.

“And now that I have been formed” – since my soul has entered the world at this point in time, it must be that now there is some mission for me to accomplish. I am needed to repair and complete some aspect of the world.

And yet, “it is as if I was not formed.” Were I to dedicate my life to fulfilling the purpose for which I was brought into the world, this would confirm and justify my existence. But since my actions are not in accordance with my true goal, I am not accomplishing my life’s mission. And if I fail to fulfill my purpose in life, my very existence is called into question.

Part 4 - Beyond “What’s Wrong With You?”

In 2005, the National Science Foundation published an article showing that the average person has between 12,000 and 60,000 thoughts per day. Of those, 80% are negative, and 95% are exactly the same repetitive thoughts as the day before.

While it is good for anyone's self-esteem to like the way they look, it is crucial to have many sources of self-esteem. For a young woman's long-term happiness, it will be more deeply rewarding for her to find things that she cares about and practice doing them. Dr. Hamlet calls this "developing mastery and accumulating positives in your life." Having a personal interest in something and seeing how your skills grow with time and effort makes you feel proud of what you can do, and takes the focus away from achieving perfection, which is impossible. It also encourages girls to look inside themselves for their self-esteem (and not just to compliments from others) which is an important part of growing into a happy, confident woman.

What Selfies Are Doing to Self-Esteem, Rachel Ehmke

וכדוגמת עשיר שאינו יודע בעשרו וממילא אינו משתמש בו, והרי הוא באמת כעני לכל דבר. וחייב אדם להתבונן ולהכיר החשיבות הגדולה שיש בו בעצמותו, ... וכל כמה שמרבה בהכרה זו כן מתרבת וגדלה בו חשיבותו, וזהו גורם גדול ועיקרי לתיקון המעשים יותר מכל שהרי מצד הכרת חשיבותו לעולם יחשוב בדעתו אם פעולה כזו ראויה לו והגונה לו, וימנע מכל מעשה ומכל התנהגות שאינה לפי כבוד

Rav Aaron Kotler

Rav Sher explains that a שן רע is someone who evaluates you in a negative manner. He himself may behave in an exemplary manner and thus serves as a great example, but the fact that he evaluates you in a negative manner will have a negative impact on your self esteem, which will certainly negatively impact on your spiritual health. Such a person is so dangerous that you need to both stay away from such a person and even warn others to keep their distance.

Dr Bentzion Sorotzkin

כשממצים את הרצון, כשכופפים את עוז החיים על ידי הסלידה הפנימית והנטייה לשוב מכל חטא, מתקמץ גם כן הרצון של הטוב, ועז החיים הטהורים מתחלש גם הוא

When we shrink our will, when we subjugate our inner life strength through internal recoiling and the tendency to repent every sin, the positive inclination shrinks as well, and the pure life force becomes weak as well.

Rav Kook