



On living **SOULFULLY**

How to feel safe with yourself

BY LEONARD CARR



“ LIVING SOULFULLY, FINDING YOUR OWN VOICE AND SPEAKING YOUR TRUTH, WITHOUT FEAR OF JUDGMENT OR CONCERN ABOUT THE APPROVAL OF AN IMAGINARY AUDIENCE, MEANS OWNING AND TRUSTING THE VALUE OF YOUR UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD. ”

Freud wrote a seminal book called, *The psychopathology of everyday life*, which inaugurated in Western society a view of people as being pathologically driven by unconscious drives and conflicts that are outside of conscious control. These unconscious dynamics dominate emotional life and the individual can only gain control by uncovering these issues that are the hidden drivers of human behaviour. From a Torah perspective, we know that Hashem made us conscious, sentient beings. He endowed us with the blessing and reasonability to exercise free will. You are able to decide on and shape who you would like to be, and the life you prefer, regardless of your circumstances. Circumstances provide merely the backdrop that constantly challenges you to demonstrate your commitment to your chosen way of being.

It is your challenge and responsibility to consciously take ownership of your emotional life in a way that brings you

richness and fulfilment. This is achieved by imbuing the ordinary with a depth I call the quality of soulfulness. Living soulfully means consciously seeking meaning in even the most mundane everyday aspects of your life. It means living consciously and at all times being present to your experience and to the people around you. It means taking yourself seriously, being aware of your needs and feelings. It requires making conscious choices about your preferred way of being. It means treating yourself with the same kindness and consideration that you would have for others.

Living soulfully means living fully in the present and being open to the myriad possibilities inherent in the present moment. Living in an open way means not being controlled or defined by your past. Living in the past closes off your perception to the infinite possibilities that are available in the present. When you bring up someone's past behaviour, you define their

identity by your view of their old behaviour, and in so doing close off for them the possibility of doing things differently in the present. Forcing someone to accept the script you write for them creates alienation and mistrust as well as blocking their options for creative change. This suffocates the relationship. Bringing soulfulness into relationships, including with yourself, means opening the relationship to new possibilities of experience and allowing each moment to be fresh and rich with exiting new possibilities.

In order for any relationships to thrive, you first and foremost need to feel safe. Feeling safe with yourself like with anyone else means being able to trust yourself that you will not turn on yourself with harsh, unconstructive criticism or make hurtful undermining comments to yourself that would be totally unacceptable if they came from anyone else. It means treating yourself the way you would anyone about whom you

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really value, respect and love. It requires recognising the G-dliness in yourself and growing yourself in ways that bring your gifts into clearer and sharper focus so that your light can shine fully and unobstructed in the world.

Consider the unreasonable or overly harsh demands or the negative undermining judgments that you make about yourself. Imagine how you would react if someone else made those same statements about you in your presence. You would no doubt find them deeply hurtful, completely unreasonable or insulting. How would you feel about someone who treated you that way? How would it affect the relationship? Could you survive, let alone thrive, in the presence of someone who constantly criticised and undermined you? Think about how differently you respond in the presence of people who enjoy, appreciate and value you. Remember how those relationships empower and fortify you; how they spur you on to be the best that you could be.

Why would your relationship with yourself be any different? Growing up with criticism often leads you to believe that criticism is the element that helps you on your path towards growth of self-development. You can see from how you actually respond to relationships that this is clearly not true. For anyone to thrive; in fact, for any living thing to thrive, the most basic fundamental element that needs to be present – and this is not negotiable – is safety. When you feel unsafe on any level, you go into survival mode. That means keeping safe and holding on to your resources that you believe to be under threat. You most certainly do not risk showing your true feelings, creativity and spontaneity, let alone trying out new possibilities of responding. You just repeat what has worked in the past to keep safe, regardless of whether or not that strategy is the most effective in the present circumstance. You operate as if it is better

“BEING PRESENT TO YOURSELF BEGINS BY TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF ON A PHYSICAL LEVEL, AND HAVING A LOVING RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR BODY.”

to use the inadequate or unconstructive defence that you know rather than risk trying something new that could create more danger or uncertainty.

Living soulfully, finding your own voice and speaking your truth, without fear of judgment or concern about the approval of an imaginary audience, means owning and trusting the value of your unique contribution to the world. In Greek tragedies, the chorus provides the commentary on the action taking place on the stage. Many people play to the commentary instead of following their own authentic inner guidance. Living soulfully means living your story as opposed to someone else's. Listening only to the chorus means being controlled by your fantasy about what other people expect of you. This belief may in fact be out of date or not even true. When your attention is on how you come across, you are not fully present to the other person, and so you do not hear yourself or the other properly. When you are preoccupied with the commentary, you may find you are out of step in your relationships. This sets off more commentary about self-criticism, leading to more fear and doubt, which leads to more feelings of inadequacy and more reliance on the inner commentary than on the action. So a vicious circle develops and you become paralysed. Living soulfully means trusting your natural reactions and allowing your experience to simply unfold in its own way, without your conscious direction or interference.

Living soulfully means making the commitment to view the world through appreciative eyes. This is a discipline that can be developed by making a

commitment to keep your focus on everything that works for you in life, everything that goes well, no matter how challenging your circumstances. Having an appreciative eye in your relationships helps to cultivate gratitude towards the people in your life, including yourself. Having an appreciative eye deepens your faith and helps to cultivate a sense of joy in life. The sense of awe and appreciation that develops from being appreciative of and grateful for all your gifts makes life more rich, meaningful and fulfilling. The sense of gratitude that you cultivate through having an appreciative eye makes you feel close and connected to the people in your life, as well as to your Creator, who gave you this life that is so rich, meaningful and fulfilling.

Being present to yourself begins by taking care of yourself on a physical level, and having a loving relationship with your body. It means taking those qualities of reverence, love, respect and loyalty into your emotional life in the way you relate to your inner world. It involves taking care of your relationships with people and with the tasks that you have to perform in life in ways that reaffirm the value of your life and your presence in the world. Being present to others means really seeing, really feeling and really hearing the people around us and honouring their lives by being with them without judgments and expectations, without demands and with an appreciation that they too have their struggles and do the best with what they have, just like you do. It means trying to be someone who brings out the best in you and in others.

Michelangelo said he did not sculpt; he merely removed the extraneous marble in order to release the form that was already inherent in the marble. When you honour the soulfulness of everyday life, you help to bring out the masterpiece; the genius that is hidden exists in you and in all who share this earthly experience with you. ■

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