

The Rabbi Daniel Lapin Podcast

Episode: *Your Most Exciting Challenge Offers a Huge Payoff*

Date: 05/06/22 **Length:** 1:11:37

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SPEAKERS

Daniel Lapin, Ruchi Koval

TRANSCRIPT

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Daniel Lapin 00:00

Welcome, happy warriors. Welcome to the Rabbi Daniel Lapin show where I, your rabbi reveals how the world rarely works. And one way that the world really works. And this is of relevance, whether you are trying to build up your finances, whether you are looking to get married, whether you're looking to strengthen marriage, whether you're raising children, whether you're beyond that point, almost everybody has an interest in becoming a bigger, better and more powerful person. Why? Because you can read as many books on leadership as you like. And you will be wasting your time if you do not possess any inner greatness. And the reason for this is that we human beings, all of us are equipped almost from birth from toddlerhood, with an infallible and reliable detector of inauthenticity, a phony detector, and, and you just cannot employ tricks out of leadership books, to try and con people into, always should follow him because he knew how to press our buttons, no, deep down, we need to follow people who in whom we sense, a bigness they are bigger people than us. They're better people than us. And they are worthy of being followed. Anybody who's had any experience in the military knows that every now and then in the military, you come across an officer, you come across a leader, you come across a man who has who exudes this, he just radiates it somebody who has achieved this level of greatness. And you say to yourself, you know, I'll follow him anywhere. And this invariably comes from conquering the inner self, rather than the world around. I think it was the English poet John Milton, who said about Oliver Cromwell, the leader of the revolution, the civil war in England in the middle of the 17th century, I think it was, it was the pope Milton who said that, and I don't have the exact words, I wish I could because they'd be memorable, but I don't have them at the tip of my fingers. But what he said was that before Cromwell ever went out onto the field of battle to conquer his enemies, he had already triumphed, in the inner battle of conquering himself. And so this is remarkably effective. The idea that you can somehow become a leader, with your, with your family, with your children, with your business with your associates and employees and friends idea that you can be influential among others, without having achieved in a dominance is completely false. And, and you just think about it while I'm talking. Think of all the phone is, you know, oh, there are people who employ power to coerce compliance from you. There's no question about that. But that's not leadership. That's not inspirational in any way whatsoever.

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Daniel Lapin 03:46

Take a look at this verse. I'm using the Rabbi Daniel Lapin Recommended Bible. And I'm on page 2113, in the book of Ruth, and page 2113, in the book of Ruth, are fairly early on chapter one in the book of Ruth, the was. Let's look at verse here we go, verse seven. And, you know, I always like saying that everybody needs a rabbi, right? And that's not just because I am eager to make sure that his full employment for rabbis, particularly this one, but it's that there are certain insights that are only accessible in the original Hebrew text, which my mission is to make available to you in ways that can be practically employed, in your family, in your faith, in your finances, in your friendships, and yes, in your physical fitness, right. Because if you can't lead yourself, you certainly won't be able to lead anyone else and leading you Self means being able to do things that the lower part of your body doesn't want to do. Maybe that's Exercise or Dieting, or many, many other things. But here's how it sounds in the Hebrew. And I know that few of you understand the Hebrew. But there is a certain rhythm and tempo to the sound of the Hebrew, which can be enjoyed and appreciated in the same way that complex pieces of music I can enjoy even though I don't know anything at all about the music theory behind that. So [Hebrew spoken here].

Daniel Lapin 05:42

So here's what's going on. Naomi is alone with her two daughters in law in the land of Moab. And she decides she has to go home to the land of Israel. And the English reads as follows. So she went out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her, and they took the road to return to the land of Judah. Now, here's what's interesting in Hebrew, verbs indicate a great deal, they indicate gender, and they also indicate the number whether it's singular or plural. So I might say he went home to Fresno, I could also say they went home, but from the verb went, you wouldn't know anything at all. In the Hebrew, it's quite different. And the way I will now translate the Hebrew verse accurately goes something like this. And she, meaning Naomi, left, the place singular Naomi left the place where she had been, and her two daughters in law were with her.

Daniel Lapin 06:51

So who's actually the driving force here? Who's the leadership? Noemi there just with her. It doesn't say Noemi and her two daughters in law left the place where they were in Moab and started the journey back to Judah. No. And Noemi went and then almost as an afterthought, in that end of the first phrase of the sentence, verse seven, and her two daughters in law were with her, that they didn't know what else to do. So they had with their mother in law, she's going on a journey, they'll go on a journey. But then time goes by the second part of the sentence reads, [Hebrew spoken here]. And they went on the journey purposefully to return to the land of Judah, but now that they is a plural. And so something very important has happened. And that is that when this all started, Naomi had not yet inspired her two daughters in law with a vision of returning back to God's land to the land of Judah. And so she went, and they accompanied her. They were her daughters in law, they were widows. Life had been very rough on them, they went along. But as the journey progressed, and they were able to grasp more of the enormous greatness of this woman, Naomi, and as the rest of the book of Ruth progresses, we become exposed to more and more of the inner greatness of this extraordinary woman who merits to be the great grandmother of King David himself. And so here we see a little bit of an insight of what

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happens, there may be people who will go with you, no matter where you are, because they don't have much of an alternative, you know, they'll go with you. And that means it's your spouse, it's your children, it's your coworkers. It might be a military unit, but whatever it people will go with you.

Daniel Lapin 08:42

But if you achieve real greatness, why everything changes, now, they have been captivated by your vision. And they are now really going with you they are part of it. They're not just accompanying you, because they have nothing better to do. They have been inspired by you. This is just a little bit of a glimpse of what achieving greatness means and what Milton meant when he spoke about Oliver Cromwell on the battlefield. And it's a what the rest of this show and some future shows will be devoted to as well you see, there's a book that we published we sought out the expert in this area in Hebrew, the areas known as Mussar. And that is the area of working on yourself for the purpose of making yourself a bigger human being. And we sought out a a wonderful woman called Ruchi Koval. And we worked with her to write a book and she wrote a terrific book. It's called Soul Construction. And if you haven't seen it yet, you owe it to yourself because this is the start. Getting this book in front of you is the start of perhaps one of the most exciting at adventures you've ever undertaken. And that is the adventure of battling with yourself the adventure of extracting more from yourself than you ever thought you were capable of. And this book, The Soul Construction, and I'm going to interview Ruchi right now, and I'm going to do my very best to ask her the questions you would like to ask her. And for you to get to understand this very first but crucial step on the journey towards self development in the ultimate what it really, really means. And so, the book is called Soul Construction. And and here's the best part of it, you can go to our website at RabbiDanielLapin.com. And you're able to get it as a book, let's say you want it as an ebook download, you can get it as well, let's say you want it in audible form, you can do that. Also, let's say you want it on your Kindle, well, you can do that as well. You can get this book in any way you want, you can get it mailed to you as a softcover book, or you can download it and start work on it literally just as soon as we finish the interview.

Daniel Lapin 11:14

So please be aware of this and, and waste no time in, in in going to RabbiDanielLapin.com. And looking up the book Soul Construction, as in constructing your soul, right your inner soul. That's really what we're talking about a great title for a great book and a great author. She's terrific. And she really lays it out in a way that frankly, she did it better than I could have done. And as you know, I'm blessed with a fairly robust ego. But that doesn't mean I can't recognize that she wrote a book I could not have written. And it's a necessary book. And it's a book that I have derived value from as well. So sit back, no, don't sit back, sit forward, energized intent with laser like focus and listen to Ruchi Koval, who I have the pleasure of speaking to for the next few minutes. And at the end of it, I'll be back to wrap things up.

Daniel Lapin 12:22

Welcome, Ruchi Koval. Great to have you back here again, how you been doing?

Ruchi Koval 12:28

Thank you so much. It's great to be back.

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Daniel Lapin 12:32

It's been a few months since the launch of your book. And the last time we spoke on this podcast.

Ruchi Koval 12:38

Yeah, I think about half a year hard to believe.

Daniel Lapin 12:42

How's your life changed in the in the interim?

Ruchi Koval 12:45

Oh, I mean, dramatically. I'm now world famous. You know, it's wonderful.

Daniel Lapin 12:55

I know you're being given a cavalcade of fan mails, fan and fan letters that cascade down on you. Anything interesting that that you've picked up, like, what are you what are you like hearing from people? And people come up to you and say, Oh, I can't believe it. You wrote soul construction? I can't tell you what differences it's made to our life, though. What are the what are some of the things you hear? And how do you react?

Ruchi Koval 13:26

Yeah, it's a great question. I would say two things. Really, the first thing that I absolutely love to hear, and this might be surprising, is when people say that I haven't finished reading your book yet. Because I just can't swallow it all at once. There's so much there, it's so dense that I want to read it slowly and really let it sink in and reread parts and share with my family and friends. That is so gratifying to me as an author to hear that. And I'm like, take all the time you need because it really is. I mean, in a sense, it's a you know, it's a small book, but it's so it's so dense, and there's so much there. And so I don't want somebody to just zip through it. I want it to really think and so that is the first type of feedback that I love. And I've heard that from a lot of people that seems to be a theme and a trend. So and that was not something that I had expected to hear. So that's that's very gratifying. The second thing that I love to hear is this book has changed my life. And I also have heard that so many times. Now, you know, when I was writing the book, that's what I felt. I mean, that's what I that's why I wrote it because I know that there's life changing wisdom that I have received from others, that many people just don't have access to or don't know exist. And the fact that I have the ability to transmit this to others is just mind blowing. But you know, when you're writing a book, you become so enmeshed in the content that you sometimes will lose the forest for the trees. And you forget how life altering it is because you're busy dealing with sentence structure and chapter, organization. And so after the book was written, and I kind of took a step back, and then people started reading it, and then they're like, this book has changed my life. I'm like, Oh, yes, exactly. That's why I wrote it. That's why this content was so powerful to me. That's why I share it with others. And so when I hear that I'm like, okay. That's why I did what I did. exactly for this purpose.

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Daniel Lapin 15:33

Don't you love it when people tell you the books all marked up, and it's got posted notes in it and highlighted sections? Oh, yeah.

Ruchi Koval 15:40

Yeah, I love that. And, actually, here's my book. And it's got multiple bookmarks and all kinds of things that I want to share with people, different classes that I'm teaching it in. And I love that, you know, and I, I, that's what I want it to be. You know, some people feel like, well, you're not allowed to write in a book. I'm like, no, no, no write in the book, underline highlight bookmark, by all means, like, make it yours.

Daniel Lapin 16:02

Because I just, it's just a library book. You shouldn't write him, that's all.

Ruchi Koval 16:06

Yeah. Yeah. Well, I think because it's like a spiritual text. I think sometimes people feel it would be disrespectful to write in it. But, you know, the point is not to read it, the point is to study it. So by all means, you know, it should be done that way.

Daniel Lapin 16:22

You know, I've I've seen Chumashim Bibles, and also volumes of the Talmud that were owned, and, and studied lovingly and diligently by, by prominent sages of the past, that are densely packed with marginal notes in a pencil handwriting.

Ruchi Koval 16:42

Yeah, that's great. In fact, some of the some of the texts that I teach some of the ancient wisdom, my books are so marked and underlined and noted that I sometimes I'm a little scared that I should never lose this volume, because that information is not anywhere. It's not in any cloud, you know. So it's these, these books become very precious, because they're very much yours with your notes, your reflections and your, you know, comments. So it's very personal and very important.

Daniel Lapin 17:10

The book, the books, remarkable, and I too have, because we published it, I keep on hearing from people how life changing it has become, it's, it's really it provides a window into your own soul or window into your own makeup, and, and encourages and introspection that is, is almost unknown in popular culture today.

Ruchi Koval 17:38

Yeah, you know, it's so interesting, you say that, because I think that a lot of self, a lot of self help books, have this sort of undertone, or almost like an unspoken caveat: do this - in order to get what you want. This book is about do this to become the greatest version of yourself. And PS, your life will become much more satisfying and gratifying. And the lives of the people that you know, will become

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more satisfying and gratifying. But this is not about self-gratification. This is about self-transformation. And I think that speaks to the introspection that you mentioned earlier that when the purpose is to change me, then looking into myself with a critical eye, it can be an uncomfortable process, it's not something that people are going to do without a little coaching. So it's almost like you need a guide to show you how to do it, because we wouldn't naturally go there of our own accord.

Daniel Lapin 18:44

A lot of people who traveled for business, get asked the same question by me every time which is when you walk into the hotel room, and take off your coat and put down your suitcase. How long before you turn on the television set? And, and the answer reflects, I think, an unwillingness that many people have many of us have an unwillingness to think as long as there's a barrage of outside stimulation. I don't have to think and if I think I have to think about myself and peer into my own soul. And, and and ask me what I think of me. Having the TV on really takes away a lot of that. How do you get by that both in your personal coaching and counseling and, and also in the book? How do you get past the sort of frightening moment of I'm going to have to confront certain realities about myself.

Ruchi Koval 19:51

Yeah. Well, I find in a way that Mussar is almost like a self-filtering process, that people who are attracted to it are people who are willing to go there. And if they're not, then when they discover some of the benefits of practicing mussar, then they become willing to go there, even if they're not. I actually saw this in real time in a class that I was teaching yesterday, there was a woman who was sharing a difficulty that she was having with her sister-in-law. And it was during her son's Bar Mitzvah, and things didn't go the way she hoped. And there were a lot of hurt feelings, and she didn't know what to do. And she, she questioned to the group, should she confront her sister-in-law. So I, we were studying my book, and I took out the book, and I read from the chapter on speech, about rebuke, and about whether it whether and how it's appropriate to give another person rebuke. And I just read read to her, I actually just read open the book, and it open to this page, which happens sometimes. And I just opened to page 100. And I said, Well, you know, the Torah teaches us about when and how we're supposed to give rebuke, and when and how we're not supposed to give rebuke. So the first thing I shared first, the rebuke must be offered for the well being of the other person. So we just stopped right there. And she thought to herself, and I could see, I could see that she was struggling. She's a newer participant to mussar. And I could see that she really wanted to say that it was for the well being of the other person. And I watched her grapple with this honesty. And then she said, I don't think it's for the well being of the other person.

Daniel Lapin 21:35

Oh my goodness.

Ruchi Koval 21:37

And.... Over operate. So I think that studying, you know, mussar the one hand puts you in a position where you're willing to engage in that process. And also starting the process, right, just sitting in that group. And that's why studying mussar in a group is so powerful, because it's a very safe, pure

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supportive setting, where you know, that if you engage in that introspection, nobody is going to come down hard on you, but rather, they'll congratulate you, which is exactly what happened. for engaging in that difficult process. So

Daniel Lapin 22:20

What what self awareness, she had to be able to recognize that she was perhaps going to be deriving a little bit too much pleasure from rebuking someone else. Exactly. Extraordinary. Listen, Ruchi, we're we're throwing around the term mussar, which lies at the heart of the book. And it's something you've been a specialist in for many years already. But there are going to be people who are going to be joining us on this discussion, and it's going to be a new term. Explain it.

Ruchi Koval 22:56

Okay. I'm so glad you asked. So mussar is a Hebrew word that appears in the Bible many times, very much popularized by King Solomon. And technically translated, it means moral instruction, or moral discipline. What it means as a movement, as popularized by Rabbi Israel Salanter, in the 1800s, is that putting oneself through a process of moral discipline, particularly by studying character traits, and engaging in that kind of vulnerable introspection that you mentioned earlier? So character traits such as kindness, such as love, such as generosity, each one of my chapters in the book is a character trait, so acceptance, generosity, silence, you know, things we don't necessarily typically think of as character traits. So mussar is using the study of those character traits, to bring oneself to a higher state of spirituality. Or put more succinctly, it's the belief that focusing studying and improving one's character traits can be a primary path to becoming a better person.

Daniel Lapin 24:16

So when when somebody like Dale Carnegie wrote winning friends and influencing people, and you know, and I'm, I'm not picking on Dale Carnegie, and I'm not putting him down. There is much of value in that book, but but it's very goal oriented - Do these things, so as this will happen, as you spoke a little earlier, you you alluded to that as well. The real the reason that good things follow in the footsteps of somebody who embarks on a mussar program of introspection is that the person becomes, as you said, the best version of themselves. The the person becomes a bigger person and a person of greater character. And this is something that is perceptible. Most of us recognize that even if we can't always put a name to it, or we can't necessarily articulate what it is that we're seeing in somebody, but it's making ourselves making ourselves greater people. Am I Am I on the right track there?

Ruchi Koval 25:35

Yeah, absolutely. And it's interesting that you mentioned Dale Carnegie's book, because one time I think this goes back 10 years, one of the women in one of my study groups asked me about that book and said, Aren't the principles very similar to mussar, it's about respecting people, it's about putting them first. And I suggested and we did this for about a year we use Dale Carnegie's book as a mussar text. But with each lesson, we teased out what he is saying to do, and why he is saying to do it. So what he is saying to do is absolutely congruent with the principles of mussar. Why he's saying to do it is not.

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Ruchi Koval 26:17

So in Mussar, we do kind, respectful, spiritually evolved humble things. In order to the way I like to put it to polish our inner diamond, to become the most beautiful version of me. Now, sometimes, that might positively impact other people in real time. Sometimes it won't, sometimes it will more positively impact me in real time, sometimes it won't. That's secondary. The point is that I have been put here on this earth with a soul, a soul that is God given. And I have to give that soul back with interest. That at the end of my life, I have to be able to say to God, I made good on the investment that you gave me. I am giving you a return on your investment. You put me here with raw materials and unpolished diamond, and I'm giving you back a refined transformed version of me. Whereas in Dale Carnegie's book, right, I am doing these things. Some of them are quite manipulative.

Daniel Lapin 27:29

Very, yes, you Right, right.

Ruchi Koval 27:31

I am doing these things so that grandma will leave me the car in her will. So that I have a chance to become the partner of this company. That part's not mussar. And it can be it can be so hard to pin down. Because sometimes, like successful business practices might look like Mussar. How do you know you're practicing Mussar when nobody else can tell what you're doing. But you know that you have done something great. I'll give you an example. Let's say that you are standing in a group of friends and everybody's chit chatting, and all of a sudden some gossipy conversation comes up. Right. And a part of you wonders if you should say something, but you know that this crowd will never be able to hear you. So you very silently and humbly just sort of kind of slip away and mix into the crowd and join a different conversation. That is like classic mussar. Nobody will know. Nobody will say, Wow, you're so courageous. You're so brave. You're so strong. Nobody knows. It's internal. It's that internal greatness. Sometimes it's only you know, and God knows. But, you know, like I share in my mussar classes, that stuff can't help but leak. Inevitably, it will impact other people positively inevitably, it will impact you positively. But that's not why you're doing it. You're not doing it for this manipulative, goal oriented purpose. You're doing it for transformation.

Ruchi Koval 28:41

Internal transformation. Yeah.

Ruchi Koval 29:09

Yeah, so actually, I shouldn't say that inevitably, it will impact you positively. It will always impact you positively. What I'm saying is that often other people might not discern your growth right away, or might not appreciate it right away. But it will. And that's why like, at the end of each chapter in the book, I share a testimonial by somebody who's been practicing mussar. And very often that's what they say. Like my friends and family just started asking me, What are you doing? Because this is amazing.

Daniel Lapin 29:41

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Right. Yeah, I mean, just the example you gave earlier. Just a woman or a man for that matter, restraining themselves from letting fly at a family member or a colleague, because they've got a little mussar safety latch in their mouth that says, Hold on a sec, are you doing this because you're trying to make everything better? Or is there a part of you that just wants to let this person have it? I mean, to even stop yourself to, that's a huge step forward in self control. It's remarkable.

Ruchi Koval 30:19

Absolutely. And so rare. So countercultural.

Daniel Lapin 30:26

You know, I'm a guy, and we're, as you well know, we're sort of more we're results oriented. You know, we, we want to know, okay, how does this work? How does this do? How does this help and, and I've had to sort of slow down in this conversation a little bit, and hear what you're speaking about, which is the polishing of the jewel.

Ruchi Koval 30:50

Yeah. And, you know, part of, I think, part of the challenge of mussar is the patience that it requires, which is, of course, a character trait unto itself. But we do live in a results oriented society. Everybody wants to see the product. Everybody wants to see the bottom line, you know, and this process doesn't work like that. It takes real growth takes real time. It's like a slow cooking stew. There's no shortcut to a slow cooking stew, you know, and so,

Daniel Lapin 31:24

Or becoming a racing driver looking at it from my perspective.

Ruchi Koval 31:28

Okay. Exactly.

Daniel Lapin 31:31

You got to you, it takes time, there is no as there is no other there's no fast track.

Ruchi Koval 31:36

Yeah, yeah. And it's not really about the results, actually, it's really about the process. Because the truth is that we never are in control of the results that God has. God is in control of the results, right? We might decide to slip away from that conversation that I was mentioning earlier, and somebody might actually see us and make fun of us for that. Somebody might say, I noticed you walked away, what's the matter with you? You're too good for us now. You know, and so we might actually get backlash, sometimes for our desire to grow and do better. That's not in our hands. That's, that's God's department. What I'm in charge of is the process. You know, and I think that if we can go to bed at night, and kind of review our day and think to ourselves, I did good today. I'm proud of me today. That's where the growth is. That's how you chart your progress.

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Daniel Lapin 32:24

I was as tough on me, as I am on the people who report to me.

Ruchi Koval 32:33

Yeah. I mean, I don't think that as a society, we're very good at admitting our faults out loud. But I think a lot of them ruminate over that in private. And I think one of the most incredible benefits of Mussar is that even if I think you know, at the end of my day, that I'm not proud of how I handled certain things, one thing I can say for sure, is that I am working on it. I am doing what I can to make myself a better person. And very often, what I try to do is I try to turn my regrets into goals. So when I'm, you know, trying to fall asleep at night, and there goes my brain on the hamster wheel, you know, and I'm like, Why did I do this? And why did I do that? I'd say, Okay, I'm going to set a goal. What do I want to do differently tomorrow? You know, and actually the most serious goal setting and tracking of one's progress. You know, a serious student of mussar I haven't ever really engaged in this practice in a formal capacity. But serious students of Mussar would have a muster journal, and they would track they would set a particular character trait for X amount of time, they would review their progress each night. And they would the same way a company will track their growth or whatever they would, they would track their growth. I mean, that's really the ideal.

Daniel Lapin 33:47

We used to call it a [Hebrew spoken]. A the equivalent of a financial statement of the condition of your own soul.

Ruchi Koval 33:58

Yeah. Yeah. And that can be a scary thing to chart, you know, because sometimes we're not necessarily sure we want to know. You know the same way my kids who are young adults, they're like, scared to look at their bank statement online. You know, they're like, know, sometimes we don't necessarily want to face that, but it must be done.

Daniel Lapin 34:20

What do you think are the differences between teaching mussar now, in 2022, from perhaps doing so in 1957?

Ruchi Koval 34:34

Well, I wasn't alive in 1957.

Daniel Lapin 34:38

Yeah, sorry. I didn't not for one moment was I trying to imply that, you know, America has life in America has changed dramatically since the 1960s.

Ruchi Koval 34:52

And, I mean, I can even contrast it from when I started doing this 20 years ago, I've seen a change

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Daniel Lapin 34:57

Even better please do Yes.

Ruchi Koval 35:00

I find the biggest difference is that the reason I started teaching, mussar honestly, is because I found that it was one of the easiest entry points for people to study spirituality. Meaning, even if people weren't entirely sure what they believed about God or a higher power, but everybody could get around the concept of trying to be a better person. What I find now is that while that's still true, people are much more into self-esteem, self-preservation, self-care. And it really, sometimes eclipses the other-esteem, other-care. So for example, if I'm talking about kindness, it used to be self-understood that when you're talking about kindness, you're talking about kindness to others. Now, inevitably, it will come up in a class, but don't forget to be kind to yourself. Which is true. And I'll go there, and we'll talk about that. But it's a change, it's a shift. I'm not necessarily saying that it's a negative shift. Because every character trait is inherently neutral, and can be taken to any negative extreme, a person can be so into giving to others that they ignore themselves, and they burn out. And that's not healthy either. But they're just there is something about it, that rubs me the wrong way. I haven't completely finished defining it in my head. I do think that, you know, self-care, self-care is a great example, self-care wasn't a word when I started teaching mussar. And I think that there is a bit of a distortion with what self care means, Judaism and in general, like it's not self-care is not a spiritual concept unto itself. I don't need to take care of me just because I need to take care of me, I need to take care of me, so that I can be the best me to be of service in this universe.

Daniel Lapin 37:07

And so when when somebody says to you, look,

Ruchi Koval 37:19

what are my responsibilities? And?

Daniel Lapin 37:22

Yes. When somebody says to you, Well, isn't that isn't that selfish, that I'm focusing so much attention on my inner self, and on my soul? You know, what about the environment? And what about all the poor people in the world? Surely my time should go on that.

Ruchi Koval 37:48

Well, I mean, that's hardly mutually exclusive. In fact, they're the very same thing. Right? It says, in the Torah, that God wants us to be responsible stewards of this earth that he gave us. So that just ties into my character trait of responsibility. And it says in the Torah, that a person should work on their generosity, and not shut down their heart to the cries of the needy. So, me being generous, or me focusing on my character traits, is actually a service to the universe. So those are not mutually exclusive things. Paying attention to my inner world, is actually the most selfless thing I can do. Because if God put me on this planet, he has expectations of me. And he wants me to fulfill a certain purpose. And if not, if I'm not paying attention to my inner world, chances are what I'm going to do, like

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many people on this planet, is just running around paying attention to my outer world, my materialism and my bottom line, and my bank account and my kids and whatever I, you know, need to accomplish for my own ego for my own pride, by paying attention to my inner world. That's how I am serving the rest of the world in the best possible way.

Daniel Lapin 39:13

Right. And, yeah, no, I get that completely. That makes perfect sense, of course. And one of the things that that's been a focus of mine lately, which I think you might be able to shed some very helpful light on is that and even just this morning, actually, I was talking to a young man who said to me, I was talking to him about his life path where he's headed. And he said, Well, what I really want to happen is this. And I stopped him and I said, Look, one of the key things in understanding how the world really works is to know that that we don't get the life we want, we get the life that flows naturally from the actions that we take. And so generally speaking, when when we make mistakes in our path, and we either do things that take us off our desired path, or we fail to do the things that we need to do for this desired path. And it's usually not because we didn't know that we shouldn't do that thing, or we didn't know that we should do this thing. It's that we lacked the the inner strength. And so again, this may be me being male and results focused or externally focused rather than internally focused. But But help me with how Mussar and Soul Construction can help strengthen myself discipline, and my willpower to stop me doing things that I know I shouldn't be doing and to help me do the things I really know I ought to be doing.

Ruchi Koval 41:09

Yeah, yeah, it's a great question. And I think that it's something that every human being will ultimately struggle with, because we all make mistakes, mistakes are a part of living and mistakes are can be a part of growing if we if we leverage them correctly. So I think a big part of the reason why I wrote Soul Construction was to offer the most accessible form of mussar, that I knew how, meaning that even if somebody never heard of mussar before, or they never studied the Bible, or they're, they're even not unfamiliar with spiritual wisdom at all, that this is something that they could pick up and read. And I include contemporary examples and reference a reference to pop culture and psychology showing how all these things dovetail with with the lessons of mussar. And the reason it was so important for me to do that, is because what I've learned over the years of teaching mussar and learning it myself, is that when you study something regularly, when you expose yourself to the wisdom of something regularly, it will by default, have an impact on you. And so, you know, when you say that, you know, when a person makes a mistake, it's not necessarily because they didn't know it's because they didn't have the requisite willpower, I would actually state that just a little bit differently, which is they did it expose themselves to No, meaning the wisdom is out there. And at this, you know, juncture in history and 2022, there is no excuse to not have wisdom, it's available at the click of your fingers. It's available in the phones that are in everybody's pocket. And it's like, if a person doesn't know, it's because they didn't look hard enough. And so it's not just it's not just the knowing, you know, it's like one of the one of the most quotable rabbis, one of the Hasidic masters, the cuts go rabbi, he said that the greatest distance in the world is from the head to the heart. There is knowing in your head, and then there's knowing in your guts, if I can paraphrase. There's knowing in your guts, how do you take it from one

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place to another, right? That's, that's the journey of life. I don't think it's always about willpower. I think it's about constantly exposing yourself to wisdom, and

Ruchi Koval 43:29

constantly exposing yourself and willpower, there will be something inside of you, that increasingly becomes disgusted with negative behavior. So you're setting yourself up for success, that, you know, when people start engaging to use my example of earlier when people started engaging in gossip behavior, you know, whereas in the past, there might have been one side of you that says, Oh, I shouldn't really talk about this. And then the other side of who was it? Oh, but I really, really, really want to know, right? But if you consistently expose yourself to wisdom, then there will be a new part of you that says, you don't I don't want to hear this. This is going to make me feel gross. And so it becomes visceral. I don't think willpower is enough. I think it's the constant exposure to wisdom that somehow alters your choices, so that you have a different new wise voice in your head that didn't used to have a voice.

Daniel Lapin 44:28

And so the the mussar master. If I'm hearing you correctly, the mussar master is not somebody who doesn't feel the temptation to do wrong,

Ruchi Koval 44:39

right? Correct. Yeah, if you don't have the temptation to do wrong, you're not human.

Daniel Lapin 44:47

It's the man man or woman mussar isn't going to turn you into an angel is it?

Ruchi Koval 44:53

Unfortunately, no. But it will open up for You the more angelic side of you that perhaps you weren't in touch with before or you didn't know existed

Daniel Lapin 45:13

I'm really enjoying the way you're portraying this because it's, it's very different from the particular approach that our audience is accustomed to from me. And there's there's nothing you say that that I disagree with, but but I love it because you're you're saying it in such a different way. And in so much of a softer and more...It's more pleasing and more acceptable. I could hear you know, there'd be things I think that I would hear in the way you're saying them more comfortably, then I would hear in the way that I say them.

Ruchi Koval 45:59

Well, I appreciate that. Thank you.

Daniel Lapin 46:01

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And I think I mean, the book really does that it invites you literally, from page to page, it's, it's not sort of book, you can read one chapter in and then say, I think I've had enough, that doesn't happen. And,

Ruchi Koval 46:13

and that's also a big part of the reason why I chose to share a lot of my own vulnerabilities and struggles in the book. Because I, it's so important for people to know that access to wisdom doesn't make you perfect, it just makes you better. And so, I am not coming at this from this perspective of which I've also seen in some self help books, hey, look at me, I figured it all out. Now I'm going to tell it to you, I didn't figure it all out, I have struggled. But But this wisdom has helped me so much along the way. And now when I have a struggle, I usually know what I should do. It doesn't always mean it's easy to do. And it doesn't always mean that I do it. But an important part of the book was like, for me to show that, you know, I struggle with stuff just like everybody else, I get hurt, I get annoyed, I get angry. Tober... this type of wisdom is not for people who don't struggle. It's exactly for people who struggle, it's exactly for every human being in the world. And I what I've also found is that my struggles over the years have gotten more refined, meaning something that I used to, you know, grapple with, let's say 20 years ago, I don't grapple with those things anymore. I grapple with, you know, more, I'm not sure how to say it other than more refined, you know, but meaning that if my struggles have changed, if I can look back and take 10 years ago, or 20 years ago, I was struggling with that I don't struggle with that anymore, I've got that particular challenge nailed, I'm not going to indulge in that behavior anymore. I'm not going to retaliate with other people like that anymore. So I might still struggle with more subtle forms, like I might still find myself carrying a grudge toward that person, I wouldn't say anything to them like I would in the past. Right. So again, it doesn't mean that I don't struggle anymore, but it means that my struggle, my struggles have improved, my struggles have become better. So that's that's how I kind of sort of look at it like an elite athlete, right? Like an Olympian. So they might not get 100 in their score. But their mistakes are far less egregious than they had been when they weren't there when they were amateurs.

Daniel Lapin 48:33

To become a professional, mussar person, man or woman?

Ruchi Koval 48:38

Well, it wouldn't really be very mussar-y of you to say that I had. That's what I aspire. And again, I'm not, you know, comparing myself against anybody else, because that's another principle of mussar. It's not about where I, you know, it's, it's always just about looking at my previous self and saying, Have I become a better version of that? So there's no rankings, you know, in this stuff. It's really just saying, How have I grown?

Daniel Lapin 49:03

That's, it's not measuring against anybody else. It's measuring you against you today, as opposed to you yesterday is that is that the idea?

Ruchi Koval 49:11

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That is exactly the idea. That is exactly the idea. And, you know, God is not judging me based on anybody else. Because we all have different starting points. We all come into this world with different advantages and disadvantages, both in terms of nature, nurture, our families, our tendencies. And so all I have for reference is who I used to be.

Daniel Lapin 49:31

Right? Do you run into with, either with people who have read the book and talk to you or add speeches and appearances or even private clients? Where does personal insecurity intersect with a mussar program?

Ruchi Koval 49:56

Hey, that's a very interesting question. It's So the first character trait because I always think of things in terms of character traits, like, the first character trait that pops into my head when you say personal insecurity is the character trait of arrogance. Now, like I said before, every character trait is inherently neutral. And then you have an unhealthy extreme over on this side and an unhealthy extreme over on that side. So a sense of appropriate humbleness, that would be the balanced center of this character trait. Then over here, on this extreme, you have an exaggerated sense of your own importance. So this is where arrogance comes in. This is where, you know narcissists, like I wouldn't say narcissism, because that actually comes from insecurity, which is the other side, sometimes they can actually masquerade as each other, but where people just don't think of others, they're always just thinking of themselves, they just do what's good for them. That's arrogance. Over here, on this side, we have extreme insecurity. Where a person thinks they're nothing, that they don't matter that nobody cares about them. Both of these unhealthy extremes are essentially obsessed with self. Over here, I'm obsessed with myself, because I'm the only important person in the universe over here. I'm obsessed with myself, because I can't stop thinking about how I'm a nobody.

Daniel Lapin 51:22

Which is a it's a weird, distorted form. It's like the mirror image of arrogance in a way, isn't it?

Ruchi Koval 51:28

Yes, exactly. And they very often manifest in the same way. Meaning sometimes people act arrogant, because they're so insecure, they do not have a healthy sense of self. So the healthy middle road, is where I know exactly who I am. I'm not overly arrogant, because of that. I'm not overly insecure, you know, because if you think about like, the overly insecure person, right, they walk into a room, and they keep thinking, Oh, I didn't dress right. Oh, I look weird. Everybody's staring at me. Still exaggerated sense of self. So the healthy balance means I know what my strengths and weaknesses are. I'm not delusional, not not too much too little. I understand what I have to contribute to this world. And this is, I think, one of the most important points I am perfectly aware of which of my accomplishments and achievements are due to my own hard work and effort, which means I'm absolutely going to take pleasure and pride in that. And which of my accomplishments or achievements are just a gift from God. And for that, I have only gratitude. That's what a true healthy balanced sense of self looks like. So too much insecurity is actually on the arrogance spectrum.

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Daniel Lapin 52:53

So, Ruchi, as we're speaking, you, you comfortably and naturally drop our relationship with God into the conversation. Yeah. But you also said earlier, and I think this is true that the way you present the book, it makes no prereq prerequisite, it asks no religious declaration of faith. This is something that you can embark on and learn from whether or not you have already worked out your relationship with God. Is that right? Or am I wrong?

Ruchi Koval 53:35

No, that that is absolutely right. And part of the reason why I'm so comfortably talking about God is because I happen to be on a podcast with you. And I know that in this setting, most of the people interacting with this platform are comfortable with God. When I speak to audiences who are less confident or secure about what that means for them, I sort of lay low on the God piece, and I focus more on the personal growth piece. And even in the book, the beginning of the book is less God focused. As we go through the book, I sort of just as in a relationship with another person, I sort of gradually introduced the God piece. And at the by the end of the book, I'm talking a lot about God because I do think that it's a process for a person to get to a comfort level. And honestly, in my teaching, I very much I'm very focused and conscious of who I'm talking to. And I'm always sort of calibrating how much or how little I should be focusing on the god piece because for some people that can really be you know, a trigger or a touch point and I don't want to lose the baby with the bathwater. I wouldn't want someone you know, to reject Mussar, because they're not sure of their relationship with God. I'll actually share with you something so interesting that I heard on this topic from Alan Morinis. Yeah, he's he's a brilliant author. And he founded something called the Mussar Institute, which is an online place where people can study mussar. And he studied from one of the most prominent Mussar teachers, Rabbi Yechiel Perr from Morocco in New York. And when he first started studying with him, he was a very secular Jew. He had, I think, a PhD and filmmaking and archaeology very, very accomplished professionally. And

Daniel Lapin 55:27

is that no longer the case?

Ruchi Koval 55:30

Which part?

Daniel Lapin 55:31

That he's not still a secular Jew.

Ruchi Koval 55:33

Oh, no, he's not. He's a religious Jew today.

Daniel Lapin 55:36

Oh, how fascinating. I didn't know that. Yeah, yeah. Is he still up in Vancouver?

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Ruchi Koval 55:42

He is. Yeah.

Daniel Lapin 55:44

Interesting. So I should tell you, we do have a number of deeply committed, I will almost want to say religious but deeply committed atheist listeners. And I know, because they write to me quite often. And what's great about them is they have no insecurity at all. They're comfortable atheists. And because of that, we're able to communicate and discuss ideas, and they are able to raise questions and issues, and I'm able to respond to them. So I kind of like having them as regular listeners of the show, because for exactly what you're talking about it, this has to stand on its own. It's, it can't require the crutch. Yeah, of some predetermined commitment before we embark on the conversation at all.

Ruchi Koval 56:43

Exactly, exactly. And actually, for many people, I have found that Mussar became a bridge, which which with which they could then begin to explore other forms of virtue at like other connections with gone. Whereas without that entry point, I don't know that I know for a fact that there would not have been an open door. But back to Alan Morinis. So this is exactly what I was saying. So he's studying with this rabbi, and he loves Mussar. But he doesn't know what he believes about the rest of this stuff. And he asked him, he wrote who Alan Morinis wrote one of his books that he asked her by pair, he goes, so can you take Mussar out of the general context of Jewish spiritual wisdom, and just have it stand on its own? And Rabbi Perr did not give him an answer. And he asked them again, at a later date didn't give an answer. And he asked him again at a later date. And finally Rabbi Perr says to him, Alan, if I were to ask you to take the radio out of your car, and put it in your kitchen, and that's how you should listen to music. What would you say? So Alan thinks about it. And he says, Well, you could. But why would you want to? And he said, here's your answer. Can mussar stand on its own? Yes, it can. But why would you want to extract it? From its roots from its natural habitat from where it came from? I thought that was fascinating.

Daniel Lapin 58:20

Very nice. Yes. Yeah, very much. So. You, you have Hasidic blood in you don't you?

Ruchi Koval 58:28

I do. I do. Yeah. On both sides. Actually, one of my great great grandparents was a famous Hasidic master. But even I mean, even as far back as my grandparents, who three of three of them are Holocaust survivors, they all came from Hasidic homes before the war.

Daniel Lapin 58:48

Interesting, and I grew up in a, in a background that couldn't be more distant from the Hasidic tradition. And that actually, was the mussar tradition. My primary Rabbi for many years, was somebody who was descended from the rabbi Israel Salanter school of thought. And I just, I just find it interesting that we're meeting and I love everything you're saying and how you say it. You've you sort of moved from the

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Hasidic avenue into the mussar, which I want to say is, is a slightly sterner business slightly more austere business, than pure Hasidism. Do you see it that way or not?

Ruchi Koval 59:44

I mean, I do think that in post Holocaust America, a lot of descendants of the Hasidic lineage ended up studying in Jewish schools, which were more based on the Lithuanian style of which was decidedly non Hasidic, as you said, and the mussar tradition arose in the Lithuanian communities and afterwards spread to other places. So, in a sense, the post Holocaust America ended up becoming somewhat of a melting pot in terms of these traditions. So, you know, there are many people like, like me, like my husband who descend from Hasidic families, who the school that I went to growing up, the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland was founded by the Desslers, which was a direct line from the mussar move. Yes, yes. And that, but on the other hand, you know, some of the some of the teachers that we had descended from the Hasidic tradition, so there was definitely a melding that happened after the war. But in a way, I, I don't know, it could be that I am totally over fancying myself here. But in a way, I think that my Hasidic roots and my Hasidic blood, which is, as you said, less stern, like there's very much a focus on God loves everyone, and we need to approach Judaism with joy, that that can also almost be married to the Mussar tradition. That's

Daniel Lapin 1:01:11

exactly what you've done in your book, Ruchi. That's, that's part of why it is. It's a beautiful blend, and, and it reads ever so much more elegantly, and invitingly, it's not intimidating, it's inviting, so much more than then some of the classic mussar texts that you and I have both studied. So absolutely, you represent this, this elegant hybrid of the Hasidic warmth, along with the seriousness of the, of the, the Mussar, almost quantifying, aspect of, you know, measuring yourself and your progress. It's beautiful.

Ruchi Koval 1:01:54

I appreciate that, thank you. And I do think that in the world that we find ourselves in, it's so different from these traditions that started in the 17, and 1800s, where if you lived in a certain geographical location, that was the only influence you had access to, unless you were wealthy enough to travel throughout Europe, and sort of pick up different different disciplines and different traditions. But now in 2022, you know, we have the proverbial entire world at our fingertips, and I do see that many seekers of spirituality, they'll take a little bit from statism, and a little bit from mussar and a little bit from, you know, the Lithuanian style, you know, commitment to study the almost academic approach toward Judaism, and, and they'll kind of put them together in this new blend that didn't used to exist, you know, and I think there's something great to be said about that. Because the truth is, there are many paths up the mountain. And we actually don't have to pick just one. And I can learn from many different kinds of teachers who come from many different kinds of backgrounds, and I, myself and everybody else, we're all complex mixes of all these different types. And so it's, you know, it's very refreshing and exciting, that there are so many different teachers to learn from and things to read and people to learn from and, and without, I didn't intend to create a blend in this book, I didn't even really think about it that much until you just asked me. But when I think about it, that's just who I am. Because I am the recipient of between my Hasidic grandparents, my Mussar, you know, day school that I went to my husband who

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studied in a very Lithuanian yeshiva, you know, rabbinical school, he studied in a place called tells, which was originally in Lithuania, one of the most, you know,

Daniel Lapin 1:03:41

where my father studied.

Ruchi Koval 1:03:43

Okay, great, right. So I guess by default, I'm sort of like this composite and, and I think that's great. I think it's exciting.

Daniel Lapin 1:03:54

Well, I would have done a lot better in your Shiva if the person teaching the mussar would have been you rather than who it actually was. But I'm only about a quarter of the way through all the things I wanted to discuss and hear you on. So we'll have to do it again. If that's okay with you, we'll proceed but but but for right now, I think what we've tried to do and succeeded to some extent is help people realize that there is a huge, exciting, wonderful world of introspection through the magic of mussar that most people don't even dream of, because our culture, as I mentioned with the hotel room, I think our culture discourages serious introspection. Our culture encourages introspection about how do you feel about this? Yeah, but not not a more metric analysis of how am I doing in terms of because To be a better person. Yeah.

Ruchi Koval 1:05:02

Well, and also, I mean, part of it goes to, you know, the commercialization of our world, that it's easy to just turn on the TV and drown it out. And TV is created to sell entertainment. You know, news is created to make money. So there are so many forces that are working on us to do what's easy, because that's what's being advertised to us. Because that's where people stand to make money. The hard thing is to turn off that noise. And to engage in this, you know, very quiet, soft force that's waiting for us. You know, and by the same token, how I said that, you know, wisdom is so accessible and so available. But by the same token, it's competing with so much nonsense, that it does become hard to find. And this is what people tell me all the time. How did I never know that this wisdom existed, and that makes me sad. It really does. And that's why like, of course, I want everybody to read this book. Because I think the world would be better off with mussar. But I want to make something inaccessible, accessible. That's really what I'm trying to do. Because it's just so valuable.

Daniel Lapin 1:06:17

It's exactly right. And, and I don't think there's any question whatsoever that becoming adapted to a mussar approach, in life and in your own self development. It, it makes for a better marriage, it makes for a better family life. It makes for better relationships with friends. And astonishingly, but undoubtedly, in my view, it makes for better relationships, in business, in one's career as well. And so the book is a remarkable gateway to a new life. And people who already own it and have studied it, report exactly that and people who yet have the exciting adventure awaiting them, well, I envy you is all I can say to you all. So Ruchi, thanks so much.

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Ruchi Koval 1:07:13

My pleasure.

Daniel Lapin 1:07:14

This was in regards to your family and look forward, look forward to our next opportunity to continue exploring the the wonderful world of mussar. You've, you've really you've really opened a couple of doors for me as well over the last six months, I have to tell you, so I appreciate that. Until next time,

Ruchi Koval 1:07:36

okay, thank you so much.

Daniel Lapin 1:07:37

Thank you. Well, here we are back again. And as I think you could probably tell, I really enjoyed chatting with Ruchi Koval about her book Soul Construction. And as I said earlier, I want to remind you that you can obtain this in in any way it's so important. As I said, it could be one of the most exciting adventures you've ever embarked upon. Fighting outside foes is challenging, there's no question about it. But fighting the inner foe dominating yourself. Extracting from yourself a level of discipline and focus, a level of performance, a level of restraint and control, the ability to imply impose limits on ourselves. All of these are the things that turn a person into a great person. And a person that effortlessly exudes greatness, right? No great person ever has to thump his chest and say I'm great. You don't have to do that. Right in exactly the same way as a very wealthy person never ever has to advertise. He doesn't have to tell you, he's wealthy, it comes across. And even if he's wearing an old pair of jeans and a T shirt, if you're sensitive to it, you can tell in the same way somebody who has achieved in a greatness or is even on the journey towards achieving inner greatness, radiates that perceptively to people around they don't always know what they're feeling. But they do feel that you are an unusual person you're somebody worth being involved in and connected with. So the the the real life implications of this are almost without limits. And the beautiful thing is that with rookies help, we've made this available in in several different ways. You might want to hear the book audibly. Instead of reading it, you might be somebody who likes listening to the book, you know, maybe in the evening, when you're getting ready to retire, maybe on a train or a plane or a bus, or maybe while you're exercising. Well, rocky herself took the trouble to read and so you hear in her voice, you will hear the passion and commitment that comes through of helping you on this journey of what is known as mussar so you can get it audibly. You might want to download it and you can do that as well. Just remember the website RabbiDanielLapin.com, which you'll see. And the the other possibility is you might be in other countries, right? We've we've had a lot of fan mail from people around the world on this book. And they are Amazon has print on demand program, right so you can get this book. And even if you're in another country, it doesn't have to be shipped from the United States of America. You can have it in pretty much whatever. Well, not every country but a lot of countries in which I have pins in my map, a lot of countries in which I am so proud to have happy warriors distributed in in 100 different countries around the world.

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Daniel Lapin 1:10:43

So I hope you enjoyed the conversation. I know I did. And I know I learned something. I came away with a renewed passion for this journey. And it's something I think you will too. So until we get together again next week, I am your rabbi, and I am helping you focus on your five F's and achieving this program of working on yourself through the magic of mussar you will be doing everything you possibly could for achieving growing and enhancing your family, your finances, your faith, your friendships, and perhaps most of all your physical fitness. I'm Rabbi Daniel Lapin. Until next week, God bless.