

## The Rabbi Daniel Lapin Podcast

**Episode:** *Smash the Obstacle to Your Self-Improvement*

**Date:** 08/18/23 **Length:** 1:14:37

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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### SPEAKERS

Ruchi Koval, Daniel Lapin

### TRANSCRIPT

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#### **Daniel Lapin** 00:02

Greetings, everybody, and welcome to all the happy warriors to this episode of The Rabbi Daniel Lapin show, where we have the opportunity to speak to the author of this book, it's called Soul Construction: Shape Your Character Using Eight Steps from the Timeless Jewish Practice of Mussar. And it's become enormously popular. It's available on our website at RabbiDanielLapin.com. And we are hearing and continue to hear from people whose lives it has impacted and made serious changes to so I thought it was time to have the author back on Mrs. Ruchi Koval. And we've been trying to put this together for a little while. But thank you so much for making it happen.

#### **Ruchi Koval** 00:54

My pleasure, it's an honor to be here again.

#### **Daniel Lapin** 00:58

Gosh, well, perhaps the first place to start might be the enormous preoccupation there is not just in the United States, but around the world with self-development and self-improvement. Now, there are certain obvious areas, for instance, the most recent edition of the Friday Wall Street Journal had as it always does a section they called mansion. And in this, they usually highlight a trend in homes or unusual homes for sale or what people are doing to their homes. And it's, in some ways, to me, it's the most interesting part of the Friday Wall Street Journal. But in this most recent week, they highlighted people who rebuild their homes for health and longevity. And so for instance, although I have no idea what the supposed benefits are, one couple spent more than the price of an average car, installing a machine that injects hydrogen into the water of the home. Hydrogenated water, I have no idea. But, and infrared rays on everything that comes into the house and air circulation. And yeah, filtering systems were the least of it. But, and a lot of it geared towards longevity. So I kind of understand that. I understand that's an area of self-improvement, with a very tangible, real-world impact, you know, I'm, I'm going to be healthier and fitter, and I'm going to look better. And then in that same category of our people who are pretty serious about gyms, going to the gym, and working out and, and again, self-improvement, you know, I get it. Another category of self improvement is financial. And that's an area

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that that I spend a lot of time in. And, I get that as well. That's very, very straightforward. People understand that if there are certain steps they can take, and certain strategies that they can deploy, that will increase the amount of money they have available, then those are things they're most likely going to want to do.

**Daniel Lapin** 03:49

But we're talking about another area altogether, we're talking about self-improvement on an internal level. And, yes, I would be among the first to argue that fixing up the inside, and I'm going to let you find probably better ways to define it than I am. I will have no trouble arguing that fixing up the inside will have impacts on the outside. So very often, some of the things that impede people's financial growth are what I call spiritual factors. An example of that might be if you have built into the idea that you somehow part of your spiritual subtext as sort of a script that runs inside of you, that there to make money you've got to be a mean greedy kind of person. If that is locked into your psyche, then I can well understand that fixing up the way you think, is going to invariably have an impact on how you do financially. Or if speak about, the holistic nature of spiritual and physical, you know how placebos work? And how it is that somebody who somehow thinks he's got a terrible disease will very often have a more challenging recovery than somebody who's optimistic. I've got a lot of data. I mean, the literature is full of how particularly cardiac patients recover better if they have strong social networks, if they have good family, and good social lives. So granted that all these things do interconnect. But there are organizations devoted to self-improvement, I'm thinking of something called Landmark Forum, is that something that's ever come across your radar?

**Ruchi Koval** 06:09

Absolutely, yeah.

**Daniel Lapin** 06:10

So there's a whole world of that. And although it's getting harder and harder to find a good bookstore to visit, whenever Susan and I do manage, we usually stop in at a bookstore. And I must say, I pretty much make a beeline for the Self-Help section. And it's not just one shelf, it's bookcases full, ranging, as I say, physical, financial and everything in between. So you speak of and this is the subtitle of the book, SSoul Construction: Shape Your Character Using Eight Steps from the Timeless Jewish Practice of Mussar. Why do I want to shape my character? I'm a skeptic.

**Ruchi Koval** 06:54

Okay. So it's interesting that in your introduction, you framed it as sort of like an external self-help and internal self-help. Which is true, that is that is an accurate construction. But I think there's another way to look at it as well. And that would be finite self-help and infinite self-help. Meaning that, you know, let's just talk about the anti-aging piece that you mentioned to yourself, right, I think, you know, obviously Anti-Aging is a whole industry products, you know, particularly marketed to women, but also to men, products and services and gyms, and, you know, massages and spas and all of this all this anti-aging, you know, and the truth is that Judaism, particularly in the ancient Mussar texts, Pirkei Avot's Ethics of the Fathers, which I draw upon, in my book, Soul Construction a number of times, makes the point that

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our bodies are finite, but our souls are infinite. Right. And while our bodies are most certainly worthy of investing time and energy into and I know in your work, you describe the five F's, right? And I believe fitness is one of them

**Daniel Lapin** 08:04

absolutely yes.

**Ruchi Koval** 08:05

Right. So we certainly are charged with caring for our bodies, because our bodies are sacred containers for our soul. And our bodies are the mechanism by which we can do good in this world, right, because a disembodied soul can't do anything, right, we need our hands to do good, we need our mouth and our eyes and our brains and our bodies to do good in this world. So we have to care for these sacred containers that have been given to us by God. Also, we have to recognize that our bodies are by definition declining. From the time we're, I don't know, 20, 25 years old, whatever is a person's physical peak, our bodies are declining. And it doesn't matter how many, with all due respect to the anti-aging industry, it doesn't matter how much cream we use around our eyes, our bodies are declining. However, Ethics of the Fathers makes the point over and over again, that our souls actually age like fine wine, if we put the correct effort into it through Mussar through Soul Construction, right? And that our souls - the opposite of declining, the older we get the Wiser we have the potential to become the more experience we've had in this world, the more we have the opportunity to learn from our mistakes and the mistakes of others. From the things that we've seen in this world and society makes a gigantic mistake in discounting the elderly and worshipping youth and assuming that young people are smarter, faster, know better, and that old people are sort of like husbands, right? That is a huge, anti-Jewish, anti-godly, you know, message. So, a person should certainly invest time and energy into their bodies and they should also be asking themselves, am I at least investing as much time you know, into my soul care routine, as I do into my skincare routine? Right? Because my soul, and right, this as a Jewish belief, my soul is going to outlive me by eternity. And so like that, that's really where I should be investing the lion's share of my time and energy, because it's infinite. And that's, that's what's going to be around, you know, eternally. So as much as we want to make sure that we're caring for our bodies, we want to make sure at least as much as we're taking care of our soul. And the study of Mussar is soul care. It's caring, and nurturing and nourishing, and growing and magnifying our souls, which are forever. So it's soul care is self care, right? Because I am my soul as much as I am my body. And you know, as a culture, we define ourselves by our body, How tall am I? How attractive am I? You know, how, how have I aged? Have I aged? Well, when people say Have I aged well, they're usually talking about their bodies, not their souls. But we have to remember that our souls are also us. Those are our ideas, our desires, our thoughts, our feelings, our ambitions, what makes us us, our values. So investing in your soul is self care. And that's really the feedback that I get from so many people who have read the book, I have to share with you, I actually have been studying with two college girls who have been home for the summer. And every Sunday night, they would come to my house at 7pm. And we would study the book Soul Construction, we covered the chapter on forgiveness, we covered the chapter on happiness. And we touched a little bit on the chapter on renewal, you know, in advance of the holidays, which are coming upon us soon. And last night, I said goodbye to one of the

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sisters, one of them already went back to college and other ones leaving this week. And she was crying. As we were saying goodbye. And she said, You know, I initially said yes to these sessions to make my dad happy. But she said, I realized that I'm going to miss them so much, because they really fill me up. So it's soul care, it's self care. It's powerful.

**Daniel Lapin** 12:07

It sounds as if that girl had really, in a sense, was a refugee from an epidemic of meaninglessness that permeates the campus to such an extent these days. And if that is the case, then oddly enough, the antidote seems to be from the past, something old, whereas the culture on the campus is the new. I think it's an aspect maybe of what you were just saying, youth versus age, and new versus old. Is there that dichotomy? In other words, is the antidote to what she? Or what inspired her to seek you out? What was that, did she ever articulate it as a meaninglessness that pervades her life on campus.

**Ruchi Koval** 13:18

So her father, who is a friend of our family actually set it up, because he comes to synagogue every week. And, you know, he studies and he hears all these ideas, and he wanted his daughters to have this as well. So I, you know, admire that greatly. And the girls, they actually come from a very beautiful, respectful family, and they respect her father enormously. But I think, and I think in many cases, in many instances, she has actually been raised with many of the values with many of the basic values of Judaism. So that's unusual in our modern era. But I think one of the things that she was struggling with is that, you know, and this is what this is a very, very important part of my book, is that these ancient, foundational, traditional ideas have even more relevance, the crazier our world gets, right? It's not like, oh, the crazier our world gets, the more out of touch those ideas are the very opposite is true. So when she looks around at some of the dilemmas that she's having on campus, whether it's, oh, this girl wants to room with us next year, but she's not a good person, what should we do? Or I have a moral dilemma, am I allowed to talk about it with a third friend, and I started describing to her that Judaism has the wisdom to navigate real life, you know, conflicts and that this ancient that's why I think it was so important, you know, to use this word timeless in the subtitle, the timeless Jewish practice of Mussar. Is that Yes, it's ancient, and it's also timeless is that these ancient truths are so almost frighteningly relevant in the modern age. And when she started hearing some of these ideas, I think she actually felt a profound sense of relief. You know, because a lot of times people have this, especially young people have this vague sense that the craziness in today's world is at odds with their inner moral compass. But they don't know how to articulate it. They don't know how to define it. They don't know how to explain it. And they certainly don't know how to navigate it. So when I explained to her that, you know, Mussar and Jewish tradition has protocol for these things, right? It was like, Oh, wow, who knew? And all of a sudden, the issues start to make sense. It's just such a beautiful thing to behold. It doesn't matter how crazy the world gets, there is this ancient compass that is never going to change.

**Daniel Lapin** 15:51

You can be anchored to reality, by something old. And save yourself from being buffeted by the tempests of modernity.

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**Ruchi Koval** 16:02

And to follow on your metaphor of sailing, because I know that is a passion of yours. So to follow on that metaphor, you know, Rabbi, Dr. Akela Tats who is a South African, now, British, Rabbi and scholar and physician, you know, he said, he said something in his book *Letters to a Buddhist Jew*, that when a person is in a small boat, and they feel themselves being pushed by the wind, the best thing to do is to hit yourself to a larger boat. And so he calls that larger boat, that's the Jewish tradition. It's large, it's old, it's timeless, it has withstood the test of time. You don't have to keep yourself safe all by yourself, a little boat in the storm, you can hit your boat to a larger boat and rely on that ancient powerful body of wisdom and knowledge to keep you on course.

**Daniel Lapin** 16:58

Are you finding in the people you speak to and I know you lecture a great deal, and you talk to a lot of people? Are you finding any struggle that emerges from a necessary readjustment? It used to be that we sold everything that was new and modern, I mean, the key words in marketing were modern, new, fresh. And, and yet, in an inexplicable way, for most of us, we're suddenly finding that terms that have to do with modern and new and fresh such as progressive for instance, presume that progress is pure, and, and that new is positive and modern, is valuable. And all of a sudden, we have to say to our children, and to people that turn to us for advice, wait a second, you cannot, you can no longer presume. You used to be if I could get the newest kitchen appliance or, or the call with the most modern feed I'm so I'm so accustomed to associating modern and new with positive and desirable and good. And yet, all of a sudden, in recent years, when it comes to the area of human life, and how to live and how to structure your life and, and the ultimate values by which you live your life, all of a sudden, the words have reversed meaning. Progressive is not good and new and modern is not necessarily helpful and correct.

**Ruchi Koval** 18:49

You know, it's so interesting that you bring that up, because I find that culture is very much a pendulum. So for instance, I'm sure you've followed the trend of Jewish matchmaking on Netflix. So it's so fascinating to me, because it used to be that when people would ask me questions about this, like about how I met my spouse, or how my kids are dating, you know, and I would have to sort of, because we dated very traditionally in the Orthodox tradition, and there wasn't casual dating or any of this. And it was such a paradigm shift. It took me so long to even explain how we did it or why we did what we did. Now, all I have to say is, oh, it's like Jewish matchmaking on Netflix. And all of a sudden people know exactly what I'm talking about. And, you know, it's so fascinating how culture changes. But my cousin who is a Jewish matchmaker, she has set up I don't know, at least two dozen couples. She told me that recently she has been getting phone calls from secular Jews who are looking for matchmakers in the wake of this TV show. Why? Because in the era of dating apps, and the swipe left, swipe right, People are getting increasingly fed up with this non-personal, you know, fake image-driven way of meeting people. And they are actually looking for something new, which is really something old. And they're starting to think to themselves, what if I could reach out to an actual person who gets to know me? And then who knows other people and can fix us up? Isn't that so new and modern and, you know, cutting edge? Really, it's a return to ancient personal values. And so I actually find that in some ways, society

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is getting saturated with the digital age, and choosing to step away from it sometimes to re-engage in old-world values, because it feels new to them. Right to the digital natives, the these, you know, kids, Gen Z, or whatever they call them, right? These young people in their 20s, who grew up in this world who never didn't know, a digital world are finding newness and freshness in these old-world ideas. It's actually fascinating.

**Daniel Lapin** 21:16

And that extends outside the Jewish community as well. I'm finding that what you're talking about resonates with me. I, after having been involved with Susan, in many, many, many matches in our synagogue in California.

**Ruchi Koval** 21:35

Oh, I didn't know that. That's, that's such a beautiful opportunity.

**Daniel Lapin** 21:38

111 weddings? Yeah, over 15 or 16 years. Yeah. Now, what we realize then, of course, was that introducing a man and a woman is perhaps 5% of the job. Particularly with people who grew up in secular non-religious backgrounds. The 95%, part of the job only began after they had met, starting with even explaining, and much more than explaining, helping a man to get the message from his head to his heart, which sometimes is the most arduous and difficult 12-inch journey, I can think of the idea that, yes, marriage is limiting. There's no question about it. Of course, it limits. You don't know that the most amazing woman isn't gonna come around the corner, tomorrow or next week. And so yes, that does close off. But the idea that limitations are paradoxically indispensable for growth and progress. And so, in terms of time management, we have a teaching a unit on time management, which teaches that one of the most important words you need to know for managing your time effectively is the word "no". In other words, you have to identify the things you're going to say no to because otherwise, you can easily fill up your available time on all kinds of fascinating and sometimes even important things, but things that are not on the schedule for this week. So all of that I mean, the that whole area of matchmaking and marriages, very, very challenging, and, and a lot of work. But one part of it that I got to think I could sell on a, you know, a television talk show, it makes so much sense to me. And I'm just worried that I may be getting a little out of touch with reality here. So I'm asking you, how would I do if I want to do try and sell a traditional matchmaking approach? And part of my sales pitch is the following. If you subscribe to Lapin's, matchmaking system, number one, you won't actually see her I'm talking to men now, but women as well. Either way, both of them, you're not going to actually see one another until you've spoken for eight hours. So there's going to be audio connection, but no video connection. And the reason for that I mean is obvious because we guys tend to get a picture in our minds and it turns out to be a real obstacle because in this day and age, very few real life women look anything like the woman that exists in our heads, so. So I'd say that if you qualify eight hours of conversation, then you'll move to video, if both of you are still on the same page. And then obviously it goes without saying that there is no not only is there no expectation of physical intimacy, but it's actually not even on the cards, it's ruled out. I've got to think that for me, for women I can really see the removal of pressure being a huge benefit. But I actually have discovered that for many men, there is relief too, that that is

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not an expected development on the third or fifth or ninth date, or whatever it is. So how would I do in your experience? How well would I be able to sell Lapin's matchmaking system?

**Ruchi Koval** 26:02

Okay, well, first off, I'm pretty sure there's a reality TV show about this system. But I forgot what it's called. But my initial thought, is that this is so countercultural, that it would be super compelling. Because I do think that people are saturated with everything goes, all expectations, you're selling your body. You know, even just, you know, the dating app having pictures. I mean, even in the Jewish Orthodox Jewish matchmaking scene, pictures are a hotly debated topic.

**Daniel Lapin** 26:39

Yes. It's really great. As a father of six girls, I'm really bothered by that.

**Ruchi Koval** 26:44

That's right. And you know, even if there are no pictures, everybody has Googled, you know, we all know how to internet stalk people. So I think that there would be, look, you would definitely have people who are like, no way in the world I'm doing that. But I think there is a countercultural revolution going on, where people are sick and tired of the image driven judgmentalism that happens in the world of dating. And I think, I think if I were an investor, I would sign on. I do I think that there's a place for this, I think that there is basically what I'm hearing you say, is what if you could put your -- What if you could put your soul on the table, before you put your body on the table?

**Daniel Lapin** 27:31

Oh, can I use that line when I sell this? Absolutely. No, that's, that's, that's beautiful. And that really, that brings us back to Soul Construction, the book, this, this, this book that's really making waves in in our world. And I'll tell you what, I wanted to ask you about. Yeah, I've been struck lately. About estrangement is your, your heart is when you when you get interested in a certain topic. I became interested in trees about two weeks ago. And now everything I pick up, everything I look at all of a sudden, has trees. And in all that's happening is I'm noticing what I'm interested in much more often. But something that I've been noticing a lot is family estrangement. And I've been talking about this. And what it is, is that people go to therapy therapists, and the therapy industry is a huge industry in the United States. And one of the easy outs for the casual less than diligent therapist is essentially to say, Look, your parents ruined your life. Now, what they're doing is riding a wave that is already there, because we have built into us an existing tendency to feel that, and this is from our youngest childhood, everyone else's parents are much nicer and more reasonable than your parents. And there wouldn't be a fifth commandment in the Bible, if we didn't already have a preconceived tendency to not honor our parents. And so we're given this commandment to counter the natural tendency we have. And now I sit down with a therapist who starts bringing out in me asking me to talk about the mistakes my parents made, and the way my parents damaged my future. It gets to the point where now, large numbers of people in this country I'm familiar with, and large numbers The people in this country are permanently estranged from their parents. And when I talk to people like that, in conversation and at lectures and I say why? The first thing is, well, you don't know how they abused me. And so when did this abuse

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happen? You know, when I was a teenager, which is 40 years ago. So I say to them, I'll tell you what I, I am interested in what you're saying, and I want to hear about your problem. But I don't want you to use two words, I want you to talk to me without using the word trauma, and without using the word abuse. And the reason is because I am an engineer, by trade, that's what I was trained as, and that's what I practiced. And in engineering words have definable meanings. The trouble of trauma is it's undefined. A person who watched his family being massacred by Nazis in World War Two, and survived by spending three years in a cellar, had trauma. And the person whose parents took him out of private school and put him in public school, oh, he has trauma as well. And a word that has so little modulation to it, I don't want you to use and abuse I certainly don't want to use because that also has an undefined broad range. So you know, tell me what your parents did. And then it becomes a much more challenging job. Because invariably, it comes out that their parents were perfectly normal and perfectly natural. And, and so I was thinking about this. And I pick up your book, as I often do. And chapter seven is essentially, well, it's about renewal. But what I wanted to ask you is this in my mind, what seems to have vanished here is the moral quality, the character quality, the aspect of your soul, which says, people can atone, I can forgive? Yes, I can get past it. If somebody is suffering from family estrangement, the sibling, sometimes it's a child, it's a parent. What can they expect to gain? How could they change their lives? Because repairing a family estrangement? Is life-transforming, isn't it?

**Ruchi Koval** 32:41

Absolutely. No question about that.

**Daniel Lapin** 32:42

And so what what could what, what where... What are some of the paths that soul construction leads the person along?

**Ruchi Koval** 32:54

Yeah, it's an excellent question. And, and it is a very, very big problem in our society today, this deep, deep fissure between the generations where the phenomenon of children, adult children estranging their parents is, it's no longer a rarity. And that is a terrible thing. You know, you mentioned the word abuse and the word trauma and about how they're completely unregulated. I will add to that the word toxic,

**Daniel Lapin** 33:29

oh very nice, thank you. Yes,

**Ruchi Koval** 33:31

People append the word toxic to relationships, and to people so casually, that it has ceased to have any meaning. And this is something that I talk about a lot in my lectures. And, you know, before we get into this, I just have to comment, you know, I do have eight chapters in my book. And of course, they address eight different character traits. But of course, human beings are not divisible into little pieces like that. All the pieces, you know, blend and impact and are impacted by all the other pieces. So you brought up chapter seven, which is the chapter on renewal, which is about coming back from our



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mistakes, and refreshing ourselves and being able to forgive ourselves and move on the ability to change negative patterns and habits in order to find fulfillment and to renew ourselves into the person we really were meant to be. The second chapter in my book is on forgiveness. And that's kind of related in the sense that it is giving other people the option of renewal, opening the door for the possibility that other people can come back from their mistakes, that they're not unforgivable. And, of course, this impact, this is impacted by the first chapter, which is about favorable judgment, and telling yourself that maybe people did the best they could with the tools they have, and maybe those tools were very limited. So in the case of parental estrangement, or in general familial estrangement, one of the things that I talk about in my books is that I believe that there are three categories of relationships. The first category of relationships is relationships that are generally speaking emotionally healthy, but there are bumps in the road, every relationship will have bumps in the road. Even if you're, you know, your spouse is emotionally healthy, your parents are emotionally healthy, your siblings are emotionally healthy, there's gonna be bumps in the road, because we're human. And we all have stuff. And we all have ego, and we all have issues, and we all have different ways of looking at things. And, you know, mussar is great for those relationships to make a good relationship even better.

### **Ruchi Koval** 35:21

The second category of relationships is where I think it's a big percentage of relationships is this is where when we're in a relationship with an emotionally unhealthy person, and that could be a parent, and it could be a sibling, it could be a spouse, it could be anybody, right and mussar can help us figure out how to navigate relationships with an emotionally unhealthy people. Part of navigating a relationship with an emotionally unhealthy person is figuring out how to put some distance in the relationship. And that distance could be physical, you might choose to live near that person, or spend large amounts of time with that person. But sometimes that person lives in your house. And you can't put physical distance between yourself in that person. But you can put emotional and mental distance between yourself and that person, and learn not to take them not to take it personally and learn not to take it to heart and learn how to avoid engaging with that person on the trigger topics. Right? So that's emotionally unhealthy people. The third category, which to my view, is very, very rare, is a toxic relationship. The word toxic means poison. Poison can destroy you. People are using toxic to be synonymous with emotionally unhealthy, they are not the same thing. With a toxic person, you need to put it far away from you. The same way, if you had poison in your house, if you bought, you know rat poison, because you had a rodent problem, you would keep it locked up, you would keep it far away from people, right, you don't do not want to have regular access. But even toxic people, I believe. And there are rare, rare exceptions, which I believe should be navigated with the help of a spiritual guide. With very rare exceptions, there should be nobody in this world that you cannot be civil to. That you cannot see them at a family gathering or at some community event and just say, Hey, hi, how are you? Good, how are you, good. Moving on. Separate paths, it doesn't mean you have to be in a relationship, it doesn't mean you have to engage meaningfully, but to be unable to talk to another human being. And I'm not saying that there are never instances where that's the case, I'm gonna say it is extremely rare. I mean, I always tell this to my kids, there should be nobody that you cannot say hello to. You know. And so, as far as estrangement, I feel like you know, a big part of it is that people are looking for someone to blame for their difficulties. And what mussar does is it puts the lion's share of the responsibility squarely

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on you. Because you cannot change and control other people, you cannot make them do anything. And so it doesn't actually matter what you're deciding you're blaming them for, because you're not going to change them, and you can't fix them. All you can do is control your emotional responses. And is that very hard? Yes, it's very hard. Being a human is hard. And that's why we need all the help we can get. And that's why these ancient truths give us an unbelievable assistance model for navigating these difficult things. But a person can live in blame and victimization for their whole entire lives, and never find peace, because they're still waiting for the other person to do the work. Mussar tells us you do the work, and you can do the work. And you can live a beautiful, happy, peaceful life, no matter what you have endured. You know, just one example of that is you know, Dr. Edith Eger, who wrote the book, *The Choice*, she's a Holocaust survivor, she's in her 90s. And she talks about the actual trauma that she went through as a Holocaust survivor, and about how she utilized her trauma to become a psychologist and to help other people through their trauma by empowering them with *The Choice*, what is the choice? What am I going to do, about what I went through in order to be the best person that I can be? And I feel that's very in line with with the teachings of mussar.

**Daniel Lapin** 39:34

In your book, *Soul construction*. Yeah. Chapter Two is as you were just talking about forgiveness, looking towards others, whereas chapter seven is renewal, internal forgiveness. Is that deliberate? Are you saying that it's quite possible for me to get past somebody else's perceived wrongdoing to forgive somebody else, even if I haven't yet got to the point of being able to, if you like, forgive myself.

**Ruchi Koval** 40:14

So it's interesting when I was writing the chapter on forgiveness, I think it was actually, Susan's suggestion that I include a piece about forgiving oneself. And I did end up incorporating that suggestion, I felt that it was very meaningful. And one of the things by the way, let

**Daniel Lapin** 40:30

me just interrupt you to tell you that she is currently editing one of my books, and it is both painful and jubilant. I detest her killing my kids. I loath when she puts a pen through an entire paragraph. But I'm compelled to admit at the end of it that, that she makes a better book. So I when I when you speak of Susan, having had input in your in your book, I know just how difficult but also how good that can be.

**Ruchi Koval** 41:06

I did definitely have mixed feelings of dread and joy when I saw that she had sent me an email. Oh, yes,

**Daniel Lapin** 41:14

I know what you mean.

**Ruchi Koval** 41:15

So I can relate. I just want to read a little bit of this, which is from the end of the chapter on forgiveness. So this subsection is called also forgive yourself. Since we are talking about our own inner world, I must

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mention here that everything we have learned about forgiveness applies equally to forgiving oneself. We all make mistakes, and we all have regrets. Often we are our own worst critics, we say horrible self-incriminating things to ourselves that we would never say to others, you're such a loser, you always mess up. You're a terrible friend. When here's, here's the part that you're asking about. When we love ourselves enough to forgive ourselves, we often feel worthy of extending that love and forgiveness to others.

**Daniel Lapin** 41:57

So they are linked.

**Ruchi Koval** 42:00

I do believe they are. Because I think that people who harbor resentment toward themselves, don't have enough self-worth to tolerate giving that gift of forgiveness to another person. Because when a person doesn't have a strong sense of self, they feel like forgiving, another person is losing. I'm letting you win. And I am losing. But if I have already learned to extend that compassion to myself, then I understand that forgiving myself is a gift that I give myself because I feel so relieved and cleansed when I extend forgiveness. So maybe I don't need to --- Maybe I don't need to forgive the other person, because they deserve it. Maybe I need to forgive the other person because I deserve it. Because I deserve to not live with that heaviness, and that grudge and that bitterness anymore. Because I don't want it. Because I know how good it feels to tell myself, it's okay. You made a mistake. We all made mistakes. God loves you anyway. And you can work through this and you can change. And this is not the end of the story. This is just the beginning of the story. It almost becomes addictive when you're able to let that go. And then you strongly desire to do that for others as well. So yes, I believe they're very much linked.

**Daniel Lapin** 43:28

Ruchi, one of the one of the interesting things about that sort of modern/ancient dichotomy we were talking about earlier is that I suspect and I'm interested to know what you think about this, I suspect that modernity tends to disregard past and future with an undue focus on present. And that modernity is reaction to the past is to put it in political terms, demolishing statutes, to obliterate the past. It doesn't seem to provide a perspective to understand the past, or a lens through which to look at it. By contrast, I would say that ancient wisdom gives you a perspective on past, present and future, and helps you examine modernity much more than modernity helps you examine the ancient.

**Ruchi Koval** 44:41

it's very interesting. I mean, it kind of makes me think about you know, we're approaching our 30th anniversary, God willing this October. Yeah, thank you. So, you know, I've been pulling out the wedding album and showing it to my kids and of course their reaction is, is this what people wore in 1993? And I'm like, Yes. And that was actually very fashion forward in 1993. You know, but what it made me think about is that anything that is by definition modern, is also by definition, planned obsolescence.

**Daniel Lapin** 45:16

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That's right. It has to be because if modernity is the goal, you're exactly right. If identity is the goal, then by tomorrow, it's no longer modern.

**Ruchi Koval** 45:25

Right? Exactly. So it is, by definition, ephemeral. It's not, it cannot last, where as, and this continually astonishes me every single time I teach a class on Mussar. If you look back at these ancient truths, they never never get stale. I mean, I mean, I've been learning and teaching this stuff for decades, and there is nothing that needs to change about it. I mean, the application will change as society changes, but the truths, they're like evergreens, it's, it's really astonishing to see. And so you can't really, you can't really plan for that it because it's it's been around for a 100 years, for 1000s of years, you know, and Truth is truth, and truth endures, and truth prevails. Right. Whereas anything that's modern, you know, and you were you were talking earlier about, you know, about progressivism and modern modernity, you know, even nowadays, when you buy an appliance, it's not lasting, as long as the appliance that you bought 30 years ago, and the furniture is not lasting, as long as it did 30 years ago, nothing is. So by definition, the new is, is not better, it's poorer quality. And it's going to last shorter. And you know, it's just, it's temporary, it's by definition, temporary. So something different and new is going to have to come up to replace it. And then something different, a new is going to have to come up and replace that. You know, I mean, this is true technologically. And this is true with fads and trends. It's just it's always changing, it's by definition always changing.

**Daniel Lapin** 47:13

So, in secular terms, I have not seen anything substantive that has come out of a contemporary university department on the thinking of Socrates and Aristotle. I've, I've looked, I've genuinely seen nothing worth reading. But there's plenty in Socrates and Aristotle, that helps to understand some of the trends on a modern university campus, or on political and governmental issues in Western Europe today. You know, where I'm going with us, and we're going to popular culture and entertainment. I don't know. offhand. I can't think of a lot of movies that I've watched. And I've said to myself, Oh, this puts the emergence of traditional thinking on the formation of society into context for me, or, Oh, this now really teaches me something I didn't understand about marriage, I cannot think of, of a movie and I'm an enthusiast of the art form. But I can think of many ways in which ancient wisdom sheds light on why a certain movie was made a certain way. Yeah. I've been talking a little bit lately. I don't know if you know, but I'm a fairly distinguished movie reviewer. I did not know that. And look, there's a niche I have captured it's all my own. There are many, many, many movie reviewers. So how do I distinguish a Rabbi Daniel Lapin movie review? The niche I occupy and have made my own is that I'm the only movie reviewer who routinely reviews movies I've never seen. And so

**Daniel Lapin** 47:24

that is a niche.

**Daniel Lapin** 48:20

That's right. And so I've seen neither Barbie nor Oppenheimer, but I was I've spoken about aspects of it. One of course is that the protagonist in each case is Jewish, not Barbie, but Ruth Handler who

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created Barbie. And and both certainly, the way I saw it is I thought both movies placed great focus on the present. In other words, Barbie never ages Barbie never gets pregnant, Barbie never has her own child, as far as I know,

**Ruchi Koval** 50:03

There actually was a pregnant Barbie that got canceled.

**Daniel Lapin** 50:05

Ah, I see evidence piles up. And of course, I argue that in certain ways, and that certainly wasn't his intention, but Oppenheimer also introduced an entire period the set the the period after World War Two, the Cold War period where people really doubted that they would have a future there was there was an air of pessimism and in the climate that people, the world was going to be brought to destruction. So in in sort of, in both ways, there was a focus on the present. But but that that being aside, I would love have, you've seen Barbie.

**Ruchi Koval** 50:45

Yes.

**Daniel Lapin** 50:46

Okay. So, so I have not, which means I in my terms, I can still review it. But I'd be more interested in hearing what, you know, you're a teacher of Mussar. You're a teacher of ancient Jewish wisdom. Review, Barbie, for me.

**Ruchi Koval** 51:07

All right. So my first dilemma was because I was going with my daughters if I should let my 13-year-old daughter see it. So I did my research, and we decided not to let her see it. And I'm glad that I didn't because the themes were too mature for her. And my opinion,

**Daniel Lapin** 51:25

what aspect well, again, not having seen it

**Ruchi Koval** 51:28

themes of women being used by men for gratification. And she is, you know, I don't I don't feel that I'm ready to explore those themes with her right now. So it was just premature I felt for this particular 13-year-old. So I had a lot of mixed feelings about the movie. On a surface level, it was a lot of fun. It was funny, and it was entertaining. And I enjoyed it, it was a fun night out with my daughters. And And honestly, I mean, movies are made to make money. Let's be honest, right? Of course, the movie also wants to make a political or a cultural statement. And of course, it needs to stand out in some way in order to be, you know, successful. But the purpose of movies is to make money and so they're definitely going for the entertainment value over the realism value. So I you know, I don't look to movies for realism. And of course, you know, when a person watches movies regularly, and they're constantly exposed to themes of romance and love, and, you know, which are fake, because fakeness sells, you

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know, it really starts to affect their worldview and expectations, even though they know that what they're watching is fake, but it still has an impact. So, on the purely entertainment level, I thought it was great. I thought it was a lot of fun.

**Ruchi Koval** 52:47

Thematically, I felt that it was problematic. First of all, I felt that it was a little all over the place, I felt that it wasn't entirely sure what point it wanted to make. On the one hand, I think it wanted to talk about the empowerment of women. I think it wanted to talk about women not having to be perfect. I think he wants to talk about you know, smashing the patriarchy and all of these things. But it was a bit disjointed. I felt like there were too many points it was trying to make and it wasn't focused enough. But that's sort of like not really where I feel like you're going with this, the main thing that I wanted to share, which I feel would be relevant to the conversation that we're having is a theme about men and women. And one of the things is one of the things that really interested me about it was the sort of guy versus girl war. And it sort of painted like, well, here's Barbie, and Barbie is fine. But then there's Ken, and Ken is a problem. And Ken is a problem, because now once Ken has experienced the real world, he's like, Oh, in the real world, because you know, they're coming from Barbie land where women do everything. The women are the ones who are construction workers, and the women's are the ones who are all the doctors and all the lawyers into everything, then they get into the real world. And Ken starts to see that the men run the show and the men get to whistle at the women and the men get to you know, boss, the women around and even the CEO of Mattel is a man, you know, and all of a sudden Ken gets intoxicated with this power and brings it back to Barbieland. So it very much reminded me of the "me too" movement where women were whistleblowing, powerful control hungry men who were who or I will use the word abusing and misusing women for their own personal gain. Now, was the me to movement a positive thing? Yes, I believe that it was men should not use women for their own personal gain and manipulate them and control them, you know, for themselves and yes, those people should be arrested and those people should go to jail.

**Ruchi Koval** 54:52

But. There's a part of the me too movement that to my view simply went too far. And what that looked like is this Women are good, men are bad. The more we get rid of men, the better this world will be. So it went from a pro-woman movement to an anti man movement. And those are the flavors that I was noticing in the Barbie movie. And even though the Barbie movie tried to make it better, and tie up all the loose ends and isn't a great, we'll work together in the end tralala, you know, as Hollywood does tend to do. But it didn't really address that issue. And I feel like it goes back to what we were saying before about victimization. And that certainly women have been victimized by men. I mean, you could just go back to the Torah to the Bible for stories about that. That's as ancient as humans, right? Men are biologically and physically more powerful than women. And they do have the ability to control them and to force them to do things. And women don't have the same degree of biological and physical power. That's a story as old as human beings, right? So what should women do about it? Women obviously cannot control men, they can only control themselves. Do I like the idea of women unionizing against bad men? I do. I think that's a restoration of justice. And I think that should be done. Do I believe when it went to talk, when we talk about character improvement, being the best person that you can be?

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Doesn't mean demonizing an entire gender? No. And that's a big part of what I saw in the Barbie movie that bothered me. And that I feel like our society really struggles with a lot. I mean, you know, even there's a popular t-shirt that women wear, it says the future is female.

**Daniel Lapin** 56:54

Yes, if the future is female, there won't be a future.

**Ruchi Koval** 56:57

And there won't be a future. So this is, this is a way of saying, I have been victimized for so long that I am now going to turn around and victimize you, for victimizing me. I don't believe that's in line with Jewish values.

**Daniel Lapin** 57:13

So would a young girl come out of that movie, feeling that boys are the problem, boys are bad, masculinity is toxic?

**Ruchi Koval** 57:23

Well, I believe that's part of it. And that's why I did not want my 13-year-old daughter to see it. I didn't feel that she was mature enough to parse out the nuance of that message. And honestly, I don't want her to be fearful about the world that she's growing up in. Because there are a lot of really good men out there. There are wonderful men out there. And men have become increasingly fearful in their relationships with women. You know, some of that fearfulness is good and healthy. Some of those men needed a shot of fearfulness. But some of it is making it very difficult for people to form close relationships. Because men have--good men sometimes don't even know what they're allowed to do or say anymore.

**Daniel Lapin** 58:08

I get it. I get it.

**Ruchi Koval** 58:13

So there's a lot, there's a lot there to unpack. I do have to say that there was one point in the Barbie movie where I felt like a little nod toward the Genesis story. Where Barbie is, you know, in this Barbieland, this beautiful, perfect utopia where the toast always comes out, golden and her high heels never hurt her feet, you know, and then she gets transported to the real world, so to speak. And all of a sudden, people are looking at her and people are laughing at her. And you know, she's getting a bad back from the high heels and this and that. And I sort of felt like it was that tragic moment where Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden fruit. And they went from being blissfully unaware of the shame of being human, to this knowledge that they were not supposed to have. You know, so

**Daniel Lapin** 59:03

that was interesting, that I

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**Ruchi Koval** 59:05

thought was very, very interesting. And I haven't had a chance to fully unpack that in my own mind. Oh, you

**Daniel Lapin** 59:10

really ought to it's a unique take. Obviously in order to review movies I've never seen I have to read a lot of other reviews. And nobody is made that no and I've seen as made that connection in the Barbie movie but that's very interesting. One always wonders whether these things were intentional or not.

**Ruchi Koval** 59:31

Right I was actually wondering that. And of course I couldn't I couldn't help but think like, you know, poor Mattel. Barbie has become so passe that they had to figure out how to make a little money so they made a movie making fun of their own product. Or whatever. That's neither here nor there.

**Daniel Lapin** 59:51

Do you happen to remember whether the audience attendance in the theater you watched it in was mostly women are mostly men

**Ruchi Koval** 59:58

overwhelmingly female overwhelmingly wearing pink.

**Daniel Lapin** 1:00:02

Oh, that's one of the requirements is

**Ruchi Koval** 1:00:04

that that's that's the thing. We did not wear pink, I'll just say but people did. Yeah, people. I mean, yeah,

**Daniel Lapin** 1:00:11

yes, I know that that is the color motif of the movie.

**Ruchi Koval** 1:00:16

Yes, it is. And you know, it's actually interesting, because when I was coming out of the movie with my girls, and they were like, Oh, you never let us get Barbie. And the truth is that when my kids were little, we did not buy them Barbie dolls. Because we didn't like the, you know, the physicality and the sexuality of the doll. We didn't, we just didn't go for that. So we didn't buy the Barbies. Of course, they played them at all their friends houses, and they figured out a way to get their grandparents to buy them. But you know, so it was interesting now that, you know, my youngest is 13. And our oldest is this 28, you know, to think back to those values, when we were young parents, and we were trying to figure out which toys are appropriate for our kids and align with our values and which toys were not appropriate did not align with our values. And how much of a hard-line were we willing to draw? You know, in that sense? So, you know, it was kind of interesting how the movie very much focused on how Barbie was supposed to save the girls and teaching them that Barbie can do anything. But I think what



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a lot of girls saw instead was Barbie has a perfect body. And I don't Yeah, and that was part of why we didn't want to play with Barbie.

**Daniel Lapin** 1:01:25

It definitely was a toy of its age. I believe that Ruth Handler was the very first business to realize you can market directly to children and bypass the parent on Saturday morning television. Interesting. All of a sudden, kids were asking their parents to buy them a Barbie. Listen, I can I can grab another few minutes before I let you go. Of course. I don't want to go without talking about social media. It's a huge topic, we're not going to delve terribly deeply into it. But since you do address the importance of both speech and silence, in the book, we are discussing your fantastic book Soul Construction. I am of the unshakeable opinion that telephones, smartphones and social media have reduced the ability of people to both communicate and converse naturally. And also to write to be able to put down one's thoughts. You know, in 1000 word essay, which middle school children were expected to do a couple of generations ago. That seems to be going and cause and effect here obviously, can be discussed, I don't know. But in terms of self development in certain in terms of becoming a better person, in terms of refining your soul and polishing your character where the social media fit and you've got a 13-year-old daughter who you didn't take to Barbie, but does she have a smartphone? And does she have social media?

**Ruchi Koval** 1:03:28

So contrary to the advice of Ethics of the Fathers, I'm going to answer your last question first. Of course, as far as as far as social media, so she has an iPad where she can you know, communicate with her friends. And she actually just asked me to get Snapchat, which is a social media platform that the kids are on and and we said no. And she asked why. And we said that there is a great potential for middle schoolers to get hurt on these platforms, and we want to protect her from that hurt. And, you know, that was the end of that she accepted that for now. I know that it is a temporary issue. I have seen with my older kids that a few of them were on social media, in high school and have chosen to get off it. At least two of my kids have done that and are no longer on social media and are much happier for for that decision. Obviously, I myself am a liberal user of social media. I'm very active on Facebook and Instagram. And I understand

**Daniel Lapin** 1:04:33

by the way, why while we're on that, how can audience members connect with you on Facebook and Instagram?

**Ruchi Koval** 1:04:41

Okay, so Facebook has a rule that you can only have 5000 friends so I created a page. So you know if anybody wants to find me on Ruchi Koval r u c h i k o v a l - my page on Facebook and on Instagram Ruchi.Koval . The good thing about having an unusual name is that you haven't unusual name. So you're easy to find on social media, Ruchi.Koval on Instagram.

**Daniel Lapin** 1:05:05

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And that's, that's KOVAL. Correct.

**Ruchi Koval** 1:05:11

So the way I look at social media, and I mentioned social media several times throughout my book, because it is a primary platform of communication in our day and age, and it's important to understand how a person can cause tremendous good and tremendous bad on social media. Basically, what social media did is it took communication, and it put it on steroids. And that's both for the good or for the bad. You know, and Judaism teaches this concept, which in Hebrew is [Hebrew spoken], that means that there was always going to be a parallel, the force is for good, and the force is for bad. And so anything that has great potential for good will also have great potential for bad, right. So, you know, for example, in ancient times, there was a very strong desire for spiritual connection. So there were prophets in ancient times, there was also idolatry in ancient times. Nowadays, for various reasons, this strong desire for spirituality is not really the biggest threat to spirituality, the biggest threat to spirituality is now apathy. So you're much more likely to find an atheist than an idolator. So you know, the same thing is true of social media, because you can reach so many people at one time. There's such a strong power, for example, if I had a negative experience with a restaurant, for example, or a small business in my community, I could go on Facebook, and in one second, I could you know, blacklist that person in front of 1000s of people, in ancient times, you had a limited amount of people that you could tell about that. So you can cause so much damage exponentially. And, by the same token, a person could create so much good with social media, if you look at all the good that a person could put out. There are people who have actually connected spirituality through following people on social media. And I think it really has very much to do with the person's intent. You know, and Judaism is very into intent. And Hebrew, we call it kavanah. What is your intention and how to have intentionality when you engage in certain things. So for instance, let's say I decide that I want to spread more kindness in the world. Well, what if I pick up my phone and I tell myself, for the next five minutes, I am going to spread joy on Facebook. So I'm going to go through people's posts, and I'm going to like them, and I'm going to make nice comments. And I'm going to wish people happy birthday. And I'm going to congratulate them on their kid getting their seventh degree from Harvard. And I'm going to do all of these nice things, and then I'm going to get off of it. So again, we're back to not being victimized by social media, but rather mindfully and intentionally choosing to use it as a force for the good.

**Ruchi Koval** 1:07:56

Now, you know, it kind of reminds me of like a doctor going into a hospital to heal people, by definition, that doctor is going to be exposed to germs. So a doctor has to take precautions, right, whether it's the mask, or it's the washing of the hands or whatever, you know, precautions are safe for are necessary for person to take in that situation. But the bottom line is that your intentionality is that you are going in there to do good, right? So when I interact on social media, I know that I am putting my character at risk. It's a risky business to go on social media, and I'm raising my chances of feeling envious, and I'm raising my chances of feeling inadequate, I have to understand those risks, and have to take precautions, you know, for those risks. So maybe there are certain accounts that I want to hide, so I don't have to see them every day. Or maybe my intentionality is, you know, there's an expression "post and ghost", you know, you get on there, you post what you want to post, you put out some goodness in

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the world, and then you get off. And you don't have to interact with every account. You know, like my kids call it hate reading, when you follow an account that you disagree with. So you can argue with that person and troll that person, right? And then you could ask yourself, what is this session doing to my character? Is it bringing me closer to the person that I want to be? Or is it taking me further away from the person that I want to be? And so the bottom line is that whatever we engage with in this world, we cannot do it mindlessly. This like mindless scrolling that people do, where they don't even know why they're on Instagram, or how they got on Instagram, but somehow an hour has passed. And there you have it, right. The problem is not necessarily social media. The problem is the mindlessness of it. You know and I do utilize social media as a positive force for the good. And I believe that it's a tool there for our use, but we have to use it responsibly and that is both from the part of the person posting and of the consumer. The person who's posting has to take responsibility not to flaunt your blessings and not to be boastful and not to, you know, make other people feel bad about the things that you have that they don't have. The person consuming has to also take that - mussar is all about taking your own personal responsibility, right? If I'm feeling low, and I'm feeling inadequate, it's not a good time for me to go on social media, because then I'm going to feel resentful of all these things that I see. So I have to go on there giving the benefit of the doubt desiring good for other people trying to be happy with the good things that they have. Each party has its own responsibility to engage in this platform in a way that will bring more positivity into this world instead of more damage.

**Daniel Lapin** 1:10:43

The, what you've just been talking about, I think, could serve as a blueprint for parents who are listening to develop a an approach to help explain to their children, what the parental limitations they are placing on their children social media engagement, and why they're doing it. I think that I think that was really, really useful.

**Ruchi Koval** 1:11:11

Thank you. Yeah, you know, this is what I this is what I try to talk to my kids about, you know, it's not that I want you not to go on social media, because I don't like you, and I want you to feel left out, is because I love you. And I want less hurt feelings in this world, you know, and the older you get, the more of an ability, you have to be discerning about the way you post and the way you consume.

**Daniel Lapin** 1:11:33

And perhaps one of the most valuable tools that come out of the Mussar movement is essentially a a highlighting of the prime quality of our father Abraham, which is a comfort of being different from the masses, and ability to walk a slightly different path, or a very different path even. And, gosh, if that's not something we have to teach our children today, every day, that it's okay to be different from others.

**Ruchi Koval** 1:12:11

Yes. So true.

**Daniel Lapin** 1:12:16

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The book is Soul Construction, and I can't recommend it enough. And I urge you to give considerable thought you happy warriors, to whatever extent you're working on fitness and finance, that you also work on the faith, F, the developing of the internal strengths, the fixing up of the soul, and the refining of the character. These are all things that will stand you in very, very good stead. And this book is the ideal textbook, it's a workbook, it's the ideal, accompaniment to walk you through this exciting journey, because every physical journey, the older you get, the less capable you are. Whether it's how many pull-ups you can do, or how many hand presses you can do, or how many bench presses you can do, or how many kilometers, you can run all of those things, disappointingly, with every passing month, you're going to be a little less good at it. But the great thing about soul construction is that with every passing month, you can actually become better at it and better and better at it. And if that's not a good enough reason to do it, then I'll provide you with a few others in weeks to come. But I think that that's a really good start. And rookie, thanks so much. It's always a delight to talk with you and to hear of your adventures and the thoughts you're coming up with. And I look forward to doing it again, not too long from now.

**Ruchi Koval** 1:14:05

Thank you so much. It was a treat to have these conversations. I appreciate it.

**Daniel Lapin** 1:14:08

Wonderful. Our it regards to the family.

**Ruchi Koval** 1:14:11

Will do. Thank you so much.

**Daniel Lapin** 1:14:13

Bye bye. And ladies and gentlemen, that brings us to the end of today's show. And so until next week, I'm your rabbi, wishing you a journey of growth onwards and upwards with your family and your friendships, your fitness and your faith. And of course, your finances. God bless.