

WHEN MEN FEEL LIKE ZERO

RABBI MANIS FRIEDMAN

WHAT WOMEN NEED TO KNOW

ABOUT MEN

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INCOMPLETE CREATIONS

The Torah teaches us fundamental principles about creation, nature, men, and women.

One of these principles appears right at the beginning of the Torah. Hashem says about the world: It is all perfect “to be done.” This means Hashem created a world that was perfectly ready to become what it needs to become. Hashem left the final task in our hands. We must make the world what it was meant to be or else creation will be incomplete.

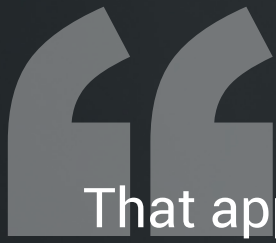
The same principle holds true in the creation of the first human being. Hashem created a human being, but then he has to become something; he has to become a man.

Man is part of the creation that needs to become. And so a man’s ego, a man’s psyche, carries a burden of uncertainty. Have I become? Have I amounted to anything? There is a demon in the back of every man’s mind that says: *You haven’t become, you’re still zero.* It’s irrational. But it’s persistent.

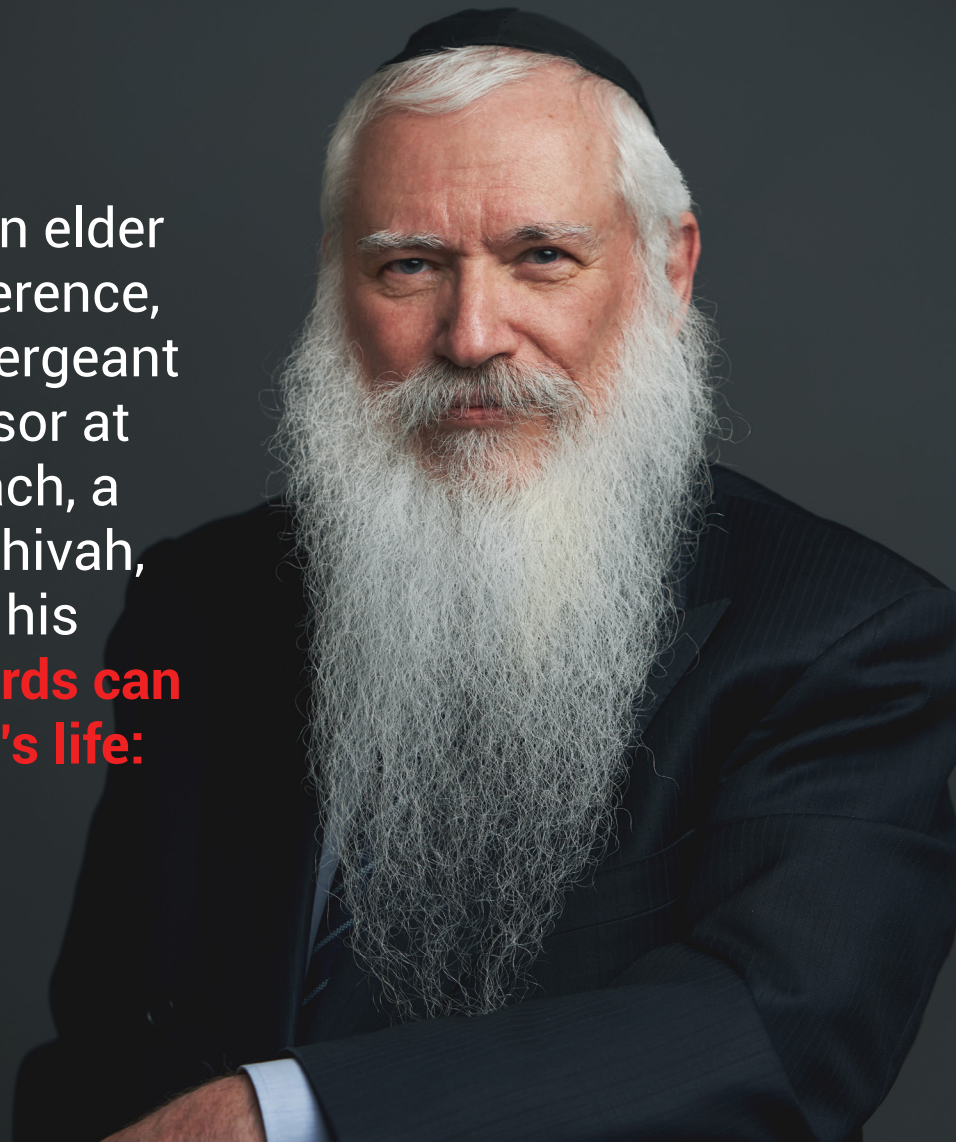
Some of the most successful and powerful men in history have proven this point. The more power they had, the more paranoid they became. They doubted themselves. Maybe all of this is just a facade and I’m still nothing.

Women, on the other hand, don’t have that in their psyche. For women, there’s level one, five, or ten; there’s no zero. Women, for the most part, instinctively know that just by being, they are enough. Of course, women also have a drive to utilize their abilities and talents for the good. But the degree to which they manage to publicly turn over the world or build a corporation does not control how good they feel about themselves as women. If they are primarily nurturers, in privacy creating a home that (or just being a person who) significantly nurtures and supports people, that is satisfying for women.

This difference between men and women can be traced back to the order of creation. Men were created from earth, therefore they are always afraid of going back to that. Women were created from men; therefore women have a very strong need for connection.



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RESPECT AND LOVE

Because they are always in doubt of their worth, men need respect like humans need oxygen. To respect a man is to honor his choices, treat him like he's capable, and expect good decisions from him. Criticizing, smothering, or emasculating a man makes him feel like a zero.

A woman needs to feel loved, appreciated, and connected. Women feel upset and hurt when they are taken for granted. To love a woman is to figure out what makes her feel appreciated and to show her love in that way.

Respect and love are decisions and actions. When a spouse decides to respect/love their spouse through daily actions, they can single-handedly improve their relationship by leaps and bounds.

WHY CRITICISM STINGS

Hillel famously said: "What is hateful to you don't do unto others." It's not an open-ended sentiment. It's actually referring to something very specific.

You know that thing you hate? Don't do that to anybody else. Which thing? Telling a man (or implying) that he is nothing.

For men, self-criticism and criticism from others have entirely different effects. When men think about their own faults and admit their own faults, it doesn't hurt as badly. It doesn't make them hate themselves, because they know they are valid before they criticize themselves. So when they criticize themselves, they are limiting the criticism to that particular detail. They're not suggesting that they are nothing. But when someone else

criticizes even just one detail, it awakens the ghost. They hear in that one little criticism *you're nothing*, and they hate that—that hurts more than anything else.

HOW BOYS BECOME MEN

Boys have to go through a ritual in order to establish their manhood, to prove they have become something. In the olden days, you proved yourself a man by your ability to fight, kill, destroy, survive. You were given an intense challenge, live or die, kill or be killed, and if you came home alive, you're the man.

Our boys go through this today in our own way. Our boys have to be careful with *zman krias Shema*, get themselves to *minyanim*, put on *tefillin*, *Chitas*, *Rambam*, *miotza'im*... Even more—they are expected to move to a *makom Torah*, to relocate to wherever the best yeshiva for them is located. We ask a lot of our boys! This is their path to manhood.

The other way to achieve manhood is to get approval from an older male, from a man who is no longer trying to prove himself, which comes with age. That approval from an elder can make all the difference, whether it's from a sergeant in the army, a professor at school, a rabbi, a coach, a *mashpia*, a *Rosh Yeshivah*, or, most importantly, his own father. Three words can change a young man's life: "You did well."

Unfortunately, in the secular world, it has been forgotten that young men need to learn from, and spend time with, their elders. *Baruch Hashem, we frum* people still have it ingrained in our culture, for example, every time a boy goes to shul with his father and earns his father's approval.

If a boy is cut off from these traditions and rites of passage, he will find some other way to prove himself a man. Perhaps by getting many women to adore him, or by joining a club or a gang or a team where they tell each other how great they are. But it doesn't work. It's just bravado, exaggerated self-importance, and it does not take away the ghost.

Judaism says there's a better way to become

a man than the ones mentioned so far, and that is to recognize and accept our own zero. We are here to accomplish something, not to become something. It doesn't matter what number we are, and it doesn't matter if we are a zero. What matters is what we do.

GIVE MEN RESPONSIBILITY

We are here to serve. The male psyche works well with that. Give us a responsibility, show us a need, and let us attend to it. When we feel like we have accomplished a mission, a purpose, a destiny, then we are fine even with our own insignificance. So instead of fighting the demon, the Torah tells men: It's true, you're very limited, you're very fallible, you're very fragile, but that's okay. Because even as insignificant as you are, you can do amazing things.

It's liberating in a way because we don't have to be anything, but we can do everything.

And that's why we start our day in the early morning prayers asking, what is a human being anyway? *Mah anu, meh chayeinu?*

Our strength is really nothing to speak of. Our wisdom is—well, we are really not very smart at all. But we shouldn't sit and worry about it. Because there is so much we can and should do, for ourselves, for the world, for our families, for others, for the Rebbe, and for Hashem.

If we are intimidated by the fear of not amounting to anything, that could be crippling and discouraging, even paralyzing. But if we use it to our advantage—I don't care what I amount to, it's what I accomplish for my Creator or my community that counts—that makes us strong.

Rabbi Manis Friedman is a Chabad shliach and the co-founder of Bais Chana Institute in Minnesota. He was the Rebbe's translator for seven years. Currently the most popular rabbi on YouTube and social media, he is also the author of many books and the founder of *ItsGoodtoKnow.org*, which publishes content online daily. To see more, please visit *ItsGoodtoKnow.org*.