

Diamonds (by Rabbi Abraham J Twerski)

Sometimes people ask, "What made you choose to work with addicts?" In "My Teacher, Isabel," I related how I got *started* in this field. The following story is an example of why I *stayed* in it.

A number of years ago, I began a small rehabilitation program in Israel for ex-convicts who had been imprisoned for drug-related crimes. In a session with the first group of clients, I pointed out that there is a natural resistance to avoid damaging an object of beauty. Inasmuch as everyone knows that drugs are damaging, there should have been greater resistance to their taking drugs. The reason they did not have this resistance was because they never considered themselves to be worthy and beautiful. I said that long-term recovery depends on developing self-esteem, so that one would not want to damage one's self.

One of the ex-convicts said, "How can you expect me to have self-esteem. I'm 34 years old, and sixteen of those 34 years have been spent in prison. When I get out of prison, no one will give me a job. When the social worker tells my family that I will be released in ninety days, they are very unhappy. I am a burden and an embarrassment to them. I wish I would stay in jail forever or even die. How am I supposed to get self-esteem?"

I said to him, "Avi, have you ever seen a display of diamonds in a jewellery store window? Those diamonds are scintillatingly beautiful and worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. Do you know what they looked like when they were brought out of the diamond mine? They looked like ugly, dirty pieces of glass, which anyone would think worthless.

"At the diamond mine, there is a *mayvin* [expert] who scrutinises the ore. He may pick up a "dirty piece of glass" and marvel at the precious gem that lies within. He sends it to the processing plant, and it emerges as a magnificently beautiful, shining diamond.

"No one can put any beauty into a dirty piece of glass. The beauty of the diamond was always there, but it was concealed by layers of material that covered it. The processing plant removed these layers, to reveal the beauty of the diamond. They did not create the beauty, just exposed it.

"I may not be a *mayvin* on diamonds, Avi," I said, "but I am a *mayvin* on people. You have a beautiful soul within you, but it has been covered with layers of ugly behaviour. We will help you get rid of those layers and reveal the beauty of your soul."

Avi stayed in the program for several months, then was in a transitional facility for eight months. After leaving, he found a job and remained free of drugs.

One day, Annette, the administrator of the program received a call from a family whose elderly mother had died, leaving an apartment full of furniture for which they had no use. They offered to donate the furniture to the rehabilitation program. Annette called Avi and said, "I have no way of getting that furniture here. Could you help us?" Avi assured her that he would get a truck and bring the furniture.

Two days later, Avi called Annette. "I am at the apartment," he said, "but there is no point in bringing the furniture. It is old and dilapidated."

Annette said, "I don't want to disappoint the family, Avi. Bring it here. Perhaps we can salvage some of it."

Avi loaded the truck and brought the furniture to the facility, which was on the second floor of a building. As he dragged an old sofa up the stairs, an envelope fell from the cushions. It contained 5000 shekels (\$1800). This was money of whose existence no one knew, and the rule of “finders-keepers” could easily have been applied, especially by someone who used to break into a house for ten shekels.

Avi called Annette and told her about the money. “That’s the family’s money,” she said. “Call them and tell them.” The family graciously donated the money to the rehabilitation program.

On a subsequent visit to Israel, I met Avi at a function of the rehabilitation program, and that is when Annette told me the story about the 5000 shekels. I said to Avi, “Do you remember our first meeting when you did not know how you could ever have self-esteem? I told you that there was a soul, a beautiful diamond within you. Many people who never stole a penny would have simply pocketed the money. What you did was truly exceptional, and shows the beauty of the ‘diamond’ within you.”

Several months later, Avi fixed a bronze plaque on the door of the rehabilitation centre. It read ***“DIAMOND PROCESSING CENTRE.”***