

Meaning Making

There's more to life than being happy | Emily Esfahani Smith | TED

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9Trdafp83U&t=22s&ab_channel=TED

- What are Emily Esfahani Smith's FOUR pillars of a meaningful life?

1. אסתר פרק ד

(יג) ויאמר מרדכי להשיב אל אסתר אל תדמי בנפשך להמלט בית המלך מכל היהודים:

(יד) כי אם החרש תחרישי בעת הזאת רוח והצלה יעמוד ליהודים ממקום אחר ואת ובית אביך תאבדו ומי יודע אם לעת כזאת הגעת למלכות:

(טו) ותאמר אסתר להשיב אל מרדכי:

(טז) לך כנוס את כל היהודים הנמצאים בשושן וצומו עלי ואל תאכלו ואל תשתו שלשת ימים לילה ויום גם אני ונערתי אצום כן ובכן אבוא אל המלך אשר לא כדת וכאשר אבדתי אבדתי:

(יז) ויעבר מרדכי ויעש ככל אשר צוה עליו אסתר:

Esther ch.4

Mordechai sent back this answer to Esther: "Do not imagine that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. ¹⁴ For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

¹⁵ Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶ "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

2. Rav Aharon Lichtenstein. "If you remain silent at this time" – Concern for the Jewish People

<https://etzion.org.il/en/philosophy/great-thinkers/harav-aharon-lichtenstein/if-you-remain-silent-time-concern-jewish-people>

We are all, to some degree, Esther. Each of us, for whatever reason, has doubts as to his or her abilities. We, too, are hesitant: "What, I'm going to achieve all that? I'm going to save *Am Yisrael*? I'm going to put a stop to assimilation? I'm just a youngster; I can achieve only a little: a little bit in my neighborhood, a little bit in a youth group, a little bit in the family. But to start a revolution? To determine the future of a nation? To avert an evil decree? Little me?"

... Herein lies the ultimate question. It is directed to each and every one of us. Let each person do as Esther did: stand before himself, stand before God, and ... not only whether what he is doing is good and worthy, but whether it is the *best and most worthy* thing that he could be doing. He has to keep asking himself: Is this really what the circumstances require? Is this the best that I can do at this time?

3. ויקרא פרק א פסוק א

ויקרא אל משה וידבר יקוק אליו מאהל מועד לאמר:

רש"י

(א) ויקרא אל משה - לכל דברות ולכל אמירות ולכל צוויים קדמה קריאה, לשון חבה, לשון שמלאכי השרת משתמשים בו, שנאמר (ישעיהו ג) וקרא זה אל זה, אבל לנביאי אומות העולם נגלה עליהן בלשון עראי וטומאה, שנאמר (במדבר כג ד) ויקר אלהים אל בלעם:

All oral communications of the Lord to Moses ... were preceded by a call (to prepare him for the forthcoming address). It is a way of expressing affection, the mode used by the ministering angels when addressing each other, as it is said (Isaiah 6:3) "And one called unto another [and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts]". To the prophets of the nations of the world, however, God revealed himself in a manner which Scripture describes by an expression ordinarily used for denoting events of a casual character and of uncleanness, as it is said, (Numbers 23:4) "and God happened to meet (ויקר) Balaam"

4. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. Vayikra. The Pursuit of Meaning

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayikra/the-pursuit-of-meaning/>

Vayikra, Rashi is telling us, means *to be called to a task in love*. This is the source of one of the key ideas of Western thought, namely the concept of a *vocation* or a *calling*, that is... your meaning and mission in life. This is what you were placed on earth to do.

There are many such calls in Tanach. There was the call Abraham heard to leave his land and family ([Gen. 12:1](#)). There was the call to Moses at the Burning Bush ([Ex. 3:4](#)). There was the one experienced by Isaiah ...

... When we see a wrong to be righted, a sickness to be healed, a need to be met, and we feel it speaking to us, that is when we come as close as we can in a post-prophetic age to hearing *Vayikra*, God's call...

From the perspective of eternity, we may sometimes be overwhelmed by a sense of our own insignificance. We are no more than a wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the seashore, a speck of dust on the surface of infinity. *Yet we are here because God wanted us to be, because there is a task He wants us to perform.* The search for meaning is the quest for this task.

Each of us is unique. Even genetically identical twins are different. There are things only we can do, we who are what we are, in this time, this place, and these circumstances. For each of us God has a task: work to perform, a kindness to show, a gift to give, love to share, loneliness to ease, pain to heal, or broken lives to help mend. Discerning that task, hearing *Vayikra*, God's call, is one of the great spiritual challenges for each of us.

How do we know what it is? ... Where what we want to do meets what needs to be done, that is where God wants us to be.

5. Kafka. The Trial

Before the law sits a gatekeeper. To this gatekeeper comes a man from the country who asks to gain entry into the law. But the gatekeeper says that he cannot grant him entry at the moment.

The man thinks about it and then asks if he will be allowed to come in later on. "It is possible," says the gatekeeper, "but not now." At the moment the gate to the law stands open, as always, and the gatekeeper walks to the side, so the man bends over in order to see through the gate into the inside.

When the gatekeeper notices that, he laughs and says: "If it tempts you so much, try it in spite of my prohibition. But take note: I am powerful. And I am only the most lowly gatekeeper. But from room to room stand gatekeepers, each more powerful than the other. I can't endure even one glimpse of the third." The man from the country has not expected such difficulties: the law should always be accessible for everyone, he thinks, but as he now looks more closely at the gatekeeper in his fur coat, at his large pointed nose and his long, thin, black Tartar's beard, he decides that it would be better to wait until he gets permission to go inside.

The gatekeeper gives him a stool and allows him to sit down at the side in front of the gate. There he sits for days and years. He makes many attempts to be let in, and he wears the gatekeeper out with his requests. The gatekeeper often interrogates him briefly, questioning him about his homeland and many other things, but they are indifferent questions, the kind great men put, and at the end he always tells him once more that he cannot let him inside yet.

The man, who has equipped himself with many things for his journey, spends everything, no matter how valuable, to win over the gatekeeper. The latter takes it all but, as he does so, says, "I am taking this only so that you do not think you have failed to do anything." During the many years the man observes the gatekeeper almost continuously. He forgets the other gatekeepers, and this one seems to him the only obstacle for entry into the law. He curses the unlucky circumstance, in the first years thoughtlessly and out loud, later, as he grows old, he still mumbles to himself. He becomes childish and, since in the long years studying the gatekeeper he has come to know the fleas in his fur collar, he even asks the fleas to help him persuade the gatekeeper.

Finally, his eyesight grows weak, and he does not know whether things are really darker around him or whether his eyes are merely deceiving him. But he recognizes now in the darkness an illumination which breaks inextinguishably out of the gateway to the law. Now he no longer has much time to live. Before his death he gathers in his head all his experiences of the entire time up into one question which he has not yet put to the gatekeeper. He waves to him, since he can no longer lift up his stiffening body.

The gatekeeper has to bend way down to him, for the great difference has changed things to the disadvantage of the man. "What do you still want to know, then?" asks the gatekeeper. "You are insatiable." "Everyone strives after the law," says the man, "so how is that in these many years no one except me has requested entry?"

The gatekeeper sees that the man is already dying and, in order to reach his diminishing sense of hearing, he shouts at him, "Here no one else can gain entry, since this entrance was assigned only to you. I'm going now to close it."

6. Rav Kook. Ups and Downs.

1. שמונה קבצים

קס"ד : כשאדם מרגיש בעצמו ריקניות גמורה, ורואה שאיננו כלום, ונפשו משתוחחת בקרבו מרוב דכאותה ומראה אפסותה, ידע כי ישועת ד' קרובה להאיר לו, ומדה טובה מרובה ממדת פורענות, ואם לפני שבר גאון, לפני גדולה ואורה דכאות רוח וענוה פנימית. ומיד יתפוס בכל האמצעים לבסס מדת ענוה זו בכל מקורות הרוח שבידו, וירומם אף ינשא בטהרת נשמתו, בהדבק במקור השלום, באור מלך גאות לבש, אל חי העולמים.

2. שמונה קבצים, ל, ס'

"כשמרגיש האדם שנהרס הרבה ברוחניות, ידע שהגיע לו התור לבנית בנין חדש, יותר נעלה ונשגב, ויותר קיים ומפואר, ממה שהיה בראשונה, ויתחזק ויתאמץ בתיקון מעשיו ודרכיו, בסדר הגון, באומץ לבב, בחפץ טהור, בלב מלא עז ושמחה פנימית, כי טוב וישר ד' על כן יורה חטאים בדרך, ידרך ענוים במשפט וילמד ענוים דרכו."

7. Environment / Social Influence

. פרקי אבות פרק ו משנה ט

אמר רבי יוסי בן קסמא, פעם אחת הייתי מהלך בדרך ופגע בי אדם אֶחָד, ונתן לי שלום, והחזרתי לו שלום, אמר לי, רבי מאיזה מקום אתה, אמרתי לו, מעיר גדולה של חכמים ושל סופרים אני, אמר לי, רבי רצונך שתדור עמנו במקומנו ואני אתן לך אלף אלפים דגרי זָהָב ואבנים טובות ומרגליות, אמרתי לו אם אתה נותן לי כל כסף וזָהָב ואבנים טובות ומרגליות שבעולם, איני דר אלא במקום תורה, וכן כתוב בספר תהלים על ידי דוד מלך ישראל, "טוב לי תורת פיך מאלפי זָהָב וְכֶסֶף", ולא עוד, אלא שבשעת פטירתו של אדם אין מלוין לו לאדם לא כסף ולא זָהָב ולא אבנים טובות ומרגליות, אלא תורה ומעשים טובים בלבד, שנאמר, "בְּהִתְהַלֵּךְ תִּנְחָה אוֹתָהּ, בְּשִׁכְבְּךָ תִּשְׁמֹר עֲלֶיהָ, וְהִקְיֹצוֹת הִיא תְּשִׁיחֶךָ", בְּהִתְהַלֵּךְ תִּנְחָה אוֹתָהּ, בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, בְּשִׁכְבְּךָ תִּשְׁמֹר עֲלֶיהָ, בְּקִבְרְךָ, וְהִקְיֹצוֹת הִיא תְּשִׁיחֶךָ, לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, ואומר, לי הכסף וְלִי הַזָּהָב נָאִם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:

Rabbi Yose ben Kisma said: Once I was walking by the way when a man met me, and greeted me and I greeted him. He said to me, "Rabbi, where are you from?" I said to him, "I am from a great city of sages and scribes". He said to me, "Rabbi, would you consider living with us in our place? I would give you a thousand thousand denarii of gold, and precious stones and pearls." I said to him: "My son, even if you were to give me all the silver and gold, precious stones and pearls that are in the world, I would not dwell anywhere except in a place of Torah; for when a man passes away there accompany him neither gold nor silver, nor precious stones nor pearls, but Torah and good deeds alone, as it is said, "When you walk it will lead you. When you lie down it will watch over you; and when you are awake it will talk with you" (Proverbs 6:22). "When you walk it will lead you" in this world. "When you lie down it will watch over you" in the grave; "And when you are awake it will talk with you" in the world to come. And thus it is written in the book of Psalms by David, king of Israel, "I prefer the teaching You proclaimed to thousands of pieces of gold and silver" (Psalms 119:72), And it says: "Mine is the silver, and mine the gold, says the Lord of Hosts" (Haggai 2:8).

Elazar Ben Arach

8. חגיגה יד עמ ב

תנו רבנן מעשה ברבן יוחנן בן זכאי שהיה רוכב על החמור והיה מהלך בדרך ור' אלעזר בן ערך מחמר אחריו, אמר לו רבי שנה לי פרק אחד במעשה מרכבה, אמר לו לא כך שנית לך ולא במרכבה ביחיד אלא אם כן חכם מבין מדעתו, אמר לו רבי תרשיני לומר לפניך דבר אחד שלמדתי, אמר לו אמור, מיד ירד רבן יוחנן בן זכאי מעל החמור ונתעטף וישב על האבן תחת הזית... מיד פתח ר"א בן ערך במעשה המרכבה ודרש, וירדה אש מן השמים וסיבבה כל האילנות שבשדה, פתחו כולן ואמרו שירה, מה שירה אמרו, הללו את ה' מן הארץ תנינים וכל תהומות עץ פרי וכל ארזים הללויה.

An incident occurred involving Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai and his student, Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh... Rabbi Elazar said to him: My teacher, teach me one chapter in the Design of the Divine Chariot. ...Rabbi Elazar said to him: My teacher, allow me to say before you one thing that you taught me. In other words, he humbly requested to recite before him his own understanding of this issue. He said to him: Speak. Immediately, Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai alighted from the donkey, and wrapped his head in his cloak in a manner of reverence, and sat on a stone under an olive tree. Rabbi Elazar said to him: My teacher, for what reason did you alight from the donkey? He said: Is it possible that while you are expounding the Design of the Divine Chariot, and the Divine Presence is with us, and the ministering angels are accompanying us, that I should ride on a donkey? Immediately, Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh

began to discuss the Design of the Divine Chariot and expounded, and fire descended from heaven and encircled all the trees in the field, and all the trees began reciting song....

9. קהלת רבה, ז:

חמשה תלמידים היו לו לריב"ז כל זמן שהיה קיים היו יושבין לפניו, כשנפטר הלכו ליבנה, והלך ר' אלעזר בן ערך אצל אשתו לאמאוס, מקום מים יפים ונוה יפה, המתין להם שיבאו אצלו ולא באו, כיון שלא באו בקש לילך אצלם ולא הניחתו אשתו, אמרה מי צריך למי, א"ל הן צריכין לי, אמרה לו חמת העכברים מי דרכו לילך אצל מי, העכברים אצל החמת או החמת אצל העכברים, שמע לה וישב לו עד ששכח תלמודו, מאחר זמן באו אצלו שאלו אותו פת חטין או פת שעורים מי טב אוכלה בלפתן, ולא ידע להשיבן.

Rabbi Yochanan had five disciples, and as long as he lived they sat before him. When he died, they went to Yavneh. Rabbi Elazar ben Arach, however, joined his wife at Dyomset, a place of good water and beautiful scenery. He waited for them to come to him but they didn't. When they didn't come, he wanted to go to them, but his wife said: "Who needs who" she asked. "They need me" he answered. She said to him: "In the case of a food container and mice, does the food go to the mice or do the mice go to the food?" He listened to her, and remained there until he forgot his learning....

10. רמב"ם הל' דעות פרק ו

הלכה א

דרך ברייתו של אדם להיות נמשך בדעותיו ובמעשיו אחר ריעיו וחביריו ונוהג כמנהג אנשי מדינתו לפיכך צריך אדם להתחבר לצדיקים ולישב אצל החכמים תמיד כדי שילמוד ממעשיהם ויתרחק מן הרשעים ההולכים בחשך כדי שלא ילמוד ממעשיהם הוא ששלמה אומר (משלי יג ב) [הולך] אֶת חֲכָמִים וְחָכֵם [יִחְכֵּם] וְרָעָה כְּסִילִים יִרְעֶה ואומר אשרי האיש וגו' וכן אם היה במדינה שמנהגותיה רעים ואין אנשיה הולכים בדרך ישרה ילך למקום שאנשיה צדיקים ונוהגים בדרך טובים ואם היו כל המדינות שהוא יודעם ושומע שמועתן נוהגים בדרך לא טובה כמו זמנינו או שאינו יכול ללכת למדינה שמנהגותיה טובים מפני הגייסות או מפני החולי ישב לבדו יחידי כענין שנאמר ישב בדד וידום ואם היו רעים וחטאים שאין מניחים אותו לישב במדינה א"כ נתערב עמהן ונוהג במנהגם הרע יצא למערות ולחוחים ולמדברות ואל ינהיג עצמו בדרך חטאים כענין שנאמר מי יתנני במדבר מלון אורחים

It is natural for person's character to be drawn after the thoughts and actions of his friends and associates, and for a person to follow the norms of the people of their country. Therefore, one must associate with righteous and be constantly in the company of the wise, so as to learn from their deeds. Conversely, they should keep away from the wicked who walk in darkness, so as not to learn from their deeds. This is what Shlomo said "He who walks with the wise will become wise; he who walks with the foolish will be destroyed ([Proverbs 13:20](#)); and what is said "Happy is the man..." ([Psalms 1:1](#))

A person who lives in a place where the norms of behavior are evil and the inhabitants do not follow the straight path should move to a place where the people are righteous and follow the ways of the good. If all the places with which he is familiar and of which he hears reports follow improper paths, as in our times, or if he is unable to move to a place where the patterns of behavior are proper, because of oppression, or for health reasons, he should enter into seclusion, as is said "Sit alone and be quiet" (Eicha 3:28). If the country is wicked and sinful and do not allow him to reside there unless he mingle with them and follow their evil behavior, he should go and live in a cave or in the desert [rather than] follow the paths of sinners as it states: "Who will give me a lodging place for wayfarers, in the desert." ([Jeremiah 9:1](#))