

“Feel Bad about Yourself”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

In Praise of Feeling Bad about Yourself:

Religion makes people feel bad about themselves. It wounds self-esteem and promotes feelings of guilt. So we hear all the time without pausing to ask: While massive, unwarranted guilt is damaging, is it so bad to feel bad about yourself? Do we want people to be bursting with self-approval even when they act badly, hurt others, cheat, steal?

The Torah and the rabbis frequently learned lessons from the natural world. Here is a poem by a Nobel Prize-winning Polish poet in which she draws lessons from the world around us in ways that our Sages would no doubt approve:

In Praise of Feeling Bad about Yourself

by Wislawa Szymborska

*The buzzard never says it is to blame.
The panther wouldn't know what scruples mean.
When the piranha strikes, it feels no shame.
If snakes had hands, they'd claim their hands were
clean.
A jackal doesn't understand remorse.
Lions and lice don't waver in their course.
Why should they, when they know they're right?
Though hearts of killer whales may weigh a ton,
in every other way they're light.
On this third planet of the sun
among the signs of bestiality
a clear conscience is Number One.*