

## “Failing Better”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl quotes the great German poet, Goethe: “If we take people as they are, we make them worse. If we treat them as if they were what they ought to be, we help them to become what they are capable of becoming.”

Through the holiday season we evaluate where we are and where we wish to be. Spiritual ascent is our goal, but too often we expect little of ourselves and of others. The same people who would never be shoddy at work, or careless on a test, are unmindful of the state of their souls.

Goethe's words are prescient: what we expect of ourselves is often precisely what we get. Will we fall short? Certainly, failure is the one unvarying human constant. But there are different ways to fail; we can fail most profoundly by not striving.

Samuel Beckett expressed it this way: “Try again. Fail again. Fail better.” We aim high and come up short. But better a life of spiritual aspiration than one of indifference.

With God's help we will have more moral, spiritual and communal victories this year than failures. I fail every day, wrote Emerson, yet to victory I am born.