**How Not to Hate Yourself**

I no longer hate myself, but when I was younger I hated myself full time. It’s was like a job I was always doing in addition to going to work. For many years, I worked two jobs: one job was the 40-hour-a-week grind, and the other was hating myself. The whole thing was very exhausting. I could exhaust myself just by sitting and thinking – that’s how strong the hate was.

What you might notice in the way I structured the previous sentence is that I used an active verb. I used an active verb because even though I felt like living in a state of self-hate was just “how I was”, hating myself is and was a very active practice. I didn’t stop hating myself until I realized that I was actively insulting myself all day, every day.

Let me illustrate that last point: One night I was crossing a street when the dudes in a passing car yelled out the window that I was fat. I felt really put off. Who were they to call me fat? I mean, I knew I was a little chunky, but calling me fat was unprovoked and unjustified. They called me fat, and the calling was an action.

Now I called myself fat all the time because I was on the chunkier side. Just like the guys in the passing car, I told myself all the time that I was fat. Since it was my own mind saying it, I didn’t notice the insult the way I noticed it when the guys in the car said it. Yet, how different really is insulting myself from being insulted by others? The guys in the car were a bunch of nasty low-lifes, and I was talking to myself in a nasty voice like theirs all the time. That’s self-hate in a nut shell: Saying mean things to yourself.

I know that thoughts seem passive. Thoughts pop up involuntarily. Say, “Don’t think of an elephant,” and the first thing you’ll think of is an elephant. The thing about thoughts is that thinking is an act. You might think it is an act that is out of your control. Believe it or not, [thinking is actually in your control](http://www.sichosinenglish.org/books/the-chassidic-approach-to-joy/08.htm). Unless you have an untreated chemical imbalance, you can actually stop insulting yourself. I know that the insults just “come up” and that they are very convincing, but read on to learn the technique.

**The rules of how not to hate yourself**

**+**The first step is to notice when you are insulting yourself. How do you know what you are thinking? Tune in to how you are feeling. Do you feel ugly? If you feel ugly and nobody else has just called you ugly, then you had a thought that you are ugly and you let it stay around and influence how you feel.

+You might not have heard a distinct voice saying, “You are ugly”. If your mind didn’t just outright insult how you look, it probably did this other horrible sneaky thing, which was compare you to other people. Think back: Did you notice someone you think is better looking than you are? When you even notice that someone is better-looking than you are, you are comparing yourself to that person.

+When you catch yourself comparing yourself to someone else, [crack a joke](http://www.meaningfullife.com/personal/emotions/Humor.php). I say to myself, “She’s a 10!” as if I am scoring models walking down a runway. It makes me laugh, and makes it easier to distance myself from the initial thought.

+If you feel self-hatred, distract yourself with pleasant thoughts. There’s a mystical saying by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi: “[If you wrestle with a muddy man, you’ll get dirty](http://www.chabad.org/library/tanya/tanya_cdo/aid/1058817/jewish/Chapters-26-28.htm).” Don’t try to fight the thoughts (your mind is manipulative and could win the argument); instead just switch them off by switching thoughts of something that always makes you feel happy. For me, it’s baby animals. I love baby animals, especially puppies. I know it sounds stupid, but bear with me. I am a 34-year-old married woman with a job and responsibilities, and you know what gets me through moments of self-hatred? I look at pictures of puppies, because when I think of puppies I feel happy. I can’t think of puppies and think of how much I stink at everything at the same time. When I’m sitting at my desk criticizing myself for not finishing the draft of my book and the negative, self-hating thoughts start to bubble up, I do an image search for puppies. For some people it might be sail boats, for others it might be funny cats. When you notice that you are feeling bad about yourself, think of your version of puppies.

+Realize that your perception of yourself is not always accurate – aim to be present and comfortable in your skin, not to measure up to anybody else. Listen, the world is a pretty harsh place. Even if you had supportive parents as you grew up, the culture at large is one in which folks are constantly encouraged to be better than the next guy. “Runner up is first loser” and ideas like that are pervasive and destructive. One day you might think you are better than another person; the next day worse. It’s all a sham that an unhealthy part of your mind creates. In addition to catching and switching negative thoughts for positive thoughts, you need to change your outlook. [You don’t need to be better or worse than anyone](http://www.meaningfullife.com/personal/pain/Loneliness.php) – you need to be where you are fully. Focus on what you are doing, not how you measure up.

+Remember that there is a higher reality in the world. The material here and now is not all there is. That [higher reality](http://www.meaningfullife.com/torah/parsha/bereishit/vayechi/Life,_Death_AND_Reality.php) is where your purpose in life is. Nobody can ever be perfect in the material world, but we darn well can live life with purpose and with meaning.

The fact that you were born means that you matter and means that you have a mission to fulfill in life. Now do you want to focus on how you “aren’t successful enough”, or do you want to start rocking out at life and having a good time? Don’t regret not being someone else; only regret not [being the best that *you*, with your unique mission in life](http://www.sichosinenglish.org/books/the-curtain-parted/06.htm), could be.

Post script: This article in not meant to take the place of psychological treatment. Almost everyone in the world could benefit from therapy, and if you have persistent self-hatred issues, please seek help.