

Diamonds Polished Here

by Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer

Andrew was a member of a group of former convicts in recovery. At one group session, the psychiatrist leading the group (who, incidentally, was also an ordained member of the clergy) declared his belief in the inherent goodness and integrity of every individual. In over thirty years of practice, specializing in the treatment of alcoholism and substance abuse, he said, this belief had never failed; each individual's integrity is always there, hovering just below the surface, eager to emerge.

Andrew demurred. "How can you talk to us of self-esteem, of our inherent goodness?" he demanded. "I've been a thief since I was eight. When I'm out of prison I can't find work, and my family doesn't want to see me."

"Consider the diamonds in the window of a jewelry store," the psychiatrist said. "Think of what they look like when they come out of the mine – nothing but lumps of dirty stone. It takes a person who understands the diamond to take the shapeless mound and bring out its intrinsic beauty. That's what we do in our program; we search out the diamond in everyone; we help the soul's beauty come to the surface; we polish it until it gleams." The doctor then looked again at Andrew, sitting there all disheveled and hunched over, as if he were trying to hide in his seat, and he said, "You're like that dirt-covered stone. Our business is to find the diamond within you and polish it until it glows."

Two years passed. Andrew had graduated from the treatment center, had completed his stay in the halfway house, and was integrated into the community, working in construction. One day the manager of the halfway house received a call from a family whose elderly matriarch had died; they wanted to donate her furniture. She called Andrew and asked him to pick up the furniture, which he willingly agreed to do. When he went to pick it up, he saw that it wasn't worth saving, but, not wanting to insult the family, he hauled it anyway.

While Andrew was laboring to carry the shabby sofa up the stairs to the halfway house, an envelope fell from the cushions. After getting the couch inside, he retrieved the envelope, in which he found about \$1,700. Andrew, remember, had served time in prison for burglary. When he was doing drugs, he would have broken into a home for twenty

dollars. But now he called the manager and told her about the envelope. She, of course, said it must be reported to the family.

The family was so gratified by their honesty that they told them to keep the money for the halfway house. As a result, they were able to provide room for one more guest, creating one more opportunity for recovery. And Andrew wasn't a crook anymore.

Andrew related this story to the doctor in a letter. "When I used drugs," he wrote, "I would get high for a short time, and when the high wore off I felt terrible, worse than before. It's been three months since I found that money, and, every time I think of what I did, I feel good all over again."

A few months later, the doctor made another visit to that halfway house. There was a sign hanging above the entry. It read, "DIAMONDS POLISHED HERE."