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**Daniel Greenberg**

**Script for BBC Thought for the Day**

**23 August 2018**

**Social media and self-confidence**

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Good morning.

In Washington earlier this week Melania Trump warned that social media can be “destructive and harmful when used incorrectly”; her “Be Best” campaign looks at the welfare implications of social media for children, and of course she has good reason to know that there can be issues around the use of social media for adults too.

Dependence on social media grows all the time: attracting followers, likes and other kinds of endorsement appear to be the prevailing currency of celebrity and self-validation among people of all ages and in all professions, occupations and social settings.

A poignant, although probably apocryphal, story is told about the Hasidic Rabbi Zisha who lived in Galicia in the 1700’s. On his deathbed, surrounded by disciples, he was crying uncontrollably. His students asked “Master, why are you crying?” “I’m frightened”, he replied: “when I reach the Heavenly Court they will ask me ‘Zisha, why weren’t you as great as Abraham’?” “But Master”, the students replied, “how could you have been as great as Abraham, with his opportunities and blessings? Why should the Heavenly Court compare you to Abraham?” “You have comforted me, my children,” said Reb Zisha; but a moment later he was crying again: “What if they ask me ‘Zisha, why weren’t you as great as Moses?’” “But Rebbe”, cried the students, “why should the Heavenly Court compare you to Moses, with his unique talents and opportunities?” Again, the Rebbe was comforted; but a moment later he cried out: “But what if they ask me ‘Zisha, why weren’t you Zisha?’” The students had no answer, and they and the Rebbe cried together as he left the world.

It’s pointless for me to look at someone else’s Facebook page and ask myself why I’m not as popular, as successful or apparently (and it normally is illusory) as happy as they are. But it’s worse than pointless: it distracts me from the real “Being Best”, which is trying to become the best me that I can possibly be.

We all have different ideas about whether and how we are called upon to account. Some of us believe in an examination after death by a heavenly tribunal. Some of us believe that, apart from public examinations like the GCSEs for which results are out today, we account only to ourselves and during our lifetime. But perhaps we can all agree that, like Zisha, we have to avoid being distracted by comparisons that eat into being able to be true to who we actually are, each and every day.