



FROM THE DESK OF RABBI MOSHE HAUER

OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT



Towards Peace of Mind

You and I need to be attentive to our mental and emotional health, especially at times like these. An important component of our well-being involves the resolution of suppressed feelings. We all know how bottling up feelings can be very corrosive, “eating us up inside.” Our Parsha specifically guides us away from keeping difficult feelings inside.

Lo tisna et achicha bilvavecha. “Do not carry hatred for your brother in your heart; rebuke your fellow and do not bear guilt over him.” (Vayikra 19:17)

Ramban offers two interpretations of this warning. Initially he suggests that the Torah is even more unhappy with hatred that is expressed in action, yet it addresses the more common phenomenon of the quiet harboring of resentment. He goes on to propose that in the series of clauses packed into this one verse the Torah is urging us specifically not to bottle it up but to instead express to others whatever resentment we may feel towards them in an appropriate fashion. In this understanding, the Torah is specifically addressing the issue of concealing our feelings and suggesting resolution via confronting the issue directly and talking it out.

It may be the case however that confrontation is just one alternative. Some of us may be

able to banish those difficult feelings, fulfilling the obligation not to carry the hatred without need for the next step of expressing rebuke. This is conveyed in a classic Talmudic passage (Yoma 75a) that offers two alternatives to getting hard feelings and anxieties out of our system.

“Anxiety in the heart of a man weighs him down; but a good word makes him glad.” (Mishlei 12:25): R. Ammi and R. Assi differ in the interpretation of this verse: one rendered it, ‘let him banish the anxiety from his mind; the other, ‘let him discuss it with others.’

The difference of opinion is directly related to alternative meanings of the unusual Biblical word used in the proverb, *yashchena*. But the two versions reveal the two approaches to resolution of such feelings, distraction and confrontation. Note the instructive words of Dr. David Pelcovitz:

“Research ... finds that coping styles are on a continuum from “attenders” to “distracters”, active information seekers to information avoiders. “Attenders” deal with stressful situations in an active manner... In contrast, “distracter” patients prefer to distract themselves.... Interestingly, research shows that the ability to cope is compromised if you try to turn a distracter into an attender or vice versa... The differing views of Rav Ammi and Rav Assi echo the “attender” versus “distracter” approach to dealing with anxiety. Distracters follow the interpretation of banishing the worry from one’s mind; attenders deal with worry by verbalizing their fears to others. In coping with the stress ... it is important to

tune in to whether you are more comfortable using distraction as the preferred approach, or are you more comforted by verbalizing your anxieties in discussion with others.”

Different strokes for different folks. We may effectively address our feelings or our personal anxieties in a variety of ways, but invariably we will do best by making sure that those feelings are put to rest, yielding the invaluable gift of *menuchat hanefesh*, peace of mind and heart. ■

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