

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

Statistics show that one in five people are affected by it, eighty percent of visits to the doctor are because of it, and a fifth of children suffer from it. This worldwide epidemic was little heard of twenty-five years ago, yet today we find it crippling the population at large and causing untold grief and pain.

The name of this terrible scourge is stress, and though many will shrug and say, "Oh, that's some modern gobbledy gook for slackers who don't want to work," don't be fooled. This is a real disease with real consequences. And if you feel that stress is only a problem in the secular world, I am sorry to disabuse you of any such notions.

Stress has stepped into our community with a vengeance. Daily I hear of regular frum homes that are under siege from the stress of everyday living. One must work harder than ever just to keep up to everyone else's standard, quality time spent with children is fast disappearing, and many heimishe homes see both parents consumed by their work loads to the detriment of the entire family. It is a difficult struggle just to earn enough to pay tuition, and grandparents find it ever harder to help their struggling children. Most working parents put in long hours and still find themselves bringing home work that wasn't completed.

We thought the new technology breakthroughs would make things easier, but in a perverse way, it's just the opposite. Mobile phones put us on call twenty-four hours a day, and if we try to hide, the answering machines buzz with messages that must be returned as soon as possible. Fax machines churn out documents day and night, everyone is busy, and the environment we live in is so noisy you can barely think straight. It's little wonder that so many are getting ill. The most heimishe parents, with all the good will in their souls, are finding this world a difficult place indeed, and our children feel this atmosphere of anguish and often act out accordingly.

Into this maelstrom of disquiet we must endeavor to inject some relief. Perhaps we can't change what the secular world has wrought, but as Torah Jews we must do whatever possible to make things better. If we can ameliorate some of the static in the air within our community, we can create pockets of safety that will give us all some breathing space.

The first step is to diagnose the problem in terms of our own existence. What causes so much stress in our lives, and what irritants can be eliminated from our lifestyle?

Anyone who looks deeply at the root causes will find several dynamics at play. First, we are driven

by a certain degree of insecurity. It used to be that someone who had a job was more or less stable. Today the marketplace throws away its workers with ever more abandon. Skills become obsolete all too soon, and we have to work harder than ever just to stay in place. Employers are victims as well, trying to keep up with a ruthless world that has no respect for those at the bottom of the pile. This makes for a working environment that reeks of unhappiness.

But this is not the core of the Yid's stress. Jews have always known how to adapt to precarious terrain. The real tragedy is that when returning to the heimishe world after a day out there in the cold, we don't find the support that was once the byword of the yiddishe velt. In a word, we are not nice enough to each other.

Let us look at the fifteenth kapitel of Tehillim for guidance. *A mizmor song by David. Hashem, who will live in Your tent? Who will dwell on the mountain of Your sanctuary?*

King David is about to describe what a Torah Yid should be. He asks a question that may seem quite basic, perhaps even superfluous. The Torah has 613 commandments. Aren't these the keys to obtaining entrance into Hashem's tent?

David goes on, however, to describe eleven behavior patterns that seem beyond the call of exact Torah duty. In reality, however, they contain the secret to allowing our minds to think and develop as they should. If we want to live in a safe and warm Torah world, it is these eleven facets that must be polished and refined.

As he begins to enumerate these vital traits, we notice something unique and eye opening. Every one of the eleven points involves our relationship with our fellowman.

He who walks in wholehearted integrity, does what is right and speaks the truth within his heart. Interestingly enough, we don't find a mention about the length of one's coat or the size of his tallis, not a peep about the color or shape of one's hat.

The next line reads, *He who has no slander on his tongue, who has done his friend no evil nor disgraced those close to him.*

David knew a thing or two about people, especially those who grabbed onto minor acts and forgot the real essence of Hashem's Will. As the Talmud Yerushalmi states, "The people of David's generation were all righteous and observant. Yet they would fall in battle because they harbored slanderers and talebearers."

So what kind of Yid is David talking about? My dear friends, he is talking about the real Yidden, those who live under the cover of Hashem's tent. Our times have seen great growth and the rebirth of our people, yet so many of our dearest and closest are in pain. In such times, we need to analyze how we relate to others, because so much of this stress is caused by our disregard of the feelings of those around us. We do evil if we don't give support to those who are suffering. We can't walk in righteousness if it's over the prostrated bodies of friends who are desperate for a kind word. Stress is

caused by anger and despair at one's situation, and such negativity dissipates with a warm smile and heartfelt empathy.

Each generation has its specific challenge. Ours may well be in the realm of David's eleven points. Think for a moment. So many of us have an acquaintance we see every day who is burdened with something that causes him enormous stress. We can ease that burden. All it takes is a bit of caring on our part. As the verse tells us, *He who walks in wholehearted integrity* How wholehearted can we be if we know that others are hurting and we do nothing? *Does what is right* What is more right than the chessed of giving someone else hope? *And speaks the truth within his heart* It is within our hearts that we are answerable to our actions. We may say that we care and we've done our best, but what kind of message is really in our hearts?

Stress is a killer disease. It wears the afflicted person down until he becomes totally depressed. Tehillim tells us that to be part of that nation that strives to live in Hashem's tent we must reach out and alleviate others' pain. We must be honest in our hearts and bring real joy into our daily interactions with others.

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