

# FAMILY ISSUES

Dedicated To The Memory Of Yechezkel Chezi Goldberg, H"YD

## Yearning for 'Boring'

By Hadassah Lehrfeld

An earthquake that shook the entire Eastern seaboard brought workers pouring onto the streets of Manhattan on Tuesday, August 23<sup>rd</sup> as buildings swayed and cell towers were temporarily disabled. Less than a week later, in the wee hours of Sunday, August 28<sup>th</sup>, Hurricane Irene swept through our area leaving flooding, as well as downed trees and power lines, in its wake. The imperative to reduce our ballooning deficit is consuming our national debate as unemployment runs rampant, companies downsize, and New York hospitals are forced to close their doors due to bankruptcy. Internationally, the fluctuating stock market threatens the financial stability of industrialized nations, and regimes decades old in Egypt and Libya succumb to opposition forces. The list of disturbing events beyond our control is endless, including the constant threat of terrorism and the persistent popularity of its extremist proponents. Undeniably, the world in which we live can be a terrifying place.

Although the news, the weather, and our finances are often frighteningly out of whack, we take comfort in the stability of our personal lives, as we enter the familiar environs of our private domains and proceed with our demanding daily routines. Mothers and fathers continue caring for their young, as those in the "sandwich generation" take on the additional responsibility of caring for their aging parents. We get to enjoy our *Shabbosim*

and *Yomim Tovim* together, focus on our goals and accomplishments, and enjoy the camaraderie of friends and family. The picture may not be perfectly rosy, but it depicts the ebb and flow of our private lives when all is going reasonably well.

However, the reality of a home where a teenager has become addicted to drugs or alcohol is one in which the possibility of calm is completely removed. When a lost and lonely youth latches onto the good-feel high temporarily available from addictive substances, the situation puts a monkey wrench in the potential for family to serve as a cornerstone of stability. Whole families are in turmoil, with parents and teens in an agony of fear and opposition. The pull of the drug is a dilemma a typical family is ill equipped to deal with. Expert help must be called in hopes of diffusing the tense situation and avoiding the most tragic outcome of death from an accidental overdose.

We all wish we could say that this is a rare occurrence, but it would be a lie. The numbers of teenagers from our religious communities who are buried each year due to overdose is staggering. Sadly, the Brooklyn community is reeling from four overdoses in the last two weeks alone, resulting in two deaths and two teens on the critical list. The tragedy is compounded when there is an opportunity to help, but there is no funding available, due to an apathetic public living in denial. Thankfully, that is not the case for the majority

of our community. The people who are so-called apathetic are often actually unaware or unbelieving. The harsh reality of the scourge of substance abuse among our own relatively sheltered and well-cared-for population is one we all wish did not exist. However, burying our heads in the sand by saying "*nisht bah unzera* is a lie we cannot afford to continue telling ourselves. Those in the know can, to their great sorrow, testify, that no family, whatever their religious or socioeconomic background, is immune.

There are organizations situated in the heart of our community that have been instrumental in averting these tragedies. You may not know Our Place and The Living Room, but to the suffering teens they serve as lifesavers. Both are open each weekday evening and staffed by dedicated adults who are present for four or more hours. They are trained to redirect addicted and wary kids towards a path of health and well-being. Each teen that is reached and helped is another soul uplifted, another tragedy averted, and another family made whole again.

The reason many of us still believe that addiction is rare in our communities is because families are reluctant to reveal that a member is struggling with addiction. Recovering addicts naturally progress to the point where they are horrified to look back on the game of Russian roulette they were playing with their lives, and often want no additional reminder of that terrible time. This is all to the good, an indication of true *teshuvah*. True repentance moves a Jew into a new place where a repetition of the abandoned mode of destructive behavior is no longer part of his or her make-up. May we all merit to achieve this level of *teshuvah* in the coming days so that we can move on to bigger and better challenges on our paths to greatness.

Donations can be sent to Our Place, 44 Wall Street, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10005. Tel: 212-248-4141 Please visit our website [www.ourplaceny.org](http://www.ourplaceny.org) for further information about our organization.

## Human Nature 101

By Dovid Lieberman, Ph.D.



### If You Fail To Plan, Then You Plan To Fail

Part 2

Most people live life reactively, never utilizing, let alone actualizing, their free will. Expanding our minds to possibilities of a new, completely different existence ignites the spark of free will. Indeed, G-d wants us to think big: "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it up." (*Tehillim* 81:11).

Having previously discussed why people are reluctant to plan their lives, we now shift to specific strategies for doing so. For we must not become like the person who shoots an arrow at the side of a barn and then draws a circle around it after it lands. He cares little for what he aims at; he proudly convinces himself, and the world, that he is a success. For us, formulating a precise definition of what we want to accomplish, and who we wish to become in the process, is vital to our success. It helps us focus on relevant activities and avoid distractions that move us away from our goal.

Mark Twain once said, "If I had more time, I would have written a shorter note." If we want to crystallize our thoughts and focus, we must think

and reflect. In addition, our goals need to be organized and harmonized. Renowned psychiatrist Karen Horney writes:

We have to make sure our goals are synergistic – living with unresolved conflicts involve primarily a devastating waste of human energies, occasioned not only by conflicts themselves but by all the devious attempts to remove them. When a person is basically divided he can never put his energies wholeheartedly into anything but wants always to pursue two or more incompatible goals. This means he will either scatter his energies or actively frustrate his efforts... no matter how potentially gifted he is – [his efforts] will be wasted. . . Divided energies also causes him to unconsciously rebel and insist on perfection, forgetfulness, overworking, etc., neurotic inertia is a paralysis of initiative and action. Generally speaking it is the result of a strong alienation from self and a lack of goal direction.

Once a path has been chosen, we must break down our goals into a series of specific, clear objectives. "If you seize something small, you have seized it; if you seize something big, you have not seized it." (*Sukkah* 5a).

Next, we should create action steps to follow, and identify the most direct and decisive path, noting key strategic accomplishments that must be met along the way. Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerondi in his essay *Sod HaTeshuvah* writes: "From the mo-

ment a person awakens in the morning he should examine everything he does. One should divide his daily schedule into manageable segments which are easy to monitor."

We are further taught, "The eyes of a fool are toward the end of the earth." (*Proverbs* 17:24). Rashi explains that people justify their inertia by saying, "It is impossible for me to do it all, so why should I even try to do anything?" G-d created the universe with ten statements or steps; He could have done it in one – or with none. Let us emulate G-d and divide our aspirations into reasonable and doable objectives.

Finally, futility is the engine of depression. (As is the pursuit of perfection, which is the henchman of procrastination. Striving for excellence is motivating but motivates you; striving for perfection is demoralizing, for perfection is a moving target.) A drop in the ocean does not inspire us, but seeing results leads to the desire for more growth and movement. In our darker hours, we may need to point to indisputable, concrete proof that we are effective.

Everything in nature has a cycle, therefore when we complete what we started, we not only gain a sense of accomplishment, we also feel more fulfilled from having successfully seen something through to the end. Ideally, progress should come in the form of completing segments of our objective so our mini-successes are self-contained and energize our resolve. *Chovot HaLevavot* writes: "Celebrate every small victory you have over the *yetzer hara*, and this will lead you to greater victories."

To be continued...

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