

Mind Your Mind

Hashem will strike you with madness and with blindness and confounding of the heart (28:28).

The latter half of this week's *parsha* informs us, in very explicit detail, of all the calamitous consequences that will befall us for not properly following in the path of Torah and *mitzvos*. Concerning this verse, the Ibn Ezra (ad loc) writes that they refer to illnesses of the mind. From this Ibn Ezra we see something remarkable regarding illnesses of the mind.

A number of years ago a man who was in a desperate state came to see the Rosh HaYeshiva. He was highly educated and held a Master's in Engineering from an Ivy League school, where he had graduated with honors. Previously, he had headed a large construction firm with many employees and his firm had offices occupying over a 100,000 square feet of space. Then came the financial crash, his business fell apart, and he was forced to close it down. Moreover, he had personally guaranteed the business leases, so he was sued for payment, which led to his personal financial ruin. Things deteriorated to the point that he and his wife were forced to move into their son's home.

He was despondent and asked the Rosh HaYeshiva for some guidance. The Rosh HaYeshiva tried to console him and offer some advice for moving forward: "Why

don't you go back to school and learn another profession?" The man responded that it was an impossibility as he had recently been diagnosed with ADHD and would not be able to focus on his studies. Here was a man who had an advanced degree from a prestigious school, where he had graduated with honors, and all of the sudden he was learning disabled?

When a person suffers trauma in their life one of the oft overlooked consequences is what this trauma does to the mind. According to both the NIH and a Harvard medical school study, about 5% of the population suffers from ADHD. Yet there are many districts in the country where the diagnoses and prescribe rate for ADHD are more than triple the accepted rate. In one NIH study, children who lived within thirty kilometers of Chernobyl and had subsequently been relocated to Ukraine for ten years were testing positively for ADHD at a rate of almost 20%.

Ever wonder why so many illnesses are being treated today at rates that were unheard of decades ago? Of course, part of the answer is that there is better testing today, but another significant percentage is due to the fact that today so many more children are products of broken or unstable homes where their

parents themselves are emotional wrecks. Today, many children are being raised by proxy with video games and social media platforms acting as their guide to the realities of life. There is very little emotional validation in their lives. Is it any wonder they are having issues coping?

The toll that the physical and financial failures will have on Bnei Yisroel's emotional state are no small portion of the terrible consequences of the punishments that Hashem doles out for not following in His ways. However, much of this reaction is within our power to control. This is part of the lesson that is being taught: We need to take control and responsibility for our reactions.

Have you ever had someone come to you and apologize for saying something unkind or inappropriate? Often it goes something like this: "I am sorry I yelled at you for something so silly, please forgive me, it's just who I am." What they are really telling you is, "that's who I want to be." In other words, instead of working on themselves they expect you to just tolerate their boorish behavior. One of the lessons of the *tochacha* is that we must constantly work to improve who we are and take responsibility for our own emotional state.

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