

Crystals

As I drove to work today, watching the snowflakes drifting down on the windshield, I was reminded of my reaction to last month's snowy day. I was out driving to the grocery. In reality, the snow was just a flurry at that point, yet I was already panicking, OK, not panicking (those of you who know me know that's not my nature) but concerned. It had been so drummed into us that a terrible storm might head our way that even the ever so common winter sight of snow flurries seemed daunting. My ability to deal with the reality of the moment, which really wasn't so out of the ordinary when you live in the Northeastern United States, was diminished by my concern for the predicted (translation: possible, not materialized) difficult future. Granted the area had just been hit by a hurricane and people had suffered through terrible loss, so the thought of an upcoming storm was nerve wracking, but the current reality was still the current reality. I was just driving through an annoying snow flurry. The cars around me were not incapacitated, the stores had power, people were out and about, and the school busses were running as usual.

The phenomenon that I experienced, that I'll call anticipatory anxiety, is not an unusual one. I have witnessed it among friends and dealt with it in my practice as well. Here's how it works: Let's say you have a presentation due at work or at school, maybe even one with a grade or a raise riding on it. You start to worry that it will not go well. You envision walking out afterwards embarrassed and disappointed in yourself. The day arrives and your printer jams. At that moment you feel as if you've failed already. You are already experiencing the feelings of the predicted (possible, not materialized) future failure. What is the reality of the moment? The reality is that there is one paper

stuck, you have not lost it all. The reality of the moment is that if you'd relax a bit you'd realize that you can pull out the jammed page and try printing it again. Simple solution.

This phenomenon happens in relationships as well. Sometimes our child refuses to do something, let's say, pick up their dirty clothes. If this is not your first child, and any of your older ones have felt it their obligation to give you "Tzaar Gidul Bonim" (they are very frum and felt it their responsibility to follow this Torah dictum), you get very nervous. Why? You start to see this act as a "first" act of defiance rather than "an" act of childish behavior. The reality here is that at this point in time you are dealing with a temporarily lazy child, not a candidate for Ben Sorer Umoreh. If our reactions are extreme, based on predicted behavior that is unrelated to the current situation, then, in fact, we create a situation that is doomed to failure. Think of examples where this has happened in your own life in your dealings with relatives and friends. (I love to get ideas from readers so feel free to e-mail them to me.)

For those of you wondering where the title of this article came from, here it is. If I remember correctly from elementary school, snowflakes are not just one crystal but many pieces stuck together. As they travel they pick up more pieces, becoming even larger. Once they hit a surface they stick to even more pieces creating large chunks (the stuff that you have to chisel off of your walkway). When our kids get a hold of it they make it into snowballs, which they then make into boulders. . . you get my drift (pun intended). This is the way that anticipatory anxiety works as well. We start off with a little concern, but rather than viewing it as such, we already see it as an insurmountable boulder! If we learn to deal with each crystal as it

comes, we can just brush it away. Someday we might even be able to see the beauty in each crystal of our experience, but we'll leave crystal gazing for another article!

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