

Seeking Solutions / By Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D.

Hamodia invites readers who are facing challenges in their personal lives to seek expert advice from nationally known Torah scholar, author and psychiatrist Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. To assure anonymity, there is no need to sign your letter, although doing so will enable us to communicate with you privately if necessary. Do your best to present the situation honestly, including all relevant details. Fax your query to (718) 853-9103 or send to SeekingSolutions@hamodia.com. Due to heavy volume, we regret that we are unable to print all letters.

Q. I am a *bachur* in a normal yeshivah coming from a normal home, but I have a problem that I would like your help to deal with it: I have a complex about myself and worry that my friends only speak to me in order to be nice to me.

Truthfully, I do act this way towards someone I know, and other boys whom he considers close friends really speak to him and include him in things just to be nice to him.

I would like to know where this complex comes from and how I could overcome it.

Many thanks for your help.

A. When you say, "they only speak to me to be nice to me," that is, of course, your perception, how you see things.

The Torah relates that when the *meraglim* returned from Eretz Canaan, they said that the land was inhabited by giants. "We appeared in our own eyes like grasshoppers, and that is how we appeared to them" (*Bamidbar* 13:33). Chidushei HaRim comments that the Torah is telling us that the way a person feels about himself is how he thinks other people perceive him.

This is a most important psychological insight. A person does not think he may be hallucinating or delusional. A person feels that what he sees as reality is in fact reality, and

does not doubt the validity of his perception.

If a person thinks of himself as being small, he is certain that others see him as small. Similarly, if he thinks of himself as dull, unattractive, unlikable and inadequate, he is certain that this is what he is and that others see him as such.

Chidushei Harim comments that the Torah is telling us that the way a person feels about himself is how he thinks other people perceive him.

In my books, I have repeatedly pointed out that many people's self-concept is erroneous, and that they have unwarranted negative feelings about themselves.

In *Angels Don't Leave Footprints* I pointed out that these erroneous feelings about oneself are the work of the yetzer hara.

The Talmud says that the yetzer hara constantly tries to destroy a person (*Kedushin* 30), and I believe it does so by

crushing him, making him feel inferior and worthless.

It takes away the initiative to accomplish, causes a person to be paralyzed by fear of failure, and makes him lose confidence in his ability to live up to all the Torah's requirements.

If you thought better about yourself, you would feel that people relate to you because they value and enjoy your friendship, rather than that they are doing *chessed* with you.

We are all better people than we take credit for. Certainly, we may have some character defects, but we should have the confidence that we can improve upon them. The famous *baal mussar* Reb Yeruchem Levovitz, *zt"l*, said, "Woe unto the person who is not aware of his character defects, but much worse is the person who is not aware of his character strengths."

We can defend ourselves against the *yetzer hara's* efforts to crush us by working toward a true self-awareness. Harav Shlomo Wolbe, *zt"l*, has a section on self-awareness in volume I of *Alei Shur*.

In *Ten Steps to Being Your Best*, I suggest a method to build self-esteem. This will not only change how you feel about how others relate to you, but can relieve you of some of the self-defeating things we do as a result of an erroneous self-concept.