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Navigating Feelings of Anger During Corona

“I’m sorry, Eli, but with all work being done from home, we simply have no need for an office manager,” Eli’s boss said empathetically. “Once we return to the office, you’ll have your job back. But until then I just can’t pay you.” Eli was nervous, but assumed the situation would improve sooner than later. With schools closed and nowhere to go, he hoped to enhance his relationship with his children while at home.

Things did not go according to plan. Rachel was swamped with her therapy practice and couldn’t keep up with the housework. However inconvenient to Eli, he knew that her practice was their family’s financial security. Still, Eli had become extremely irritable, nervous, and angry. He was often shouting at the children, demanding that they clear their dishes, clean their rooms, or simply go to sleep on time. Without school there was no need for a normal sleep schedule. Each child had his/her own routine and nobody seemed to be maintaining “normalcy.” He began berating his children and constantly referring to them as “lazy kids.” What happened to the tenacious children he remembered? He thought that by enforc-

ing order, he would reinstate that sense of responsibility. In reality, the relationship with his family only deteriorated. He was angry with his wife, his children, and most of all, with himself.

Anger is a perceived coping mechanism to deal with environmental pressures and stresses. People may perceive some threat from their environment, regardless of its timidity, and believe that they can control their environment before it controls them. Their behaviors can align with their anger, e.g. yelling, breaking objects, even detaching emotionally, as a form of asserting their authority over others. The problem is that by becoming angry, the person only further loses control and causes those around him/her to distance themselves even more.

The Rambam explains that Moshe Rabeinu’s sin when hitting the rock was that he referred to the Jewish nation as *morim* (rebels) in an angry manner. The Jewish nation was thirsty, and although they asked for water in a disrespectful way, Moshe’s anger only distanced them even more. They assumed that if Moshe was angry at them, then Hashem must be angry with them as well—but in fact He wasn’t! Had Moshe replaced the word rebels with *downtrodden* or *distressed*, he may have perceived their behavior and request in a different light. Changing a perception

of an incident can significantly alter our reaction.

As described by the American Psychological Association, this technique of changing one's perception is called *cognitive restructuring*. People who are angry tend to think more with emotion than with intellect. Understandably, they may be facing other pressures which are out of their control and therefore seek to gain control wherever possible. They have a difficult time emotionally detaching from a situation; and instead of focusing on the issue at hand, they respond to their perception of how it impacts their sense of self.

Under considerable stress from his suspended employment, with no way of changing the situation, Eli chose to assert authority over his family as a coping mechanism, which only further ignited his anger. Cognitive reconstructing calls for someone to refrain from ascribing *descriptions* to events, instead focusing on the event in an absolute manner. Instead of getting frustrated by his children's "laziness" (a description of the event), Eli should realize that the children are also coping with a strange, new reality. When an incident incites feelings of anger, one should try and determine the true source of that emotion.

In the moment, it may not be easy to shift from anger mode into cognitive restructuring mode. These are a few simple tips that anyone can utilize to curb their anger:

- Take a few deep, slow, belly-filling breaths. Studies show that such breathing techniques can increase re-

laxation and reduce symptoms of anger and anxiety.

- Take a step back. Most situations don't require immediate intervention. Consider your reaction ("Why am I frustrated?", "How is this feeling affecting my perspective?", etc.). Gather your thoughts and prepare a response.
- Take a five-minute break during times that are often stressful (e.g. bedtime). The world won't end if the kids get tucked in a few minutes later than planned, and that short, precious break can help one mentally prepare to better handle the stress.
- Ask for help. *Everyone* faces challenges. Know when to ask for help, whether from a spouse, a close friend, or perhaps a mental health professional.
- The impact of coronavirus on daily life and families spending more time together has increased the emotional burden for many people. Anger is a common challenge, but with appropriate self-care and self-awareness, one can control his/her anger rather than the other way around. ■

Amudim Israel provides free and confidential clinical case management to Anglo individuals and families dealing with trauma, addictions, and mental health issues. In addition to providing direct support, Amudim's mission includes providing education and awareness about these topics within our communities. For more information please contact office@amudim.org.il or 02-374-0175.