



## FROM THE DESK OF RABBI MOSHE HAUER



OU Executive Vice President

# Never Alone

Whatever the challenge or difficulty, we do so much better when we do not experience it alone. As Rashi in this week's parsha makes clear: "I will scatter you amongst the nations." This is the harshest measure. When members of a country are exiled to a single place, they see each other and take comfort from each other. The Jewish people however were scattered such that no one was able to be connected to another." (Vayikra 26:32, Rashi)

By contrast, the Talmud (Brachos 5b) records how Rav Yochanan would carry with him a bone fragment from the tenth child that he had lost, ר"ל. When he showed it to other bereaved parents it opened a door for them to see that he was someone who could understand what they were experiencing, who could truly empathize with their indescribable pain, and who could make them feel a bit less alone.

Relieving the loneliness of others is our fundamental role within both our family and our community.

G-d created marriage and family because "it is not good for man to be alone." While according to Halacha, the marriage bond is created by a gift of money or something else of value, none of us has witnessed a wedding where the bride was presented with five, five hundred or five thousand

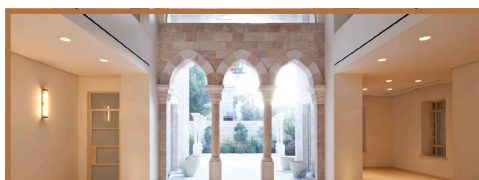
dollars. Instead, we give a ring. Money is put away, in a bank, a wallet or a drawer, while a ring – explained the Sefer HaChinuch – is worn on the finger, seen and played with all the time, a constant reminder of the special connection and relationship that it had forged, that the bearer of the ring is not alone.

While this role is easily noticed by those blessed with marriage and family, it is similarly essential to friendship and community. Author Johann Hari quotes a South African psychiatrist named Dr. Derek Summerfield who told the story of a Cambodian who worked in the rice fields. One day, he stood on a land mine left over from the war with the United States, and he got his leg blown off. They made him an artificial leg, and after a while, he went back to work in the rice fields. Apparently, it is super painful to work under water when one has an artificial limb, and it was traumatic to go back and work in the field where he had gotten blown up. He began to spend all day crying and refused to get out of bed, developing all the symptoms of classic depression. His doctors, his friends, his community, went and sat with him. They listened to him. They realized that his pain made sense, that it had perfectly understandable causes. One of the doctors, talking to the people in the community, figured, "You know, if we bought this guy a cow, he could become a dairy

farmer, and he wouldn't have to go and work in the rice fields." They bought him a cow. Within a couple of weeks, his crying stopped, within a month, his depression was gone. Notice that they did not say to this farmer, 'Hey, buddy, you need to pull yourself together. It's your job to figure out and fix this problem on your own.' On the contrary, what they said is, 'We're here as a group to pull together with you so that together we can figure out and fix this problem.' The listening – the community – the fact that someone understands what I am going through – that is an important part of the solution. He was already on the road to recovery when those friends came to sit with him to try to understand his sadness.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. There are many benefits to our community when we enhance our collective awareness of mental health. We benefit from being sensitized to the issues so that we recognize them in ourselves and in others, and we gain from being educated about available resources and the many ways that these challenges can be addressed. But perhaps most importantly, by discussing these issues we relieve the terrible loneliness of those who feel they are suffering alone. Our community provides strength by any measure taken to relieve the isolation of those who will now know that there are others who share their struggles, and that they are part of a community that is aware of and sensitive to their pain. ■

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