

dence in his ability to lead. Moses was imperfect, yet remains a heroic figure.

For college students, the quest for perfection can add to the risks associated with being away from home. Some students turn to addictive strategies to cope with stress and feelings of inadequacy: alcohol, drugs, binge-eating or drinking, self-mutilation, self-starvation, unhealthy sexual choices, extreme exercise, Internet 24/7, and the like.



INTERVIEWEE RABBI EDYTHE HELD MENCHER

How can Judaism help us avoid such self-destructive behavior?

Judaism teaches that each of us is made *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God. Each of us is of infinite value, placed on this Earth to serve a mission only we can fulfill. Sometimes, when we have no idea how else we might help ourselves, we attempt to ease emotional suffering by doing things that may ultimately harm our bodies. The key is to recognize that we and our bodies are deserving of infinite care and kindness, and to remember that there are positive and calming ways of coping with emotional turmoil.

Of course, there are times you may not even know *what* it is you're feeling and *why* you're feeling it.

So what do you do if you don't know what's bothering you?

Core Contacts

The *RJ Insider's Guide to COLLEGE* is a collaborative project of *Reform Judaism* magazine, the URJ KESHER College Department, and Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life. To read and email this college section visit www.reformjudaismmag.org. To learn more about KESHER's Reform college programs visit www.keshercollege.org, phone 212-650-4070, or email kesherc@urj.org. For additional information about Jewish life on hundreds of campuses throughout the world, contact Hillel at 202-449-6500 or visit www.hillel.org.

The first thing to do is talk about it with someone you trust, because as you speak you are likely to discover the real sources of distress and therefore be able to figure out real remedies. For example,

you might be feeling lost because of a romantic relationship or deep friendship that went sour and is now over. But after you speak for a while about this, you might realize your feelings are not just about the breakup, but also a reaction to a combination of factors, such as

the homesickness and loneliness that people typically feel after they've invested their energies on one relationship at the exclusion of other possibilities in an unfamiliar place. Yes, this intense relationship is a loss, but once you make new friends and get involved in new activities, the loss will feel far less acute.

Or, for example, you might be thinking, "I'm an academic failure; I don't have what it takes to make it at this school." But after you speak for a while about how you're doing in your various classes, you might realize that you're upset about not being able to master just two courses, calculus and chemistry. Once you've identified the problem—that you're struggling in courses requiring math skills—you can acknowledge that you *are* succeeding in other classes, and think about times in the past when you overcame a specific academic problem. You might talk to a parent, who could remind you that in elementary school you didn't think you could learn your multiplication tables, but you did, with some additional help. From there, the logical next step would be to engage a math tutor on campus: a professor, a teaching assistant, someone at a learning center, or a fellow student. You might also choose not to take two courses requiring math skills in one semester.

There are three messages here: 1) discussing and thinking over a situation often clarifies what our real worry is and then how we might find relief; 2) the difficulty we're dealing with now is not a predictor of how things will always be; and 3) almost always, we do have the

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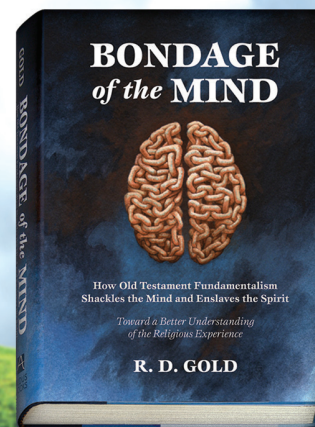
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