

## A Rabbinic Perspective *By Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom*

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### ***"I'm Fine"***



**H**ow often do we ask someone "How are you?" and get the expected, perfunctory response, "I'm fine." Without thinking, we shoot back "Great. Have a nice day." I was struck by a letter to the editor recently by a volunteer working with survivors of Hurricane Katrina at the Convention Center in Austin, Texas. The writer described how she would "go up to someone, say, 'Hi' and ask, 'How're you doin?'" They'd mostly respond by saying they were fine. "I'd ask, 'Do you need anything?' and I'd get the response,

'No, but thank you for asking.'"

But after a few days, she became more assertive, pushing a little harder and listening a little longer. "It often turned out that there was something seriously wrong that needed medical attention. Like the grandma whose knee was hurting to the point of not being able to walk from a fall earlier in the day. I offered to take her to medical triage and grabbed a wheelchair for her. On the way, I found out that her ankles had been swollen for days and that she was diabetic. They taped up her knee, gave her painkillers and found out that her blood sugar was off the charts. They gave her a blood-sugar testing kit.

"Almost to a person those first few days, they had no idea that here in Austin in the convention center, they could have any medical need that they had cared for. This wasn't something they were used to as a right in their lives.

"I often had to convince them that it would be all right to ask, and often I had to go with them to give them the confidence to ask.

"It has deeply saddened me and also opened my eyes to something I've had them closed to for many, many years."

Often our eyes are closed to the suffering of the people around us. Often we take "I'm fine" at face value and are happy not to get involved. Often the answer is given with no expectation that the questioner really wants to know, or if they do, that they are willing to get involved with us.

However, we are much better people, much more human, when we open our eyes and our hearts, when we can sense in a look or in the quality of the voice that someone is not "fine" and is silently crying out for help. We stop and ask a little more until the person feels safe confiding in us.

Many people around us are troubled and anxious, and are just looking for someone who will care and help. It shouldn't take a disaster to teach us that.

With a new year upon us, let's listen a lot more carefully to the people around us. We will do a lot of good and feel much better for having done it.

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