BEHALOTEKHA: More therapy or more responsibilities?

American Jewish journalist Abigail Shrier, in her 2024 book Bad Therapy, does not deny that therapy can help, or even save lives. Her warning is that in certain circles it has become automatic, used even when it is not needed. Her target is a culture that, in the name of catharsis, pushes children, and especially teenagers, to ruminate on their own distress again and again. And chewing on it does not help. It locks them in a loop of anxiety that only drags them down further. Asking “how are you feeling” on repeat, validating every fear, tracking every emotion: all of it, Shrier says, manufactures the very problem it claims to cure.

For the kind of anxiety that comes from abundance and from having nothing meaningful to do, her prescription is not the couch. It is real life. And she gets specific. Give the teenager chores at home, jobs that actually matter and have to get done. Push him to get a job, part-time or summer, and earn something with his own effort. Let him move around and figure things out alone: run an errand, settle his or her own fights. Set clear rules at home and hold the line, instead of negotiating every point with your child like she is another adult. And on the other side, let go. Stop padding every fall. Stop treating every normal stumble of growing up like a wound that needs treatment.

Strong character is not built by picking at small problems until they grow. It is built through competence: the feeling that you can stand on your own, that you are useful, that you are worthy. The teenager carrying a real responsibility is too busy to spend his days ruminating over his feelings.