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to want to do something; but in many of these situations, there's not much direct action that we can take.

"So the brain can spin out of control, scaring itself, maybe feeling guilty and ruminating over issues that are beyond our control. This is the essence of a 'bad worry' habit."

Perhaps it is because of the amount of Jewish brainpower dedicated to worry that we end up with the neurotic New Yorker stereotype. "Neurosis is basically suffering that you create yourself," says Rossman. "A neurotic person, a Woody Allen archetype, is the kind who is processing distress 24-7, regardless of circumstance."

The neurotic prototype is someone with a very bad worry habit. "The phenomenon makes for funny Woody Allen movies," he says, "but it is miserable for those who live with it or whose families live with it."

The shame, he says, is that so much of Jewish anguish may be unnecessary. "We have enough real problems to solve, without letting our runaway imaginations add to our distress."

He says the first step to kicking the habit is developing awareness of it. The next step is recognizing that neurotic thoughts are based on inaccurate interpretations of events — story lines that may have developed at a young age but are totally false.

"By learning to observe your thoughts," Rossman says, "and by considering other ways of interpreting events, it is possible to lessen the grip of obsessive worry."

The Worry Solution teaches mindfulness, but sometimes the help of a therapist is invaluable.

"Freud once said that the purpose of therapy is to turn neurotic misery into simple unhappiness," Rossman says. "But we know now that people can do much better than that when they learn to worry well." □

Dr. Rossman is the founder of The Healing Mind, co-founder of the Academy for Guided Imagery and a clinical faculty member at the University of California San Francisco Medical School.

HEALING

Resolved

Is worry to Jews like cream cheese to bagels?

Martin Rossman, M.D.'s, new book *The Worry Solution* (Crown Archetype Books) is dedicated to his grandparents. "They had a lot to worry about," the dedication reads, "and they handled it with courage and grace."

Take the example of Rossman's paternal grandmother, Jesse: Three months after she was married, at the age of 17, her husband died during a typhus epidemic. Not long after, there was a food shortage, followed by a wave of pogroms in Russia. Jesse grabbed her baby son (Rossman's father), her four younger siblings and fled to America.

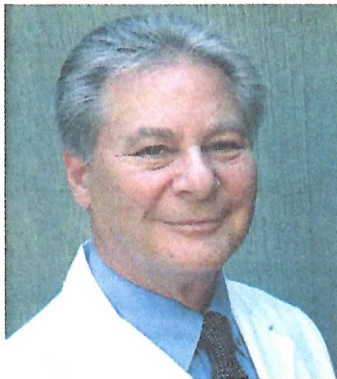
At one of the border crossings, the baby started crying, just when everyone needed to be quiet. The smuggler commanded Jesse to either silence or smother the baby.

"A lot of the Jewish people in this country, especially in Detroit where I grew up, were from the same heritage and had similar stories," Rossman says. "A 17-year-old in this country today, especially in the middle class, fortunately doesn't have to deal with things like that."

But it's exactly these kinds of extreme worries, Rossman says, that has taught the Jewish community how to worry well.

In his book, Rossman distinguishes between "good worry" and "bad worry," according to whether the worry is a problem-solving mechanism or simply a hamster wheel of obsessive thoughts.

"If you get stuck in bad worry," Rossman says, "you can just collapse in the face of stress. But very few of the *landsleit* — people from the old country — did that. They didn't have



Author Dr. Martin Rossman

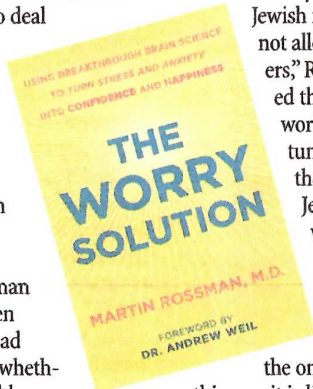
community. Education in particular, Rossman says, has served as a coping mechanism. "Knowledge and critical thinking are forms of power," he says. "Where there is real danger, you better be sharp and street smart. You better be paying attention."

As a tiny minority group in a sometimes-hostile world, Jews have always known that the odds are stacked against them. So Jewish culture teaches to always be at the ready. "The Jewish mother and father will not allow their kids to be slackers," Rossman says. "It's expected that you'll study, do well, work hard, look for opportunities, and give back to the family and community. Jews value being savvy, whip smart, making the most of opportunities and taking care of our own."

While Jews are not the only people to have adapted this way, it is likely, Rossman says, that millennia of persecution has heightened the importance of these values in the Jewish community.

But what happens when a people wired for persecution suddenly finds itself in the land of the free?

"The brain is kind of like a scan-



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JN CONTENTS | theJEWISHNEWS.com
Jan. 27-Feb. 2, 2011 | 22-28 Shevat 5771 | Vol. CXXXVIII, No. 25