

Summer 5777

RISE

Reaching out with **I**nspiration **S**upport and **E**ncouragement



A project of Chazkeinu



A **REVOLUTIONARY PROJECT** UNITING JEWISH WOMEN WORLDWIDE

A **PEER-LED ORGANIZATION** STRENGTHENING AND EMPOWERING
JEWISH WOMEN WITH MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES

SERVICING WOMEN LIVING WITH:

- ADHD •
- ADDICTION •
- ANXIETY •
- BIPOLAR •
- CYCLOTHYMIA •
- DEPERSONALIZATION/
DISSOCIATIVE DISORDERS •
- DEPRESSION •
- EATING DISORDERS •
- INSOMNIA •
- OCD •
- PANIC DISORDER •
- PARANOIA •
- PERSONALITY DISORDERS •
- PHOBIAS •
- PPD •
- PTSD •
- PSYCHOSIS •
- SCHIZOPHRENIA •
- SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDE •
- SOCIAL ANXIETY •
- TRICHOTILLOMANIA •
- ... AND MORE

ALSO SERVING WOMEN WITH
UNDIAGNOSED EMOTIONAL STRUGGLES

OUR PROGRAMS

- > PHONE SUPPORT MEETINGS
- > CHAT CLUB
- > QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER
- > PARTNER PROGRAM
- > INSPIRATIONAL EMAILS
- > ONLINE FORUM
- > OUTREACH MEMBER LIST
- > DAVENING (PRAYER) GROUP
- > SHABBATON
- > CHAZKEINU GATHERINGS
- > EMPOWERED NON-EMERGENCY SUPPORT
HOTLINE
- > CARE PACKAGES
- > BIRTHDAY SURPRISE

“AFTER THE FIRST MEETING I JOINED, I WAS ON A HIGH! IT WAS ONE OF THE MOST INCREDIBLE EXPERIENCES OF MY LIFE. I FELT SO CONNECTED AND VALIDATED.”

“I WOULD DESCRIBE CHAZKEINU AS A HEARTBEAT; IT IS ESSENTIAL AND PART OF WHAT KEEPS ME ALIVE.”

“I HEARD SOPHISTICATED NORMAL WOMEN SHARE THEIR STRUGGLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS... I DON'T THINK OF MYSELF AS DAMAGED GOODS ANYMORE. I THINK OF MYSELF AS A REGULAR PERSON WITH A TOUGH CHALLENGE.”

“I HAVE BECOME MORE CONFIDENT, STRONGER, HAPPIER, BECAUSE OF CHAZKEINU.”

“CHAZKEINU HAS BECOME MY GO-TO PLACE TO CONNECT AND FEEL LIKE A REAL HUMAN BEING.”

IF YOU ARE A WOMAN LIVING WITH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES OR COPING WITH A FAMILY MEMBER STRUGGLING, WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US! PLEASE CALL, EMAIL OR CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE!

314.346.7414 • CHAZKEINU@GMAIL.COM • WWW.CHAZKEINU.ORG

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| Letters |

To my dearest Chazkeinu sisters,

How do I even begin to express all that I feel towards each and every one of you amazing women from all corners of the world who have impacted my life immeasurably?

Before Chazkeinu, I remember feeling and expressing so many times that no one really understands me. I just wanted to be able to be myself with others and couldn't. I felt that many of my relationships were superficial. The "Hi!" and "Bye!" at the grocery store or the small talk at a community event was just not doing the trick. It was often more painful than helpful for me.

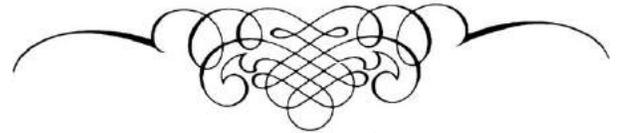
The way I picture my "Chazkeinu metamorphosis" is imagining that I'm traveling in my car, and I so badly want to reach my destination. The "only" problem is that I'm not quite sure where I want to go or how to get there. I begin my journey through roads that are pleasant looking but not inviting. I see others around but no one seems to notice me. I'm on an endless path, and I don't know where to turn or where I will end up. Finally, I decide to take a break at a rest stop and to figure out which direction I came from and which way I am going. I look through maps desperately trying to find the destination that I long for. I find it! I can't imagine how I will ever get there, but I decide to try. Then I discover others who are also lost and want to get to the same point as me. What a relief! We travel together picking up all those who are headed in the same direction. Then it hits me! I am not traveling alone any more. I am with others who have been in similar places, have gone through similar situations, and are headed on the same track as me. I can relax, enjoy the scenery, be myself, and feel confident that even if I don't know exactly where I'm headed, it will be okay. I feel privileged to ride with others who don't judge me by what they see and love me for who I am. The feelings are definitely mutual. Chazkeinu has brought me to the most incredible places I never would have imagined I could reach.

Welcome to the summer edition of "RISE". We are proud to present to you with a compilation that will inspire you and warm your heart. Sit back and enjoy hearing from Chazkeinu "passengers" and others. You are in for an awesome ride.

Sending you the best wishes for a safe and enjoyable summer!

With love and appreciation,

Zahava



A message from

*Rabbi Yisroel Grossberg,
Rabbinical Advisor of Chazkeinu*

It is a pleasure to have an opportunity to greet all of you and share some of my feelings about this wonderful organization, as well as describe what it has meant to me to serve as its Rabbinical Advisor. A few months ago, I was introduced to Chazkeinu and had the opportunity to interact and offer chizuk to many of its members. Additionally, I got to meet the people who work tirelessly to keep the many successful programs running smoothly as well as those who constantly look to find new areas that can be helpful to the members.

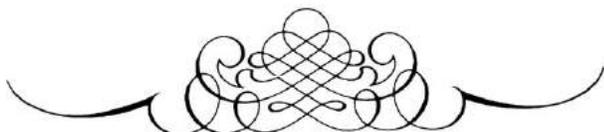
I was literally blown away by the work that was accomplished through the many projects that Chazkeinu is involved in. I got to see firsthand how much of an impact this organization has had on helping those who are struggling. Over time, I realized that there was no other organization helping this population which explained why the Chazkeinu members were taking to it like a person in a desert finally getting life-saving water.

When I was approached and asked if I would serve as Rabbinical Advisor, I paused for just one moment before answering. I had quite a full schedule and many responsibilities, but the pause was truly just for one moment. How could I not grab the opportunity to be involved in such a special organization? When I thought about the courageous and strong members who are facing their challenges head-on and doing what it takes to move forward, I realized that it would truly be a privilege to be a part of Chazkeinu.

Boruch Hashem, since accepting the Rabbinical Advisor role, I have been able to see firsthand why it is so important to have a Rav involved. On the administrative level, there are many questions and issues that come up which require halachik or hashkafik input. To the credit of those in the leadership positions at Chazkeinu, decisions are always made in consultation with a rabbinic authority.

On the individual level, I'm happy to have connected with many members. I have been available to answer questions pertaining to individual challenges and others that are related to halacha, Jewish law. Additionally, I have had the zechus of working with family members of those who are facing challenges in the field of mental health and need chizuk to help their loved ones.

The one thread that continues to show itself throughout all of this work is my immense admiration for the courageous Chazkeinu members and their relatives who continue, despite the challenges and difficulties, to grow and thrive.



Mailbox



I was going through a very hard time and feeling very depressed when I first heard about Chazkeinu. By my very first meeting, I already took the courage to open up and share a bit of what I was going through. The encouragement I received that night was incredible! That very same night, I sent a message to my therapist asking if she knows of a good doctor who takes my insurance. I managed to get a list of Bikur Cholim organizations whose generous contributions have helped me to continue my therapy which I desperately needed. When looking back, its unbelievable how far I've come in the past year since joining Chazkeinu! May Hashem continue guiding me in the right direction and heal all of us very quickly.

Let Chazkeinu turn into a family who looks back and thanks Hashem for what we went through in the past. Thank You!



Thank you so much for all that you do. You changed my life for the better. I am so grateful for all the work you do for people with mental illness. I can not wait to read this newsletter.



Chazkeinu is "the ray of light in a world of utter darkness..."
Knowing I'm not alone has opened worlds for me!

*We would love to hear from you!
Please email
Chazkeinunewsletter@gmail.com
with your questions, comments,
and feedback.*



Chazkeinu gives so much information, between the mental health speakers and personal stories, that without it my knowledge would be so limited. I can now describe my symptoms much better. When I'm going through a tough time, I know a Chazkeinu member is with me in my pain. I made so many friends around the world that I would never have known otherwise, and they are real friends; something which is rare. Thank you Chazkeinu for changing my life. I think about all of you often; I love you all and wish you only the best.



I just read your Rise newsletter from Pesach... I was amazed at the quality and style of the newsletter, as well as the material that you managed to enclose in those 25 pages. Thank you for always keeping us so well informed.

Just as a side, it's amazing to watch how Chazkeinu is growing, becoming more professional, and having added on so many programs over the year.

May Hashem help you to continue going מחיל אל חיל and providing this unbelievable service to the world who



Chazkeinu has opened a whole new door in my life. It's a place where I can finally be ME without any cover ups. The rapid growth of members proves how much this is needed for our community. I especially enjoy the Chat Club prior to the meetings, as well as the Partner Program and the inspirational emails. I am so fortunate to be a part of this INCREDIBLE organization! Thank you Chazkeinu for being an enormous support to us all!

Torah's Light

By Avrohom Steier



Just a little over a month ago, we celebrated the magnificent holiday of Shavuot; a day where we commemorate the greatest milestone in the history of the Jewish people, that of our receiving of the Torah. If you were to ask a group of people what Torah means to them, the responses would be greatly varied. Some would refer to it as a rulebook, others would call it an approach to life, yet others would say it is a way to connect to Hashem. All are correct, on some level, and every person should come to appreciate Torah as they relate to it. For those who suffer from pain, in this context emotional pain, there is a specific way of looking at Torah that is important to understand.

Imagine two people who suffer from a severe anxiety disorder. One is an atheist, the other an Orthodox Jew. The suffering that the disorder brings upon them is immeasurable, making them doubtful of so many things that others take for granted and completely disrupting their lives. They live in constant fear of the unknown, and their entire day, from morning until evening, is filled with difficulty. While they seem to be living parallel lives, the reality is that they are miles apart from each other.

The atheist sees no meaning in anything that befalls him. His illness could have occurred to someone else, but he happened to be on the unlucky side of the cosmic dice. His illness carries with it no potential, no possibility for growth, and no mission. It is but a barrier in the way of his pursuit of pleasure; pleasure that cannot be realized due to the constant anxiety plaguing his heart. His life becomes one of complete misery.

The Orthodox Jew, however, has the Torah which teaches him how to deal with challenges and difficulties. It teaches him that this illness was sent specifically to him by the Creator of the entire universe to accomplish a task

that only he can accomplish and that the illness contains within it the possibility for much growth and betterment. It teaches him specific reasons why Hashem may have sent this difficult test to him and that it has been sent to him from a Loving Father who desires only to help him and bestow kindness upon him. It teaches him that everything in life has meaning and a depth of which we can only scratch the surface.

To be sure, his life is not one of endless sunshine. The pain wrought by the anxiety is very real, and he struggles daily to overcome it. At times, the pain is so intense that he cannot remember what the Torah has taught him, and he loses his clarity for a short while. However, he is able to regroup and re-inject meaning into his experiences and hardships; thereby saving himself from the horrible experience of pain without meaning, suffering without reason.

For many years, my wife had posted on our refrigerator the following statement from the holy Chofetz Chaim. "In the final analysis, for the believer there are no questions, and for the nonbeliever there are no answers." While most of us would not fully qualify for the category of the believer who has no questions, we can appreciate the great clarity and answers that the Torah and our faith have given us. Imagine the alternative described above, and you can begin to appreciate the great light that Torah has shined upon all of human suffering and pain experienced in this world.

Avrohom Steier is a talmid of Bais Medresh Govah in Lakewood, NJ and the author of the book Battle of the Mind; a book offering Torah based words of encouragement and inspiration for those battling mental illness.



Summer is often looked at as a time of fun, freedom, and a sense of relaxation. These can be beneficial for our mental health - or the converse. Sometimes, having expectations can move us in a positive direction, as we will frame our experiences in a more positive way. We may be able to more easily manage life's challenges, as we experience ourselves in a more relaxed state. Summer can give us the warm weather that allows us to avoid the stress of having to find coats and boots.

On the other hand, expectations can often breed challenges. If we focus on how we MUST be relaxed, we MUST have fun, and we MUST feel a sense of freedom, we may find ourselves sorely disappointed. Our expectations may be inconsistent with our school or work schedules, with the realistic experience of our day to day life, and with our own physical experiences of the summer weather.

It is important to be honest with ourselves about the real challenges and benefits of the summer months. If we thrive through consistency and routine and they are absent in our summer, we may be the type of people who need to put in some sort of schedule. If we become dehydrated and irritable, we might need to carry water with us and make sure to drink adequately. If we have difficulty being around people all the time and the reality of our summer experience is that we are always around others, we may need to set aside time in our schedule to regroup and spend some personal alone time every day. Depending on the medications we might be taking, it is a

good idea to speak with our doctors about any safety precautions that might be relevant at this time of year - such as being aware of how much sun we are exposed to or how much water we need to drink to stay healthy and safe.

Some of us have experiences over the summer that are not noticeably different than during the year. Our work, school, and other responsibilities may stay the same, and the summer itself is very similar to other months. Sometimes, when this is the case, we feel a sense of social pressure. We might be telling ourselves that we "ought" to be having a different experience, we "ought" to be on vacation, or we "ought" to be relaxed. We will be challenged by the thoughts that we are telling ourselves. We will benefit by accepting the unique situation we are in at this point in our lives, and using it to grow.

Every point in our lives gives us its own set of challenges and its own set of opportunities for growth. May it be Hashem's will that we will be able to use the challenges we have over the summer to our benefit and to meet these challenges with strength and healthy coping!

Shoshi Lewin, Psy.D. is a clinical psychologist working in private practice in Baltimore, Maryland. She works with individuals, providing psychotherapy addressing a variety of clinical issues, including stress, medical issues, mood disorders, and anxiety disorders. She has worked and provided training and clinical supervision in both inpatient and outpatient settings.

| Meet a Member |



Meet a Member

Can you please share with our readers a little bit about yourself and your struggles?

I am a young girl in my early twenties with a full-time job taking care of toddlers and babies. I began therapy about four years ago after falling apart a little more than half a year after my best friend, backbone, and only person who I ever spoke to got married. Over the years, I did a lot of climbing and falling. For every step up, I fell down three. I was diagnosed with PTSD, MDD, BPD, and anxiety. Two years ago, I was placed in the hospital two different times (two months apart) for acting on suicidal thoughts. Thank G-d, at this point, I am in a much better place.

Can you share with us how you have worked and continue to work on overcoming your difficulties?

I started off with therapy but stopped after a few months. I was scared of doing the work, and I convinced myself I didn't need it. About five months later, a friend I'd opened up to convinced me to go back. That's when I started my long and painful journey on the road to recovery. I did, and still do, a lot of EMDR, and it has helped me tremendously. I worked really hard for a couple of years before we realized that medication was needed to get any further. A few months after being on meds and after two hospitalizations, I started DBT in addition to my regular therapy. DBT helps me learn different skills and coping mechanisms in order to deal with life's challenges and the pain that comes along with it. I went through the four modules of DBT with individual therapy sessions, and it took me about 11 months to complete it. A few months ago, I started going again; because, I felt that one round was not enough and a review was needed.

Who has helped and supported you throughout your struggles?

I am lucky enough that I was able to create a very strong support group for myself. I have a few close friends/mentors, who are all much older than myself, in addition to my aunt and my Rav, who have all been extremely supportive through all the ups and downs. My therapist is an amazing person who constantly reminds me of my values and that these hard times will eventually pass. My family has been there for me and, like the others, they have tried to help me to the best of their ability. Last but not least, there's Chazkeinu! Without my support group, my journey would have been so much harder and would have taken much, much longer. I am forever grateful to them all!

How did you hear about Chazkeinu?

About 7-8 months ago, I was going through a very hard time and needed a lot of chizuk. One day, I was at a group where I was venting about what was going on. At the end of the meeting, one of the members came over to me and told me about Chazkeinu. I called into the Monday night hotline and, after one or two times, I was hooked!

Which of Chazkeinu's programs have you gained the most from?

It's hard to say which program helped me the most, since for me it was all intertwined. I started out with just the Monday night phone meeting and, shortly after that, the Shabbaton was announced. At the Shabbaton, a bunch of long lasting friendships were formed. Although I personally did not officially take part in the partner program, the wonderful people I met through Chazkeinu became my partners. I have also reached out at different times to people on the outreach list when I needed someone to listen and my "regulars" weren't available. Sharing my story on the line has also helped me tremendously. I don't hear it often, but, the few times I did hear feedback from others who had listened, it gave me strength knowing that by sharing my story someone has been helped.

What have you gained from your relationships with other Chazkeinu members?

I have gained many, many sisters who are all traveling on similar journeys. There is nothing like going through life connected with others who truly understand you. We support each other in our ups and downs lifting each other when needed and praising and acknowledging our achievements. There is no one like my Chazkeinu family, and I feel so proud and lucky that I had the privilege of joining and meeting so many amazing people!

What message and words of inspiration would you give to those with similar challenges?

There is a story about a Chinese bamboo tree that has really spoken to me numerous times along my journey. A Chinese farmer, who usually struggles to survive and provide for his family, plants the Chinese bamboo seed and sets his hope and vision on all it will provide when it towers 90 feet above his head. With a heart toward the future, he digs hole after hole, plants the seeds, and then begins their care.

Day after day, he carries water to the spots he has marked, and, because it's human nature to want to see results, he carefully inspects the spots every day. Nothing. Knowing he has to feed his family, he plants other crops carefully around the spots that contained the real hope for his future. He continues to water them every day, feeding them carefully, and watching... Nothing. Within months, the other crops grow providing nourishment for his family but providing nothing for the future. These crops will not make his dreams come true - they will simply provide for the present. The Chinese bamboo seeds contain all his hopes, his dreams.

A whole year goes by... Nothing. He continues to haul water. He stares endlessly at the spot, but sees nothing but barren ground. His hopes, his dreams, seem so very far away. There is no evidence of life. Has the seed rotted? Has it died before it ever had a chance to grow? Another year goes by... Nothing. His neighbors, those who don't know and believe in the miracle of the Chinese bamboo, laugh at him. They mock his vision for the future. They look on with scorn, and, as he holds buckets of water to the spots, he begins to question himself. Is he pouring water and his life's energy into something that will reap no reward for him?

Another year goes by... Nothing. Three years of pouring water, energy, and hope into the Chinese bamboo. Nothing to show for it. Yet, he's heard of the miracle of the Chinese bamboo. He heard of the huge rewards that

come to those who believe. One day, he stands over the spots and he cries his frustration and fears. The spots reveal nothing, the barren ground seems to mock him, yet the wind whispers hope to him. He sighs and hauls yet more buckets of water.

Another year goes by... Nothing. 4 years... Four years of hoping, wishing, and diligently tending his dream. Surely the miracle will happen now. His neighbors have quit laughing. They no longer even care, yet they quietly talk among themselves of the farmer who isn't quite right. At this point, even the farmer isn't sure. Yet, he's fallen into a habit, so he continues to water the spots. He continues to feed them. It's simply what he does now with no knowledge of reward. Just a simple, now unspoken hope that life resides beneath the spots he so carefully tends.

Another year passes... Nothing. 5 years. The farmer is tired... Tired of hauling buckets. Tired of growing and tending so many other crops to feed his struggling family. Tired of trying to keep his dream alive. Tired of seeing no results day after day. He stares hopelessly at the spots. There cannot possibly be life in them after so many years. He must have watered them the wrong way. He must not have fed them correctly. If only he had done things differently, there would be growth. Despair rocks his soul. Five years he has poured into his dream, into his hope for a better future. His dream mocks him. The vision of a better life for his family melts away under the harsh reality. Tears fill his eyes as he grabs for the last hope residing in his soul and slowly lifts the bucket to pour water on to his dream. After 5 years, he realizes it would be silly to give up .

Then comes the morning when the whole village is jolted awake by the cries of joy from the farmer. They watch startled from their windows as he runs down the dusty road calling for his family to come see. As his family races back up the road after him, the rest of the village pours from their houses to see what has gotten this crazy farmer so excited. They find the family clustered around the spots, talking excitedly. From the edge of the road they can see green sprouts thrusting out from the barren ground. They seem to be growing before their very eyes! The farmer is dancing. The miracle has happened! The miracle has come!

The spots become the place for everyone in the village to come, as they watch in amazement as the bamboo grows and grows and grows. 10 feet! 20 feet! 30 feet! 40 feet! 50 feet! 60 feet! 70 feet! 80 feet! 90 feet! In just six weeks, the bamboo has grown 90 feet tall! 5 years of nothing and now this... 90 feet in 6 weeks! It is truly a miracle! The farmer stands to the side. He is aware that all his dreams have come true. The harvest of the bamboo will provide all he dreamed of for his family. The bamboo that will replace what is harvested, springing forth from the deep roots forming during the last five years, will provide for generations to come.

He also realizes the lessons he has learned are far more valuable. He has learned to plant a dream. He has learned to do the daily things that would make it a reality. He has learned to ignore those who said it couldn't happen. He has learned to push past his own fear and doubt and keep taking action. He has learned to have faith when there was no reason to have faith. Now, he smiles every time he walks through the village. Everyone is holding buckets of water to their own spots. Gazing over at his towering 90 feet tall bamboo they know what can happen. Because of him. Because of his willingness to blaze the trail and make his dream come true.



Meet a Member

Can you please share with our readers a little bit about yourself and your struggles?

I am married and have a few children. A couple of my children also struggle with mental health issues, but thank G-d, they are doing very well now. It has been a long journey; lots of challenges, struggles, and lots of therapy. We definitely have our ups and downs. I have two diagnoses, Bipolar and ADHD. Within the mania cycle, especially in the beginning and the end, there can often be some anxiety. It was explained to me, by a mental health professional, that, within depression, anxiety can become its own diagnosis if it is severe enough. I have suffered from PTSD as well, mostly from my childhood, but it is not an active diagnosis. I still suffer from nightmares at times, but for the most part, the PTSD doesn't affect me, and I think that I have worked through most of those deep issues.

What are some of your challenges, and how do you work on overcoming these difficulties?

I think one of the hardest things for me is that I don't have any support from my family of origin. They have actually caused me a tremendous amount of pain and problems throughout my life. I have persevered and managed to figure out certain problems and issues, and I continue to move on to healthier people and try to have a positive attitude. My husband, my children, and my very carefully chosen close friends are my family. I have made my family. There are lots of women out there who also have to do this, and it is possible. There is hope for real love and a loyal and trustworthy family. However, it takes time to build. I have been working on it for a long time. Some friends do come and go, but it is important to reach out and try. G-d is always with us. He gives us gifts and opportunities, and often, when a door closes, another one opens. I have seen this with myself so many times. Sometimes, we have to be patient even though it is not easy. Easier times come, often when we don't expect them.

Another challenge that I have had is when I am not hypo-manic, and I am accused of being too loud or having too much fun. I get nervous sometimes that I may be laughing too loudly, or that I may get carried away. This can be a painful reality of having Bipolar. I think this is a common feeling, and we can be criticized or judged by people around us, or be hard on ourselves. I try not to self-stigmatize. We can be our worst enemies, even in our own minds.

How did you first hear about Chazkeinu, and how have you benefited from Chazkeinu?

I heard about Chazkeinu for the first time on Monday, October 31st from 2 different women who don't know each other and don't even live in the same city. That evening, I called Zahava and spoke with her right before my first meeting. That was it! I was completely hooked! It is the peer support that I have needed for a very

long time. To listen to other women who suffer from similar experiences, thoughts, and feelings is truly validating and invigorating! I am not alone! Every time I am on the line, I am moved and touched. Everyone who shares has such pearls of wisdom and such an important perspective to offer. I have it in my schedule every week for both the Monday night and Wednesday phone meetings.

Have you shared your story on the phone line? What was your experience, and would you encourage others to do the same?

Telling my story on Chazkeinu was the most validating and incredible experience for me! I have never received so much validation all at one time before. I would really encourage other women to share their stories. It was so freeing, and it was a huge step forward for me. I worked very hard to write and edit it, and I shared it with a few people whom I trust and respect, including my therapist and close friends, before I read it on the phone line. It was a healing process to summarize and tell my story in a concise and concrete way that could help and inspire other women. I have a few different issues in there, so it covered a range of topics and emotions. I still hear from women who hear my story on the recorded line. I feel it is both an opportunity and a privilege to be able to tell your story through Chazkeinu in their safe and anonymous environment. The stigma is stopping; it is getting much better out there. I can see and hear the difference.

What have you gained from your relationships with other Chazkeinu members?

I am a very giving person, and I love people. I am a real people person. I have been able to receive so much chizuk/strength and have had the opportunity to be there for quite a few different women. Currently, I am in touch regularly with a few women, and I have developed a very special bond with them. Being there for them is the most rewarding part. I don't know who is helping who more. I am helping them, but really they are also helping me just as much! It's beautiful! What a gift! Thank G-d for Chazkeinu! There is a reason that it has grown so much in such a short amount of time. Not only does it help women who are struggling, it helps their families as well, and it spreads and continues to help all the people in these women's lives. We are all healthier and happier people because of it!

What message and words of inspiration would you give to those with similar challenges?

I would like to share some more ideas and tools on how we can take better care of ourselves. I believe it is important to do something special for ourselves every day. We have to care for our own needs first before we can truly care for another person. This self-care can come in so many forms; it is different for everyone. Whatever you love, makes you happy, makes you comfortable, or puts a smile on your face is real self-care. Exploring that could be a big part of the journey, and we are always changing and growing. Life changes and sometimes we need to adjust what works. It's hard work and it's worth it. We have to learn and practice how to love ourselves. Self-validation and praising ourselves, all that positive "self-talk," is so important. I also think that it's important to allow ourselves to feel our feelings. Enough people out there can be invalidating and dismissive; let's not do that to ourselves as well. Lastly, I will end with the importance of having a mentor, wise person, Rabbi or Rebbetzin whom you really trust and get to know, so that you can confide in them and listen to their wisdom and advice.

I want to give all of my Chazkeinu sisters and anyone out there suffering a huge bracha that they should always see G-d in their lives and never give up hope. To keep going, no matter how hard, and to believe with all their hearts that things do get better. We have to keep praying, trying, and believing. Sometimes it's one day at a time and sometimes one moment at a time. By reaching out to others we also help ourselves. G-d loves each and every one of us very much. G-d is with us every step of the way...



Meet a Member

Can you please share with our readers a little bit about yourself and your struggles?

I was diagnosed a year after I got married with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). As a child, I felt very misunderstood by my family and friends, but most of all, I felt misunderstood by myself. I had behaviors that were not the norm which I could not figure out, and they left my family, friends, and I stumped. Back then, there was no talk about mental illness and therapy. I was not sent to see a therapist and got married without solving any of those issues.

Going to marriage therapy a few months after I got married didn't do much good for me, but a year later when my daughter was born, I finally opened up to my husband (who is now my ex) about my inner hidden struggles which had been going on for way too long. It was then that I started my journey of psychiatrists, medications, therapists, and support groups. After being married for 6 years, I was diagnosed with a minor eating disorder and joined OA, Overeaters Anonymous, which has helped me tremendously in my emotional and spiritual growth.

Can you share with us how you have worked and continue to work on overcoming your difficulties?

DBT, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, was developed by Marsha Linehan, and is a skills based form of therapy that was specifically created for people with BPD. Marsha, herself, shares about her own journey through BPD and how she found these techniques helpful to her, which led her to create this form of treatment. DBT has been most helpful for me in managing my emotions and keeping me in balance. It gave me an awareness of how my mental illness was effecting my daily living, and how I can change that for the better. I learned that I need to balance between the acceptance of life challenges and situations, and at the same time change the things that are in my power to change. OA helped me a lot with my eating disorder and has taught me to work my emotions through, instead of eating them off.

What is the most difficult part of your challenge?

The secret. The secret was half the battle.

Being misunderstood by most people in my life, including myself. Mental illness was not an open topic when I was growing up or even when I was diagnosed. It was a secret between me, my husband, and my therapist. Hiding medication, making excuses when I had appointments all the time, blaming weight gain on my pregnancy, these are just a few hardships I faced while suffering from my disease.

Relationships were also a huge difficulty for me, due to my instability and mood swings. Through working on myself really hard and continuously going to therapy and group, I have been able to maintain healthy relationships

in many areas of my life. Through opening up about my mental illness, I am now able to share with friends and family my struggles, and how they affect my relationships. I can teach them what to say and how to walk on this journey with me, every step of the way. I can be a "tour guide" in an open manner. I am able to identify when a relationship is good for me and when it is not. I stick with those who accept me unconditionally and stay away from those who judge me or are not interested in learning how to walk my journey with me.

How did you hear about Chazkeinu, and how have you benefited from their programs?

A teacher of mine called me and told me to listen to a specific recording on Chazak. It was Zahava telling her story...and the rest is history. From the very first time I spoke to Zahava, I knew I had finally come home. In Chazkeinu, I no longer have to keep my mental illness a secret. I feel accepted and loved just for being me and for no other reason. I can support others, and they can support me. I have gained tremendously from the phone meetings, as well as the Partner Program, in which I was paired with someone who shares similar struggles and the same diagnosis as me.

What have you gained from your relationships with other Chazkeinu members?

I am loved for the simple reason of just being me. I feel we all speak the same language. I have been in marriage support groups, divorced women support groups, addiction support groups, OA, and more, but none of these groups were able to support the deep secrets hidden inside me. Here at Chazkeinu, I can share my emotional and mental struggles, and my Chazkeinu sisters know EXACTLY what I mean. I feel understood in a way I never did before. Chazkeinu has given me a chance I never thought I would get in life. Thanks to all my Chazkeinu friends, I can honestly say I am finally home.

What message and words of inspiration would you give to those with similar challenges?

Recovery takes time, and time takes time. Things don't happen overnight. For me, I constantly have to remind myself to live in the moment, in the here and now, and to accept my situation as it is now, without jumping to regrets of the past or visions of the future. I have to continuously give myself credit for what I have done so far, cut myself some slack, not be too harsh on myself, and remind myself that, "For today I did my best, tomorrow my best will be better." For at the end of the day, I AM A HIDDEN HERO!!

To be interviewed for this column please contact Chazkeinunewsletter@gmail.com

Some Mothers

By Mindy Moses

Most mothers	To their children.
Give everything they have	They open wounds in their hearts
To their children.	They bare their souls
They give their hearts	They cleanse with tears
Their souls	To find the strength
Their tears	For their children.
And their strength	
To their children.	They do it
	Because their mother didn't.
Some mothers	They do it
Give more than everything they have	So their children won't have to.

Taken with permission from Ami Living Magazine



Ask the Therapist

By Tonya Swartzendruber MA and
Dr. David H. Rosmarin PHD, ABPP

I experience anxiety on a daily basis. I have spoken to my therapist about this issue, and she keeps telling me to access my prefrontal cortex, correct me if I'm wrong: the part of the brain that deals with logical thinking. She has suggested deep breathing, pausing to think, saying "let me think about that," etc. I still seem to have trouble calming myself down with things like making decisions, social anxiety, or being pressed for time. Do you have any tips to help me deal with my anxiety?

Experiencing anxiety daily can be very challenging. Not only are the symptoms of anxiety uncomfortable, but our responses to anxiety can minimize how much we enjoy our lives and even begin to dictate the choices that we make. For these reasons, looking for "tips" or techniques to reduce anxiety as a first step usually does not work. Instead, one needs to start with an understanding of what anxiety is (and is not) before identifying what they can do.

Anxiety is a natural whole-body response to events that the mind or body perceives as dangerous, either real or imagined. The anxiety response is also known as the "fight-or-flight" response. During this response, chemicals are released into the blood stream to trigger a host of changes including increased heart rate, increased breathing, tensing of the muscular systems, hyper-focused visual attention, and slowing of digestion. This is why many anxiety sufferers complain of panic sensations, chest tightness or pain, muscle tension, dizziness and stomach upset.

Now, in a situation where real danger is present, this system is invaluable; it gets us to safety as quickly as possible. When this system gets activated in the absence of real danger, however (which is often the case today), the natural physiological symptoms of the flight or flight response can be uncomfortable and cause distress. For example, if you get short of breath and your heart starts pounding in anticipation of an upcoming work meeting, you might become concerned about your performance and start to think about potential problems and catastrophic outcomes. In this way, the anxiety itself becomes a trigger for further anxiety.

It is also helpful to think of anxiety as having three main components: (1) Somatic sensations like heart palpitations, sweaty palms, and shortness of breath, (2) Anxious thoughts such as worry and concern, and (3) Urges to engage in behaviors (often avoidance or escape). When broken down into these parts, a path toward responding more skilfully becomes clearer.

With this understanding of anxiety in mind, the following structured steps can be helpful to manage one's symptoms:

1) Notice

Acknowledging when we are anxious is the first step in responding effectively. This could be as simple as recognizing that our heart is pounding or that our breath is more shallow than usual. When anxious, our attention can become very narrowly focused on the threat that we believe is there. Noticing that there are natural processes happening in one's body can help us shift our attention to things beyond the "false alarm" system that is activated.

2) Allow

A good deal of the struggle with anxiety just comes from our attempts to get rid of anxious thoughts and feelings. Research has consistently shown that attempts to get rid of anxiety often result in it growing stronger! An alternative to this response is to *accept* how one feels and stop fighting against one's somatic sensations and thoughts. Of course, this is easier said than done, especially when we have grown to believe that anxiety is dangerous. With practice, however, dropping the fight with anxiety becomes easier and easier. This acceptance or allowing frees us up to consider the next step: Making choices.

3) Choose

We often feel compelled to respond to our anxious thoughts as if they signal real danger. Typically, this involves avoiding or escaping situations that make us anxious. For example, in the case of social anxiety, this could mean declining social invitations, keeping conversations short or superficial, or avoiding eye contact to try to prevent negative evaluation. Although anxiety convinces us that avoidance or escape are best, there are other options. We can choose to respond in a way that expresses what we value. For example, if we value friendships and relationships, we can choose to engage with others even if we feel anxious around them. This approach of choosing to do what we care about even when we are anxious not only helps reduce anxiety in the long-run but can make a real improvement in the quality of life that we lead.

Now to illustrate what this looks like in the real world; imagine a person named Moshe facing the work meeting we mentioned above.

In the noticing step, Moshe becomes aware that his heart is pounding and his palms are getting sweaty, and he notices thoughts such as, "I am going to make a fool of myself" or, "It will be terrible if I feel this way during the meeting". In this step, Moshe simply acknowledges that these thoughts and sensations are present.

Next, in the allowing step, Moshe deliberately stops struggling with these thoughts and feelings by just letting them be there without debating with them, convincing himself that there is nothing to be anxious about, or increasing his anxiety by imagining catastrophic outcomes. In this way, he lets the anxiety be as it is without adding additional struggle.

While making a choice, Moshe considers what he values in this situation. It could be communicating his ideas in an assertive way, or listening carefully to his colleagues. He stays focused on what he can control in the meeting: his own behavior. He minimizes his attempts to control how his anxiety ebbs and flows in anticipation of the meeting. Moshe also works to keep his attention focused on listening carefully and speaking assertively during the meeting while his anxious sensations and thoughts play in the background. He does not engage in struggle with the anxious experience but stays focused on interacting in the ways that are important to him in the meeting.

In sum, responding to anxiety skillfully is possible and can have a real impact on our quality of life. Taking the steps to notice, allow, choose, and act in the face of anxiety can transform our relationship with anxiety while freeing us up to choose a life that matters to us.

All our best,

Tonya Swartzendruber & David H. Rosmarin

Tonya Swartzendruber, MA, is a Mental Health Counselor at the Center for Anxiety, where she delivers evidence-based treatments to adults, adolescents, children, and their families. David H. Rosmarin, PhD, ABPP, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, part-time, and Director of the Center for Anxiety, which has offices in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Monsey, and Boston. They can be contacted at 646.837.5557 or info@centerforanxiety.org

| Sisters Share |



Alone with my Mental Illness

By Devorah

I am isolated.
I sit here alone
With no understanding friends to call my own.
I want to break free.
Happiness I would like to see.
I am full of darkness, fear, and sadness,
Until I reach out
I call Chazkeinu to help me.
I share my struggles.
I share my pain.
Happiness and relief I gain
I am not alone.
I have Chazkeinu friends to call my own.

A Message from your Body

By Yehudis

To My Dearest Self,

I know at times
It seems so slow
But here are some things
I want you to know

You're doing amazing
The best you can do
There is nothing else
That can be expected of you

The work you are doing
Can be hard as a rock
And sometimes your body cries
Slow down or stop

It's okay to space out

It's your body saying no
You're going too fast for me
At a slower pace you must go

You must trust your body
It knows you best
Sometimes it's okay
To stop moving and rest

I can assure you
No harm will be done
If you listen to your body
And rest while you run

You're going to get through this
Taking day by day
And by listening to the warning signs
Coming your way

I promise that one day
You'll look back and see
How much you have accomplished
Being the best you can be

Just keep trying your hardest
And you'll get very far
Simply by being
The best that you are

I wish you hatzlacha
I know you'll be fine
You just have to remember
That healing takes time

With love,
Me



By Yehudis

Friends
So caring
And kind
Loving
Yet hard to find

Friends who will stay with you
Through your ups and downs
Friends who will help you
Keep smiles not frowns

Friends who just know

The right thing to say
Friends who will often
Go out of their way

Friends are a commodity
And truly a gift
Friends you can rely on
To give you a lift

Friends who understand
The silent words you say
Friends who bring light

And meaning to your day

Friends who you want
And carefully choose
Friends who are valuable
That you don't want to lose

Friends like mine
Are the best there can be
Thanks to my friends
For sticking with me

The Ground is Shifting

By Esther

The ground is shifting beneath my
soul
I lose my footing; my sense of control.
I feel myself falling onto the
splintering floor
The skin of my emotions is bruised,
bleeding, and sore.
I plummet into the now open abyss
Blinded by the gloom and by
melancholy's kiss.

Who will here heal my roiling
emotion?
Who will here offer balm to my brain's
unceasing commotion?
Who will here steady my quivering
being?
Who will here answer my whimpering
and pleading?
Who will here keep company to my
forlorn soul?
Who will here offer my chained self a
blessed parole?

My wounds are oozing helplessness
My heart is pounding hopelessness
My ears ring with dirges of fright
My eyes perceive a desperate sight.

I must lift myself up although it seems
impossible
I must dust myself off although it
seems unfeasible
I must extend one foot in an effort to
walk
I must tune my vocal chords in an
effort to talk

But how, when my arms are chained
by depression
How, when my soul has lost all
expression
How, when my foot is atrophied by
fright
How, when ME was so long out of
sight.
How, when my lips are clamped by
pain and tears
How when my heart is hijacked by
panic and fears.

A promise rings out
It enters my soul
It soothes raging pain
It assures and consoles.

"I will never abandon you

Precious child of Mine
I will always accompany
You in your difficult climb
I keep you near Me
I hold you all alone
I watch you, I protect you
I keep track of how you've grown.
These stepping stones I send your way
Are custom built, My child, for you
Albeit with sobs you use them well
You're being transformed;
More cleansed and more true.
Every measure of pain
Every tear, every spasm
I carefully count
You never would fathom.
How each one is turned
Into a diamond up here
How each sting, each hurt
Is a sparkling gem with no compare.
Every ache, each twinge
Are bars of silver and gold
Every bitter salty tear
Transforms to treasures untold.
When the story will end
When the redemption will be
My child, you'll then weep in joy
When your fortune you will see."

My Heart is Crying By Malka



Dear Diary,

My heart is crying
I also want to cry

I want to cry
For my ears
That never heard
I love you my dear

I want to cry
For my eyes
That were always open wide
To search for some inner pride

I want to cry
For what wasn't shared
Making life so unclear
Leaving me with questions all over
That never disappeared

I want to cry
For the tears
That had to be shed
To myself only, in bed

I want to cry
For the compliments
That were never pure
Always with a taste of negativity
Leaving me hungry for more

I want to cry
For what was denied
My emotions and feelings
Locked inside

I want to cry
For my feet
That were forbidden to take me
To any occasion
I surely belonged to be

I want to cry
For my soul
That always failed
To acknowledge it's role

I want to cry
For the smiles
That did not reflect
A loving and healthy bond
A child so deeply
Wants to get

I want to cry
For my addictions
For the times I had to lie
To avoid possible friction

I want to cry
For the memories
That are so alive
Driving me into misery
Elevating the pain
So high

I want to cry
For the times when I try
To get a boost
For my mood
But fail to reach out
And get some chizuk from you

And now, I'm finally crying
I'm crying for the hope that arises
For the hope that energizes
For the hope that soothes
And comforts me
For the hope that grows
From withering seeds

And I'm finally crying
For the will that was reborn
For the will that I had never known
For the will that has found it's way
And for the new life,
Poking its head through the dirt,
Beckoning a new day.

Song By Shayna

Intense loneliness
Deep pain
Suffering silently
Much shame

My string has unraveled
I can't keep up; how long I travel
I must begin anew
Beginnings are tough; that's true
I will succeed
With these words I will lead

Let it go, one butterfly at a time
Let it soar away from my sight
Let in positive energy
Let out all the ugly
Let-me-be-strong
Let-nothing-go-wrong

Let it go, let it go, let it go
I say go
Just let go
Leave it to go

Rain Of Diamonds

By Esther



Rain of diamonds.
You're an untold treasure,
Multidimensional and breathtaking,
Beyond measure!

Your recovery is an occasion to
Transform difficulties into successes,
A chance to discover your hidden
Powers amid life's distresses!

From sand, oysters fashion
Iridescent pearls,
Whilst a rigid rose mystically
Develops and unfurls!

A caterpillar turns into a butterfly,
We behold metamorphosis
In the flash of an eye!

Rain of diamonds.
You're forever in fashion!
Please safeguard
Your holy soul with passion!

Commit to glowing in the dark,

By living mindfully,
Deal with each
Perplexing moment tactfully!

Like a diamond,
You're multifaceted and reflective,
Never relinquish your fortune,
For stones that are defective!

Rain of diamonds.
It's a new beginning,
Stay collected, connected,
And with a certainty of winning!

Be like the sun;
A radiant smile will get you started,
Letting go of unhelpful thoughts
Mends the fainthearted!

Faith and trust
Will dissolve your fears!
Hashem yearns
For His children's prayers!

Rain of diamonds.

Picture the invisible!
Hope in the inconceivable;
Delight in the achievable!

Never fail to capture
An unforgettable moment,
Revel in inspiration
To your heart's content!

Celebrate mini victories,
And implore for more,
Hashem will send His emissaries
To carry you to the top floor!

Rain of diamonds.
You're an unstoppable gem in motion,
You are the star you are,
Because you've created ripples in the
ocean.

Rain of diamonds.
Your remarkable beauty has been
revealed!
High accolades to a true champion
Who persevered and healed!

Intrusive Thoughts

A parody based on Dr. Seuss' book, *Green Eggs and Ham*

By Breindy

*Will you calm down, oh worry,
No, I will not, I need to control
Will you in a hat or on a bat
No, No, No
Not in a hat or on a bat
Not in a boat or a jet
No, No, No
You bet...*

*I'm so bored and restless
You are senseless
You need to calm down
Relax*

*I need to stay right in my tracks
Will you be calm in my bed?*

*Or under the blankets I will tread
No, No, No*

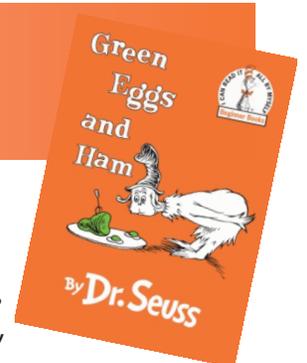
*Leave me be
Let me be free
In a tent
Or my house that I rent
I just want to be
As calm as can be
You will not let me
So I will make myself be free!!*

*No, no, no
Don't run away
You see, I'm here to stay
Night and day*

*So don't bother
I won't delay!*

*You can't fool me
Be there you may
But I will be ok
With or without
I don't have a doubt*

*Will you in a car, bus, or train
No, No, No
I don't care
It's for you to know
I want to grow
I'm not waiting for you to go!!*



Laundry

By Ahuva



Generally speaking, the word laundry doesn't usually evoke inspiration. But hashgacha pratis is often cloaked in the mundane, and the following story is no exception. You can find Hashem anywhere, even in the single word, "Laundry."

Yechezkel is one of those kids who can melt your heart and make you laugh like no one else can. He is a personality and a half, with twinkling eyes and an awesome sense of humor. He has Down syndrome and goes to a special school which was founded for the frum community. As I am on the subbing list for this school, I landed in his classroom one fine Tuesday.

The main reason I took the job was because I needed distraction. I had a tremendously important appointment with a top specialist the next day, the outcome of which would impact my life in a very significant way. The jellybeans and butterflies wouldn't leave me alone, and I knew I could use some form of a diversion. And so, there I was in Yechezkel's classroom, trying firmly and not so successfully to banish any thoughts of tomorrow.

After the kids had lunch, it was time for centers. I ran one center while two other teachers ran the others. The teacher I was subbing for left me a book to read, and I was so grateful that I wouldn't need to use my brain all that much for the activity. At times, I found myself reading on autopilot while my thoughts drifted to where I would be in less than twenty four hours...

As I was reading the book to Yechezkel's group, Yechezkel suddenly pointed to a green, sticky blob on the table and asked, "What's that?" I asked him what he thought it was, and with a twinkle in his eye, he responded, "Blood." I began to laugh, and when he saw that I found his joke funny, so did he. Like I said, he's a riot.

A little while later, I distractedly leaned on the table, and when I moved my arm, I realized that it was full of green sticky stuff. "Oh no," I exclaimed, "My shirt is all sticky!" Yechezkel leaned over to look, and then he reached out and gently patted my arm. With round eyes full of compassion he said, "Laundry."

That one word changed my entire day around.

"It's going to be okay. I'm here with you. I'm taking care of you."

"Laundry." *Don't worry, it's going to be okay.* How did he know what I needed to hear right then? The truth was, he didn't. Hashem put that word into his mouth, because He knew I needed to hear it.

That thought was so comforting and so empowering. Hashem was looking out for me. He knew exactly how I felt and wanted me to know He understood. "Laundry." *It's going to be okay. I'm here with you. I'm taking care of you.*

And at that moment, I really did feel like everything was going to be okay. Because I knew that Hashem was behind me all the way.



Dear Chazkeinu,

We live in such a pressured time. We are always so busy trying our hardest to juggle all of our responsibilities. Sometimes, we manage to accomplish (almost) everything. (What a tremendously satisfying feeling that is!) Other times, we find ourselves staring at the clock wondering where the last few hours just went. With this in mind, I hope that this article provides you with some relief. (I am no stranger to procrastination which is why I set out to write this article, hoping that it will help me as well.)

Most people, including myself, have a hard time when it comes to juggling all of our other responsibilities. We all have SO MUCH to do and don't know how to fit it all into our day! Or we simply get side-tracked and find something else of lesser importance to do. This is called **Procrastination**. Procrastination has a lot of enemies, yet its enemies seem to want to stick with it! If you feel this way, you're in good company!

At times, I want help with my own time management skills or just want some Chizuk and call a friend of mine who I know is juggling college and/or is working. I ask them for their "secret" or if they have any good methods that work for them. Much to my surprise, their answer is, "I really don't have any system. It's really hard, but I just do it somehow." I am a bit disappointed, but I also know that I am in good company!

Tip #1: Write it ALL down.

When I have so much to do, it's just too overwhelming for everything to "live" or stay in my head. I take out a sheet of paper and write everything that's on my mind. Some examples would be: call so and so, buy milk, eggs, bread, etc., everything from A-Z. Once I have it all down, I have some thinking space and can start prioritizing.

Tip #2: Prioritizing and Delegating

Once everything is down, it's time to start prioritizing and delegating each task to specific days. How? Use about a minute to glance through your list and ask yourself: What has to be done today? What can be done tomorrow and so forth? To do this, take out another piece of paper, and write down the following categories:

Urgent- needs to get done today, **Not as urgent**- can wait for tomorrow and **Can wait** (for later on in the week.) With this in mind, you can start delegating your to-do tasks to each category. If you have a hard time figuring out if a task should be given more attention now or the next day, ask yourself: What will happen, or what are the consequences if I don't get this done today? If the answer is something like "nothing" or "not much" then put it in the not as urgent or can wait category, depending on your answer.

Tip #3: Timing Each Task

Once you have tasks under each category, the next part will be figuring out how much time you need to devote to each task. A lot of people, including myself, either overestimate or underestimate the amount of time needed for a particular task. This is okay as long as you learn from each experience that Task A really needs X minutes/hours.

Here's a little secret:

If you're really not sure if a ½ hour or an hour is enough, then simply allocate one hour just to be safe. If you finish in 45 minutes, take note of that. It's important to note that this list is not set-in-stone. With time and practice, you will get better at it. This brings us to tip # 4.

Tip #4: Distractions

Distractions, distractions... That all too familiar word! Before you begin working, eliminate all distractions! Cell phones, computers etc. I know how tempting it is to just answer that message and then get back to work. How often do we really just answer the message or call and then 'get back to work?' If the actual removal of your computer or phone is too hard, try putting it on silent, vibrate, or even turning it off. For me, and I believe for others as well, the most daunting part of my work is actually starting. Once you start, half of the battle is over.

Tip #5: Taking Breaks

Last but not least, it's important to take breaks to prevent burnout. Breaks should serve as a "refresher" and to clear your head a bit. Typically, a break should be no more than 15/20 minutes, at most.

Please Note: Some of this information is taken from the book titled "The Time Diet" by Emily Schwartz.

I hope that you will find something here that will help you juggle all your to-dos!

My Safe Place

By Malky

Tonight I learned something. I learned that I have a safe place. All my own. My safe place looks like this. It's a wooded, spacious room way up in the attic. A comfortable bed with sunny yellow linen awaits me in the corner. There is a carpet. Medium sized. The room is tidy and clean. Lick-the-floors clean. The room is filled with the glorious rays of the sun shining through the big window. There's a table. On it lay my coloring book and pencils and markers and sharpeners, and every other item that exists which could help me color with my creative and happy juices filling up the room, flowing out the door, and down the stairs. I have my paints and brushes on the table too. There is enough color around the room to make my black and white crayons feel left out. A bookcase filled with my favorite books stands at the side of my bed. The ceiling is slanted. From the door you can see some bright and colorful stripes by my pillow. Walking closer, you see it's the teddy bear I just bought. Yellow and green and pink and blue and purple. Soft as my yellow blanket which I used to cuddle with til it shredded. Huggable. Listening ear. My teddy doesn't even interrupt me when I talk to it! Finer manners than me... My teddy claims I was absolute love at first sight. We keep each other company when it's thunderstorming. We color together. We read to each other. It helps me find just the puzzle piece I'm looking for! We smile together. Sometimes, my friends join us. They know they have an open invitation. All they need to do is walk in and fall into the spare bed in my room with its own sunny yellow linen. They know about my CD player which is plugged in, sitting beside a stack of all my favorite CDs.

My room is so many things. It's cozy, warm, relaxing. It's quiet, calming, clean. It's colorful, inviting, and happy. It's protected by a strong mind. My mind holds an attic. My attic holds my room. My room holds me. Ever so gently.



What Went Wrong

By Baila

Let me tell you the tale of four people.
EVERYBODY, SOMEBODY, ANYBODY AND NOBODY.
It seems that there was an important job to be done,

A...N...D

EVERYBODY was sure that **SOMEBODY** would do it. **ANYBODY** could have done it, but **NOBODY** did it. **SOMEBODY** got angry because it was **EVERYBODY'S** job.

EVERYBODY thought **SOMEBODY** would do it, but **NOBODY** asked **ANYBODY**.

It ended up that the job wasn't done, and then **SOMEBODY** blamed **EVERYBODY**,

When actually **NOBODY** blamed **ANYBODY**.

One day, I was on the bus going to my therapy appointment, and in walked an older girl with a cellphone in one hand and a pocketbook in the other. She "happened" to sit in the seat in front of me. As she was sitting, I noticed a tag very visibly sticking out of her shirt, but I was hesitant to tell her about it. I think that this was done unintentionally since usually no one would leave a tag sticking out like that. The price and the brand name of the store were so obviously displayed that she must have left it on accidentally. I therefore tapped her on the shoulder and said, "Excuse me, do you know that your tag is sticking out of your shirt?" To my surprise, she replied, "I know." I was really taken aback and was a little baffled by her reply. I thought, "Nebech, is this girl all right?" She looked at me and said with full confidence, "Oh, I'm just wearing it for a couple of days, and then I will return it, as I do not like the shirt". I must have looked really scary and had a certain expression of shock on my face, because she turned to me and hesitatingly asked me, "Why, is something wrong?" I looked back at her and said, "Are you kidding me? Of course, it's wrong! You cannot wear something and then return it!" She looked back at me and said, "I have 30 days." I replied, "So what! It's just not the right thing to do! It's simply wrong. It's like stealing!" She responded, "EVERYBODY DOES IT!"

A few thoughts that struck me about this story:

- Everybody does not do it. She had it all wrong in her mind.
- Even if everybody does it, it doesn't make it right. (Two wrongs do not make a right!!)
- The word "everybody" weaves its way into many different categories, which can cause a lot of harm.
- I read somewhere that there once was a Rabbi who reprimanded his student for calling his friend names. The boy told the Rabbi that everybody does it. The Rabbi replied, "Gehenim is big. There is enough room for EVERYBODY!"
- It struck me that maybe this girl really meant no harm and was simply unaware of this, and had to have the situation clarified to her. As soon as she was informed that it was wrong and that not "everybody" does it, she took off the sweater, and replied that she realized that she was in the wrong.
- I think that this could be a lesson for everyone. When we see someone doing something wrong or strange, there may be a reason behind it.
- As many of us can relate, our outer appearances can often reflect our inner turmoil. Let's look beyond the superficial view of others and reach out to those who may be struggling.

Your Support System and Putting You Back into it

By Batzheva

You just received a formal diagnosis from your psychiatrist. Your therapist cancelled during your most stressful week of the year. You're changing meds, again, and you're an absolute zombie. Or all of the above (I hope not at once). You could really, really use a listening ear.

You know all about the importance of having a support system, and you have one. You've got a mentor, Rabbi, therapist, doctor, community referral liaison, and even a peer support group. You read inspirational articles and stay up to date on the latest medical developments about your condition. It's great. It's working.

But still, you want to know how to go about the *other* people. You know, the regular, normal friends you have from school, camp, work, the neighborhood, wherever. Those regular people worry about things like coordinating Purim costumes and knowing where to get the best latte, just like you used to before the Diagnosis or Issue walked uninvited into your life. You're trying to figure out where to put those people now. The truth is, you have other/bigger/heavier things on your mind right now, much weightier than costumes or iced coffee. But you like those friends, and you want to include them in your life, to share with them and benefit from the friendship you share, just like always.

You're not sure what to do. On one hand, that awesome friend that you go back with all the way since high school, she's a great listener. You know that talking to her will give you the validation and empathy you're looking for right now. You're also fairly sure she'll be accepting of your issues and not treat you differently than in the past. (Commercial: if you do have such a friend, recognize that they are few and far between.) So a big part of you wants to call her right now and open up, letting her in on your biggest secret. To take comfort in

her acceptance of you and your struggles. Another part of you wants to keep her in the dark. This part of you wants to have a place where you can be regular, talk about the mundane and keep things light. Seriously, if every person in your social solar system was privy to your mental health struggles, where would you turn to for distraction?! Imagine if every time you spoke to every friend there'd be the inevitable, "So, how are you *really* feeling?" That would leave little place to escape and just *be*. Sometimes you feel like to just *be* means to be yourself, not the actor you're portraying to the world.

Sigh. So confusing.

Maybe we can make sense of this together. Let's say we took stock of our social solar systems (that term is one paragraph old, and look how well it took off!) and decided to designate roles. Not outright, of course, but in our own heads; to organize things. And let's say we appoint one or two friends to be our sounding boards. Yeah, we'd talk about work and the weather too, but those friends could also be there when we need to crash after therapy. Depending on your comfort zone, and if it's important to you, they could be the friends you pour out your meds frustrations to (anyone with meds has got at least *some* complaints). These friends might be Chazkeinu friends, who can personally relate, or friends from your life who have earned your trust. This is a lot of trust we're talking about. Now we have people with whom we can be somewhat transparent. Then we designate the other friends to be there for regular matters. We are going through a lot, but we still want to maintain the relationships we had before life got this hectic, and we decide to invest in those by touching base every so often. We feel relieved to have a place where we can forget about mental health for a bit.

Let's remind ourselves here, now that we've

effectively sorted this all out ;-)) that every part of the support system plays a crucial role. The Rabbi, doctor, therapist, mentor, friend, and support group work best when they each fill the part they are designed to play in your life. To expect one to pinch hit for another can put everyone in an uncomfortable position, often with undesirable results. Let each person be there for you in the way that they are most capable.

Having established that premise, it is time to focus on the shining sun in the very center of the solar system. Remember, dear reader, that you alone are your greatest asset. Often, you rely on the various orbiting resources you have wisely surrounded yourself with. You take care to turn to each one when that specific resource would be most helpful. But...

Dear shining sun, I remind you to also turn inward. Take time to access the inner strength inherent within every human being. To tap into the eternal spirit of the Jew who can rise to meet the challenges G-d has designed uniquely for you. Don't be afraid to be with

yourself, to sit with your struggle for a little while and process your pain with the skills you've been learning. You may be surprised to find that you are better equipped to handle your life than you give yourself credit for. You may develop coping mechanisms that allow you to function in a healthy way, even in the face of challenges. As you know, helping yourself is a most rewarding endeavor.

Sometimes, turning to a friend for comfort *is* the best way to help yourself, but you can only make a wise decision if you give yourself space to step away from the urgency and think, "What would *really* help me right now? What would be most effective?" How wonderful if our default during crisis could be to calm ourselves down and *think*, instead of reaching for the phone on autopilot. This reminds me of one of my favorite affirmations, from the song *I Can Be Stronger*, which is really a song almost entirely made of affirmations. So, this line is my favorite: *...I am a hero; everything I need is inside of me.*



Moderation – I just can't get enough of it

By Renee Edison

Like many others, I suffer from a lack of moderation. I constantly find myself *excessively* indulging out of fear that if I don't, my needs will not be met. When I go to a chasunah, I usually eat at least two rolls or, sometimes, three if the table is empty. In shul, I find myself pocketing candies that were meant to be thrown over the mechitza.

If you think that's unreasonable, just yesterday, I pulled into the parking lot of Wall-Mart, and the sight I beheld left me breathless; hundreds of empty parking spaces just sitting there in full glory. I quickly maneuvered my car and grabbed two of them all the while hitting myself for not bringing the van which could have easily clinched three spots. At this point, if you're thinking that Wall-Mart, with all those catchy distracting sales, is a dangerous store for someone like me to shop in, you should see me in Costco. Just last week, I got an eighteen-pack of plastic drawers for the same price you'd get a set of three at Target. The first eleven drawers were easy to fill with my disposable sock collection (whenever I buy shoes I take at least a half a boxful,) and I have plenty of ideas as to how to fill the rest. As of now, it'll probably be my hotel soap collection, but my wire hanger collection is definitely the runner up.

I sometimes wonder if there is a place where you can purchase moderation. Would it come in a can or maybe in a plush bag with a tie string? Imagine if they gave it free like those pens at the dentist (you should see my collection). I would take my van, grab as much moderation as possible, and load it all up. By the time I get home, it would just leave me feeling incredibly immoderate and that would defeat the purpose.



The Summer and its Delights

By Saralah

Every part of the year has its own uniqueness. What does the summer have to offer? What is its uniqueness?

Summer is an extension or a continuation of the spring. I think of the spring as a sense of birth and renewed hope. Renewed visions. An opportunity to look ahead and pursue our dreams. As an extension of the spring, the summer offers us a second chance and gives us the strength to keep forging ahead. What is it about the summer that offers us this kind of strength? I believe it's all about nature or, rather, Hashem's creations. The summer offers us an abundance of tools that can give us a slightly different perspective.

Flowers. There are all kinds of flowers that contain many different colors; red roses, orange tulips and much more. Take a deeper look at flowers, and you'll notice how they stand. Tall and straight. They didn't just happen to stand tall and straight on their own. They had to "work." They went through being watered, cut,

pruned, and rained on. Yet, they are standing tall, and their colors show off their pride.

Trees. Taking a look at a tree, we just see the surface. It's tall and has many branches and leaves. Digging somewhat deeper, we come to the realization that the tree didn't just grow tall on its own. There was a tiny seed that was planted. It was nourished with sunlight and rain, and it grew. It had to go through that work.

Each of us can be compared to trees and flowers. Just like the trees and flowers offer their beauty to the world, we too offer our own uniqueness and contribute to the world in so many amazing ways. We also have our own individual challenges that shape us into the people we are and the people we will become *because* of it. We are not limited. Rather, we are limitless in how much we can grow and do. Hence, the summer can be viewed as a parable for the numerous opportunities that there are for us to flourish!

Recognizing Perfection

By Sima

Hashem is perfection. This world, life, me, are all perfect. Though I don't usually recognize it, everything is designed by the Perfectionist Artist. The disillusionment lays in differing perceptions of 'perfection'. I understand perfection as comfort, joy, and simplicity, but Hashem's understanding of perfection is not in circumstances, it's in people. So He draws a perfect setting which includes neediness and pain and dysfunction, because it's primarily in these places where people have the chance to connect. When I connect by giving to others or when I connect by taking from others, WE become more perfect people. That's how we become more G-dly. That's the perfection that G-d envisioned when He originally created the circumstances. We don't need to 'paint' a better setting or environment. Nothing's broken; we don't need to fix anything. We need to follow the voice of compassion. We need to be kind. We need to speak softly. We need to pray. We need to realize that this is the perfection G-d envisioned. Our tikkun, our perfection, is intertwined in each other, through our perfectly designed strengths, weaknesses, and experiences.

| Rising up |

*“Man wants to believe in himself
and to understand G-d, when in
fact he should believe in G-d and
understand himself.”*

-The Alter of Novordok

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