

Winter 5778

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| Letters |

*A message from Rabbi Yisroel Grossberg,
Rabbinical Advisor of Chazkeinu*

It is my pleasure to once again be writing a letter for the Chazkeinu newsletter. This newsletter is even more meaningful as its publication coincides with the much anticipated Chazkeinu Shabbaton.

The fact that so many members have come together to gain chizuk while at the same time being mechazek each other, is a testament to the success and continued growth of this wonderful organization.

As we enter the Chanukah season, it is important to reflect on one of the central themes of this holiday. The Greeks did not wish to cause us physical harm, instead their goal was to have us completely assimilate and integrate into Greek culture. With an understanding that the spiritual threat that the Jews faced at that time was just as dangerous to us as a nation as if we were being physically threatened, we can understand the vital role that Chazkeinu plays. The mental health world can be confusing and sometimes even seem to appear at odds with our Torah haskafos, outlook. Having a resource that truly understands you and where you are coming from can be a huge form of comfort and emotional support while facing life's challenges. Having an opportunity to connect with other members who share your value system, and to hear from mental health professionals who are fully familiar with your lifestyle can make this challenge just a bit less intimidating.

As we all watch Chazkeinu grow and thrive, we can be so proud of all that we have accomplished and continue to accomplish in the area of offering support to those who are struggling with mental illness. We can be uplifted by the fact that at this time of year, when we pause to remember the centrality of Torah in our lives, we are part of an organization that is helping us remain true to our religious beliefs, while at the same time helping us get the emotional help and support that is vital to our success.

To my dear Chazkeinu family,

Alone

In a world of darkness

Confusion and pain

Stigma, isolation, a void within

Hope and relief seems so far away

Will I ever see the light

I raise my eyes

I see others

Enduring challenges so similar to mine

I am not the only one

I can join others, I can connect

Together, we can move on

Chanukah is approaching

The menorah from my window will shine bright

Each night the shamash candle

Transfers the flame to other candles

Without losing any of it's own light

Creating a sparkle and shine in darkest of night

Though the nights are long and the air is cold

On a journey that seems to have no end

I can feel the spark of hope from others

I have a light that I can give to another

The flame of inspiration, strength and encouragement

We, together, can bring light into our world

At Chazkeinu, together we are better

Thank you for sharing your unique and special light

That only each of you can give!

May we have the strength to strengthen each other

And see that light of healing we long for

At the end of the dark tunnel.

*All my love and admiration,
Zahava, Chazkeinu Co-Founder*

| Letters |

A Message from Tamar, Shabbaton Coordinator

I would like to personally welcome each and every one of you to Chazkeinu's Second Annual Shabbaton!!

It is so exciting that so many of you are able to attend. I am confident that this weekend will be filled with exciting opportunities to form new friendships and strengthen old ones.

Although at first glance, we each have our differences - be it in age or backgrounds, just like when we experienced at the Shabbaton last year, those differences will fall aside. We will all be able to bond with each other because we share a common link - that of dealing with a mental illness. We all speak a common language and that transcends all the differences.

I am asking each of you, if I haven't met you yet, please take the time over Shabbos to come over to me and introduce yourself. I am eager to meet our many members. I also encourage you to introduce yourself to others. You will be surprised at how much you have in common. You can also use the contact list that is included in your welcome bag to make outreach calls after the Shabbaton, and that way you will be able to maintain the friendships that you will make over the weekend.

As you can imagine, putting together a Shabbaton such as this one takes tremendous effort, but to me it carries with it tremendous meaning. It gives meaning to the suffering that I endured when my mental illness was at its worst. I know that I can take that pain and anguish that I experienced then, and use it to help others feel less alone in their illness. I honestly feel that if I was meant to suffer as I did, it was for a purpose and that purpose was to help you.

Don't underestimate your power to help and give meaning to your illness. There are so many opportunities for you to volunteer for Chazkeinu, as there are so many things that can be done within our organization. Please let us know if you are available and we can find a job that is right for you. I have seen firsthand how my leadership and involvement in this organization has aided in my recovery.

On a very personal note, in addition to mental illness, I also have epilepsy. I had a bout of three major seizures within seven months and I couldn't drive for over a year. The very day that Zahava called me to see if I would like to partner with her was a day of one of my seizures. B"H I have been seizure free since that day, and I am convinced it is because of my involvement in Chazkeinu. The merit of my efforts has brought me healing and for this I am grateful.

Chazkeinu continues to grow, and with your help it can develop beyond our wildest dreams. There is something out there for everyone, and something that your personal talent can help us with. We welcome your suggestions and are eagerly waiting for you to volunteer your time. You never know how you will benefit from it too!

I look forward to spending a wonderful Shabbos with all of you!



H - He can heal me, Hashem can do anything
O - Optimism outpouring from me, One day at a time
P - Putting the past behind me, Praying for a better tomorrow
E - Energy enveloped inside of me, Empowered to exist and excel

To read more inspiration from fellow Chazkeinu members, turn to page 17.

Mailbox



Chazkeinu has changed my life in so many ways. I have found real, deep, meaningful friendships. I

finally have the peer support that I needed and wanted for so long.

The Shabbaton last year in December was so special. It was so warm and friendly. Everyone I met was eager to speak and share their experiences and their feelings. There was no pressure for those who did not want to share. It was so wonderful to be able to place voices with faces. I felt a true sisterhood. I felt unconditional love and acceptance, like I had never felt before in any other group.

I had an incredible time and I will never forget the experience. I would highly recommend women to come. If you are not sure, it is worth taking the chance. I don't think you will regret it! Opening up ourselves for love and support is such a beautiful thing, one that will stick with us for a long time.

Thank you so much to all of my Chazkeinu sisters!

Sincerely,
Chaya Leah



What I liked about Shabbaton: I thought it was so nice how we were

able to just be our real selves. It was so nice to be able to talk about our meds, therapists etc. without shame. There is nothing like talking about your fears and anxiety without any judgments from others. There was this feeling of togetherness and understanding from all.

Baila



The previous Chazkeinu Shabbaton was the highlight and turning

point of my connection to this OUTSTANDING organization!

Just seeing everyone in full picture caused me to feel so honest, open and authentic! The program was amazing and so was the atmosphere... It was an experience I'll never forget!! This makes me super excited for the upcoming one...

Thanks in advance and my sincerest appreciation for everything Chazkeinu provides...

Looking forward,
Minky



I'm truly fortunate and grateful for having been able to partake in last year's

groundbreaking Shabbaton, and I am extremely excited about the next one coming up shortly! I look forward to having the opportunity to spend time once again with all my wonderful dear sisters whom I've already had the privilege of meeting, as well as finally being able to put a face to all the brave inspiring voices which I get to hear over the phone lines. CHAZKEINU is doing it again and it's hard to imagine, but I hear it will be even bigger and better! A HUGE THANK YOU TO TAMAR for your endless devotion & tireless efforts. As well as to all of those helping make this event a reality.

See you in Passaic,
Estie

We would love to hear from you.

Please email Chazkeinunewsletter@gmail.com

with your questions, comments, and feedback.

| Chizuk |

The Chashmonaim and You



By Rabbi Avrohom Steier

The holiday of Chanukah is almost upon us. Those radiant days where we celebrate the miraculous victory of the Chashmonaim over the Assyrian-Greek Empire, and the subsequent miracle of the lighting of the Menorah for eight days from one day's worth of oil. A beautiful time of the year that arouses in many people feelings of warmth and excitement.

However, one point requires clarification and some added depth. Do the Chashmonaim (also referred to as Maccabim) and I have anything in common? It is wonderful to celebrate their miraculous victory and to learn of their great piety and self-sacrifice, but is there any comparison that I can draw between my humble existence and their colossal achievements?

The Chasam Sofer shares the following fascinating idea which sheds new light on the accomplishments of the Chashmonaim. He writes that after the destruction of the first Bais HaMikdash (Temple) the Jewish nation as a whole was duly lacking in their religious observance, and consequently, they fell prey to the influences of the nations to whom they had been exiled. The entire length of the Babylonian exile which followed the destruction of the first Bais HaMikdash was only seventy years; therefore, the damage was not that great. The exile following the destruction of the second Bais HaMikdash, however, has

lasted for close to two thousand years with no definitive end in sight. Had the Jewish people entered this exile in the same state in which they entered the first exile, the results would have been catastrophic.

Enter the Chashmonaim. This small group of spiritual giants changed the course of the Jewish nation preparing them for their eventual exile throughout the diaspora. By sacrificing their lives for Hashem and His Torah, they strengthened the fortitude of the Jewish people and gave us the power to withstand all of the trials that we have faced personally, and as a people, throughout this long and bitter exile. Additionally, they enacted certain safeguards to protect the Torah and prevent it from being overturned through the years.

"Beautiful idea" you say, "but what does it have to do with me?" In a word: Everything. When someone struggles with mental illness and toils to overcome it, they usually think only of the here and now; I must control and subdue my illness in order to live a better and more productive life *now*. While this is an understandable and necessary motivation to accomplish one's goals, the truth is that there is much more at play here. The work and effort being expended has the ability to impact generations to come.

How so? Simply put, mental illness runs in families. Many people who suffer from one

"They are strengthening their own lives and that of their children, so that mental illness will no longer be able to rear its ugly head in their family again."

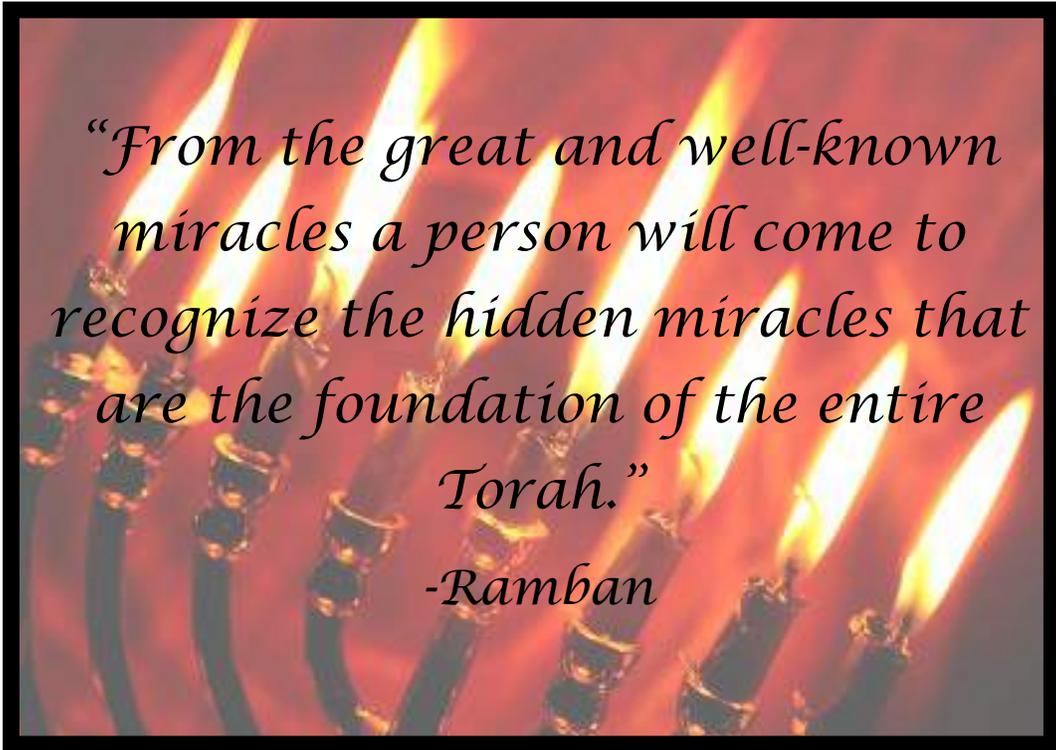
mental illness or another can view a similar illness in a parent or grandparent. If certain mental illnesses are left untreated, they run a strong risk of their children having to grapple with the same illness. When someone goes for therapy, they are, in effect, breaking the chain. They learn how to control their actions, thoughts, and emotions better; thereby, creating a healthier atmosphere for their children to grow up and be nurtured in. If their child does begin to display warning signs of a mental illness, they are able to recognize the issue and correct it before it begins to snowball. They are strengthening their own lives and that of their children, so that mental illness will no longer be able to rear its ugly head in their family again.

I believe there is another aspect to this “building for the future” that exists by those who fight against mental illness. Mental illness is not a new phenomenon. While the number of people experiencing it may have increased in recent years, the disorders that exist now have existed for a very long time. Yet, there has never been such an awareness of the existence of mental illness as we see today. That awareness can be directly

attributed to the brave souls that take their lives in their hands and do what is necessary to get the help that they need. The tide is slowly turning against mental illness as more and more people get help and more forms of therapy and medication are developed. I wonder if in the year 2100 (if Moshiach has not come by then) people will look back at our generation as the generation that changed the face of mental illness forever.

I hope that we now begin to see how we can relate, at least in a small way, to the heroic Chashmonaim. They risked their lives to defend Hashem and His Torah and, by doing so, strengthened the resolve of the Jewish people for millennia. So too, those who stand up to their mental illness and are not letting it control them are strengthening their children, future generations, and all of the Jewish people who are affected by their bravery. Their light, much as the light of the Chashmonaim, will continue to shine for eternity.

Rabbi Avrohom Steier is a talmid of Bais Medresh Govoah 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.



“From the great and well-known miracles a person will come to recognize the hidden miracles that are the foundation of the entire Torah.”

-Ramban



It is that time of the year when the days are getting colder and shorter. While some people do not mind the change, others may struggle with their mood (“Winter Blues”), and others may experience full-blown Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) which is the regular occurrence of depressive symptoms during the winter months. If you are unfamiliar with SAD but notice a change in your mood during the winter, take special note of these particular symptoms: Significant weight gain (5% or more of your body mass), social hibernation, oversleeping, and low energy. Whether you have the Winter Blues or SAD, here are some things you can do to help yourself.

1. *Are you taking your vitamins?* As sunlight exposure decreases with the fall and winter seasons, people get less Vitamin D. In addition to Vitamin D’s job to help cells communicate throughout the body, it can also increase our energy levels. When you are not getting direct sun exposure, your body is no longer absorbing Vitamin D, so try your best to get as many sunrays as possible by continuing with outdoor activities during the daytime, even when it’s cold. This is also a great way to stay less isolated and to get some fresh air which also helps decrease depression. So, get out your winter gear, bundle up, and get outside! For SAD, some therapists recommend a “light box” which simulates the rays of the sun indoors.

2. *Are you exercising?* Exercising is a natural antidepressant, and 15 minutes per day is often all it takes! By having a regular fitness plan, not only are you building structure into your day, but the natural feel-good endorphins in your brain are released and give you extra pep-in-your-step! If the temperatures are too cold, there are plenty of local gyms you can join, or try to access school/university gymnasiums where you can walk on the track. Have you ever tried a winter sport? Maybe this is the year to try ice-skating, snowshoeing, or skiing (cross-country or downhill). There are also indoor sports that don’t stop during the colder seasons, such as basketball, volleyball, and even bowling. Not to mention, exercise can also keep you socially connected!
3. *You are what you eat!* Your mind and body’s ability to function properly depends on the food you put into your body, or lack thereof. With the colder weather approaching, “comfort foods” become much more appealing. Some indulgences to cope with the cold may be fine, but *only* eating comfort foods will decrease your energy even more which impacts your motivation to prepare wholesome meals. Therefore, begin preparing a food schedule before the winter comes. Choose a time and 1-2 days during the week

(Continued on Page 16)

| Meet a Member |



Meet a Member

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

I am a mother of 3 children. I was diagnosed for the first time about 8 years ago, shortly after the birth of my third child. I was diagnosed with many, many different types of diagnoses, each completely different from the next. One of the diagnoses that I received was "Generalized Anxiety Disorder" with severe debilitating panic attacks. The panic attacks came with a vengeance and without any mercy. When I would get panic attacks at home, all I could do was to pace back and kick and scream. At this point, the panic attacks have decreased in frequency and intensity, and I am able to, thank G-d, keep down a steady job every day for five hours a day.

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

I tried everything. I went from doctor to doctor and hospital to hospital (eleven hospitals in a span of two years). I went from one therapist to the next and from one outpatient center to the next. Each time one of these options failed, I felt rejected all over again. Yet, surprisingly, I did not give up. After five years of no success, I prayed to G-d very, very hard saying, "Please help me find that special somebody. Hashem, I'm feeling so alone!"

Around that time, my husband's Rebbe told us to switch gears and try something completely different. He recommended Health Kinesiology which is something completely different and unlike any therapy that I ever tried. It is energy work. HK is balancing the energy in the body that becomes unbalanced when talking about an emotional event. When a person talks in 'talk therapy', or to anyone for that matter, the chemicals in the body become unbalanced, and HK balances these chemical imbalances in the body so that a person remains balanced and focused when talking.

This was my cure. This is where I found my Tante Laya. What I liked about her as an HK practitioner, unlike all the other therapists, was that she did not look at the clock and cut me off mid-sentence to say 'time is up'. She actually let me stay until I felt ready to leave.

Tante Laya has taught me so, so much, and is so patient with me. One of the many things that she taught me is EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique) which is also known as tapping. EFT is a technique where you tap different meridian points in your body with an opening sentence, and you tap out all different emotions and feelings until you get to the root cause of the behavior that you wish to adjust or fix.

Tante Laya has also taught me PRS which is known as the 'pose.' PRS is holding part of your head or forehead with your hand, relaxing, and letting the tension go. You can also do it by holding your pinky and ring finger together while breathing slowly to let the tension go.

Finally, she also did inner-child work, which means that you go back to places in your childhood, places you never imagined you were holding on to and release all the pain and hurt.

What is the most difficult part of your challenge?

The most difficult part of my challenge, but also the most rewarding, is accepting that I am different than other 'regular' mothers. Their families are growing, while mine remains small. They can manage all their household responsibilities themselves, while I have help for everything. I have someone who cooks for my family. I have someone who shops for my family. I have an adopted "Bobby" who helps out with children as needed. I have people who are mentors for my children and take them out for some fun. While I am aware that I am very blessed to be able to have and afford all this help, it is still very difficult. It is so painful accepting and swallowing the fact that I am not like my friends and sisters. It is a bitter pill to swallow.

Another difficulty for me is remembering to slow down when things get hard for me. I brought this up to a nurse practitioner in one of the outpatient centers, and she told me that when you feel like you can't go any more, you literally STOP, HALT, AND THINK.

H.....hungry....you eat

A.....angry.....you write

L.....lonely.....you call a friend

T.....tired.....you rest

Do you regularly participate in Chazkeinu's phone meetings? If so, can you share something that resonated with you?

I listen to the phone meetings on Monday nights, live. I also listen on Wednesday, but mostly on the recording, as I am at work during the meeting. I find the speakers very resourceful, informative, insightful, and professional speakers are so helpful. I like very much how they address my struggles and share their expertise and knowledge related to it. Those who share their stories are very courageous. Hearing them speak about their struggles and how they overcame it, has given me more strength and courage.

One of the speakers that resonated with me spoke of Yitzchok Perlman who was playing in a concert and one of the strings of the violin came off. Instead of going to get a new string or a different violin, he continued playing with a broken string and ended up getting a standing ovation. The speaker said that we can play our part in life with our broken strings, our challenges, struggles, and hardships.

This resonated with me very much, as I think that one of the things that make me special is that I accept help with everything. I humble myself to get whatever help is needed for my family. It's not easy for me, it makes me feel ashamed. It is actually really hard admitting weakness. Someone wise once said, "Admitting weakness is a sign of strength." I want to do what is best for my family. Having people in my house, or even outside help with everything, is very, very difficult. But I accept it because it is right and the best thing for my family. This is my broken string.

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

Having friends from Chazkeinu has helped me tremendously. It has given me hope and courage to know that I am not alone and that others are walking my path. For so many years I carried this deep, dark, heavy burden, yet when I speak to my Chazkeinu friends they treat me as normal. This helps me a lot. Listening to and seeing other Chazkeinu members who also struggle and yet are so 'normal' has strengthened me to realize that I am also 'normal'. I have an illness just like I have hands. It is a part of my body. It is part of me. It does not define me as a person. It is just another body part.

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

Never ever be ashamed to ask for help. Reach out to others. Sometimes asking family is humbling and humiliating. Sometimes friends and strangers, like in my case, are easier targets to reach out to. Reach out, ask, and don't be shy. Ask your friends to drive you. Ask your friends to take you out. Ask others to help you with meals or whatever you may need. Your family and friends want to help you. They want to ease your burden, but they are not mind readers. If you don't tell them, they won't know. They may realize or figure out that something is wrong but won't know how to help you. Let them help, and if they cannot help, ask them to daven, to pray. Davening is always needed. Mental illness is an illness just like any other illness, and a refuah shelaima, complete recovery is needed.

Additionally, a person should not get discouraged if they fall. It's the fall and then rising back up that makes us greater and more elevated. **IT'S okay to fall.** We fall, then get back up. Dear Chazkeinu sisters, if you feel like you fell in your battle against mental illness, it's okay. Don't be discouraged; know you can rise and start over. Go for it. You can do it. Keep climbing! **YOU CAN DO IT! HASHEM KNOWS YOU CAN DO IT, AND SO DO I!**

Love, Baila



Meet a Member

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

I'm single and in my 20s. I work part-time as an assistant teacher which I, Baruch Hashem, love. I'm also attending college and am pursuing a degree in special education. In terms of mental health, I struggle with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). My Anxiety and OCD do take a toll on me and can be very hard. Baruch Hashem, I'm learning how to deal with my challenges and hope to lead a productive life IY"H, G-d willing.

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

I was diagnosed when I was a child. Back then, I was never fully committed to working on myself and never made real or substantial progress. As I matured and got older, I realized that it was up to me, and B"H I have been working hard. I attend therapy once a week and see my psychiatrist regularly. Specifically, I'm learning to challenge my thoughts related to OCD. For instance, I have quite a hard time getting myself to sit down and start my work due to my fear of it being less than perfect. I then obsess and agonize about how well I did my work. I try challenging such thoughts by asking myself, "What's the worst thing that can happen?" I brainstorm and do self-talk based on the worst case scenario and try to work from there. (I once put off an assignment until the night before and got extremely anxious, but I got it done, B"H. Since then, I have this incident in my head which helps me get going before the last minute).

I'm also learning DBT (Dialectical Behavioral Therapy) skills to manage my emotions, which is very hard. When my emotions get intense, I ground myself by using my five senses and by being mindful of my breathing. I use the same skills as mentioned above, in addition to self-talk, to manage my anxiety. I'm becoming more aware of how my actions and thoughts affect myself and others, which gives me perspective and opens up my mind.

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

I heard about Chazkeinu from Chazak. I called Chazak one evening while unwinding and heard Zahava's amazing story. I quickly got out a pen and paper and jotted down her contact information. I will say that I was quite nervous to contact Zahava, but I am so grateful that I did!! I emailed her that night and the rest, as they say, is history!

I have benefited a lot from Chazkeinu. Firstly, I always look forward to each Chazkeinu email. They are always filled with a tremendous amount of chizuk, inspiration, positivity and hope! A lot of work must go into them, so thank you, Malky!! I also love the Monday night calls which I'm a regular on. Whether it's a mental health professional speaking or a member sharing her story, there's always something positive and inspiring to take from them! I also try to attend Chazkeinu outings whenever possible. I've attended the Lakewood event, the event in Borough Park, and a couple of other ones. There was a tremendous amount of warmth, positivity, and the feeling and motto of "We're all in this together to help each other." Lastly, I've also found the professionals on Empowered to be very helpful. They are especially warm, understanding, and helpful.

A special thank you to Zahava, Tamar, and to all the other contributors for making Chazkeinu what it is!!

Do you regularly participate in Chazkeinu's phone meetings and can you share something that one of the speakers said that resonates with you?

I am a regular on the Monday night calls which I love. I don't remember anything in particular that was said, but I do want to say that I come out feeling so inspired and so invigorated. I often hang up and say to myself, "Wow, if she did that, I can do it too!" Of course, on my own level.

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

I have B"H made so many friendships through being a part of Chazkeinu. There's something different when talking to Chazkeinu members about my challenges than talking to a "regular" friend. Whenever I talk to Chazkeinu friends, I hang up feeling validated, understood, and imbued with chizuk. Baruch Hashem, the friendships blossom into a real tangible bond. Thank you, Chazkeinu!!

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

As hard as it is, never ever give up!! Even though times may seem so bleak and sometimes we can't even imagine coming out the other side, there's always hope! Whenever possible, I try to remind myself that this is my nisayon, test, given to me by Hashem and that I CAN get through it. I also keep reminding myself that if Hashem gave me this challenge, it means He knows I can get through it. So, my fellow Chazkeinu members, never lose hope. You may not be in the best place now or in the place you want to be in, but that doesn't mean things won't get better. They will with Hashem's help. Although the path to recovery may be a long and arduous one, it is definitely well worth the work! Keep strong!!



Ask the Therapist

By Dr. David H. Rosmarin, PHD, ABPP
and Perella Perlstein, PsyD

I find myself having a very hard time getting over things. I take things very personally, and it really cuts into my ability to function. People say I'm attuned to other people and that I am a great listener, but the problem is that even when the conversation is over, I'm still thinking about it. I considered going into the mental health field because I am empathetic and really want to help, but I can't seem to let go of things. This also comes up in some of my relationships. I have a hard time accepting criticism and moving past it in a productive way. When someone gives me constructive feedback, I find that I beat myself up about it and then resent the person for putting me in this uncomfortable situation. I know I need to detach from these situations – but how do I do that?

(Trying to) Let Go

Dear (Trying to) Let Go,

You sound like an empathetic and caring person. You care about others which can make it difficult to deal with their pain and emotional distress. Part of the reason why you have a hard time letting go may be, because like many people, you instinctively blend your emotions with those of others. In our Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) program, we refer to this as an example of "emotion mind." When in emotion mind, you experience unwanted, intrusive emotions such as sadness over another's life challenges or anger and resentment over being criticized, and this causes you suffering. As we teach in DBT: Suffering is pain without purpose. Therefore, one approach is to try to assign purpose and meaning to your emotional pain. If your goal is to help ease someone else's pain, or if your goal is to find a way to effectively implement another's constructive feedback, then – as tragic as your friend's life situation may be, and as painful as the criticism can be – your emotion has a purpose. Armed with your purpose, you can move from unbearable emotional suffering to more manageable emotional pain. From here, it's possible to move even further forward by simply observing and describing how we feel. This is an essential process because it is difficult, if not impossible, to deal with emotions that you are unsure about. Another key step is to

check the facts. Do your emotional reactions fit the facts? Be careful and don't assume YES. Be open to the possibility that even if your emotions (e.g., sadness, anger, etc.) are valid, your emotional *reactions* (e.g., feeling hopeless about being able to help others, or self-loathing and resentment over criticism) may not fit the facts. Be open to changing your beliefs about the facts because this may allow you to change your emotional reactions. For example, maintaining the belief that the only thing that matters to your friend is whether or not you are able to solve her problems and eradicate her pain is NOT a fact – it's an *assumption*. Your friend's challenging situation does not cause you pain. Your belief that you are solely responsible to eliminate her pain is causing you distress. Once you've checked the facts, here's another strategy: Try and act in the opposite way that your emotional urge is telling you to do. In DBT we call this "Opposite Action." In the case of your criticizing boss, your emotional urge may be to attack and assume a defensive position. Instead of doing that, try gently avoiding him and being a little nice. These are just a few of the many DBT techniques that can help people to manage their emotions better and let go when they want to. If you'd like to learn more, consider joining a DBT skills group for a structured approach to become more effective in daily life and build a life worth living.

All our best,

David H. Rosmarin, PhD, ABPP, & Perella Perlstein, PsyD

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To submit a question for this column, please email chazkeinnewsletter@gmail.com.

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when you tend to have the most energy. Make this your "food preparation day." Go grocery shopping and begin preparing meals for the week. If you have most of this completed in advance while you have the energy, you are more likely to follow through. This also alleviates some pressure which can be a key trigger for depression.

4. *How much sleep are you getting?* One of the most robust predictors of depressive symptoms is not getting enough sleep. Yes, setting an alarm and pushing yourself to get out of bed on time in the morning is crucially important to combat symptoms of depression, but so is getting to bed on time. Research indicates that most people need 7-9 hours of sleep, yet the overwhelming majority of Americans get far less. No wonder depression impacts more than one in five people at some point during their lifetimes!

Altogether, these four points provide a solid

foundation for how to keep your mood more regulated during the winter months. However, these and other strategies can be a challenge to implement consistently in the context of life stress and bad weather. So, if you tend to struggle with depression, or if you anticipate struggling this winter season, consider finding a therapist to help coach you along with these and other approaches. Often just a few sessions can make a world of difference!

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| Chazkeinu Sisters Share |



With my Chazkeinu sisters at my side, I have...

- C** - a Common bond, a Community
- H** - a (safe) Haven, a Home away from home
- A** - Assurance, Acceptance
- Z** - Zest for life, Zany fun times
- K** - Knowledge, Kindness
- E** - Empathy, Empowerment
- I** - Information, Inspiration
- N** - No more stigma, New start
- U** - Understanding, Unity

I can do it *By Yehudis*

The times are rough, it seems so hard
But one day I know I'll see
That although life's one big challenge
It was somehow meant to be

There are many stops along the way
To the places I must go
And each one is important
It will only help me grow

Decisions are so scary
Which path am I to take
Which one will help me through these
times
Without causing me to shake

There are shaky ladders, deep dark
pits
And storms that soak my skin
But through each and every trial
I know that somehow I must win

I made it off the carousel
That kept spinning round and round
And began a slow but steady walk
With my feet upon the ground

I'm no longer on the floor
In the pit way down below
I began a slow but steady climb
With my eyes upon the goal

I made it through the weeds
With holes on each and every side
The tunnel's now complete
And the door is open wide

I know I'm moving slowly
But the end is now in sight
When I think back to the distressing
times
I no longer scream in fright

With determination to keep going
I know I'll make it through
I keep my eyes upon the goal
And never change the view

It's still hard to decide
Am I ready now or not
How far should I push myself
And will I know to stop

I know that I can do it
Even with my questions and my fears
I know that I can do it
Even though I still may shed some
tears

Although I'm still afraid
There's no more terror and dismay
Cause if anything should happen
I know I'm heading the right way



When there are twenty voices arguing with each other, it's hard to listen to any of them. And when your allegiance is with each of these contradicting opinions, life is complicated. I wonder how all these thoughts are all from me. For then, I am so many parts, and I am so apart that I get lost in them in the search for myself. And when I watch others keeping themselves together during crises, I am awed. Because under stress, all of me yells. In all different directions. And since I am unsure of what and who to listen to, I do all of it. This gives "coming apart" a new meaning, literally.

When things come together, it goes better. How rain and sun, which are on opposite ends of the spectrum, when together, bring growth. And how a man and a woman, also on opposite ends of the spectrum, when together, bring new life. And how depression and mania, once again, opposite ends of the spectrum, when I work them together, can be something beautiful. If and when, it all comes together.

And I think that things come together when there's a strong force pulling in the middle. Like how a strong self keeps its various parts in sync and lives in peace. Like how the institution of marriage brings a man and woman together. Like how a shared experience brings together strangers, who would have never known each other, and gives one the opportunity to touch another person's life and bring hope, understanding, support, and encouragement in the place of loneliness.

A grain of sand alone is barely visible. But the sand is all that keeps the world from flooding. Maybe that's what G-d meant when He promised Abraham that His children will be as dust, sand. Together we will protect the world from going under. We will protect each other from going under.

We will be better, together.

Song *By Shayna*

I believe there is a plan
It's not a chance
This darkness with end
Lightness will ascend
Even if it doesn't feel real
Life is the deal
It's not an illusion

So many symptoms pain me
When will I be set free
I want to fly, go soar
It sounds that easy

Will my wings carry me through
My baggage is heavy
I want to survive

I need to get off this racing train
My thoughts in the front
My heart's in the tail
Help me my soul screams

Why am I here
What am I doing
Where is this going
Where's my destination
When will it end
Who will help me

There are answers I won't know
the reason behind
All the things I didn't say in my
life time

But I believe there is a plan
It's not a chance
This darkness will end
Lightness will ascend
Even if it doesn't feel real
Life is the deal
It's not an illusion

There are answers I won't know
the reason behind
All the things I didn't say in my
life time

But I believe there is a plan
It's not a chance

Running

By Yehudis

I'm worried, I'm nervous
Will I get up on time
I keep getting up
And going back to sleep
Until it is time

I rush to get ready
Only five minutes to go
I start running
Running to get there
Now I must stop and wait

The bus comes
And drives around
It's taking so long
I scream - faster, faster
I must get to the next place

The bus stops
And I get off
I start running
Wrong way, I run back
Now I must stop and wait

I'm worried, I'm nervous
Did I get there in time

Did I make it
Then the bus comes and I get on
Last stop

The bus is going
Over streets and highways
It's taking so long
I scream - faster, faster
I must get to the next place

Where do I need to go
At which stop do I get off
I'm worried
But the person next to me
Helps me to my destination

This is my life
Always worried
Always running
Racing ahead
Trying to get to the end

I'm at one place
And I worry
Will I make it through
Will I survive

And then I keep on running

I can't sit in one place
I scream - faster, faster
I must get to the next place
I want to get to the end
I want it all to be over

Where do I need to go
Where am I running
On this never ending race
I am lost
I am worried

But there is always Someone
Standing right near me
Helping me through
Whenever I get lost
And don't know where to go

He tries telling me to slow down
But I don't listen
I want to finish
And get to the end
But it's taking so long

Standing Together

By Breindy

The single cloud starts drifting away
Beyond the scope of the eyes
Leaving a clear sky
To the unnoticed treasure of surprise
Those peeking through the sky
Can tell the movements of the cloud,
So slow and distinct
In its first instinct.
It joins another clouds array
To make it a cloudy day.
But it isn't there to stay.

One cloud doesn't make a cloudy day.
Together, it combines to display.
The opposite is also true
When feeling blue,
Coming together creates feelings for one another.

The Yevanim (Greeks) tried destroying everything,
Lots of destruction it did bring
Aftermath, it was hard to find that one light,
Once they did, it wasn't enough.
A miracle shined,
Eight of them intertwined
One lonely little candle
Needed its support to handle.
The seal was not broken
It remained strong, well spoken.

Let us band together,
Like the clouds,
The oil, and fan the weather
We will remain strong forever!

A Lesson From my little Boy and His New Toy

By Estie



We bought for my little boy
A brand new fire truck- cute little toy!
Oh the fun! Oh the joy!
But what happened shortly after,
Put a stop to the excitement and laughter.
Where are the megaphone and the water hose?
It's supposed to come with the toy - he checked the
box; so he knows!
Well, they're nowhere to be seen!
How upsetting! So mean!
Call the company/the store and tell (yell!),
That a truck without the parts they should not sell!
It's so unfair-
I want it so badly right over here!

This transpired Sunday after school,
My son went to sleep feeling like a fool.
Monday had come and gone-
To call the store: remained undone.
That night when all was finally quiet,
My home I began to tidy up a bit.
Alas - what did my eyes meet?
Yup - that's it; my sons missing treat!
Red megaphone and water hose so long!
It was here from the start; the company did nothing
wrong!

I then decided to put it in my drawer and hide it.
I don't want him to find the surprise
As soon as he open his eyes.
For then, all he will do is play,
And miss his school bus that day (oy vey).
The excitement will have to hold just a little bit more,

Until I share with him my
great find of the night
before!

In this I found a lesson so crystal clear:
There are plenty of treats I beg for
From my Father in Heaven so dear.
He has access to it all-
Nothings too big or small.
What I must remember however,
Is that He doesn't want me to "miss my bus ever."
And though it's hard to truly feel it,
Hashem knows just when the time is fit.
And if he decides to withhold it from me,
It must be for my benefit, even though as of yet I so
don't see.

Now this message I want to ingrain,
In my bones and in my brain.
This is my challenge, my duty,
And I will succeed you'll see!
Every effort I will use,
With emunah, faith to infuse.
I will read and learn whatever it may take,
So that my belief will be real not a tiny bit fake.

I am not up to this level yet,
It's the work of a life time - you bet.
Worth the effort for sure - absolutely -
Since I will then have acquired true inner peace
and tranquility.



T- Twists to turns

I- Involving irritating/inspiring intricacies

M- Mindful motions make meaningful moments

E- Extraordinary examples of experiences exclusively evolving on earth

You're Not Easy to Live with Either (don't say this at home)

By Batsheva

One day, my therapist said, "You know, you're not easy to live with either!"

Bam.

It wasn't a slow, blood-drains-from-your-face moment. It was a *punch in the guts, knock the air outta you!* one.

Of course, it was in context which I will provide later on (if you really must know how a legit professional came to say such a thing), but first I will tell you this. When I heard, from my therapist, to my face, that I was no picnic to live with, three things happened.

First, I felt very humbled which was a rather new experience for me, and it was rather, uh, humbling. I'd been blaming some key people and experiences for my troubles, and here this woman who knew the inside story was basically saying I was bringing my own package to the table too. With one sentence, she put me in my place and directed me inward. Oh. The second thing I felt was gratitude. I was flooded with gratefulness and love toward the friends and family who stick with me even though I'm...not easy to live with. Wince. I resolved to express that appreciation and gratitude to my loved ones. The third thing I was inspired with was a passionate rush of energy. I was going to change things, *now*. I was on a mission to become more pleasant to be around and less not-easy-to-live-with.

I guess it's a progression of sorts. First, humbly acknowledging that there are things in your life that need fixing AND are in your hands. Next, reaching out to the people who are hanging in there with you and saying, "Thanks for sticking this out with me," and finally, sort things out!

I want to tell you what's been going on here lately. It's been nearly a year since that conversation. In that time, my three immediate reactions have been happening to me over and over, synthesizing to form an approach that guides my work in therapy and spreads to

the rest of my life. It's changed the way I see self-improvement, and in a measurable, real way, I have even changed me.

It looks something like this. I get really mad at a loved one who is invading my personal space. (Note: this is not referring to toxic relationships; rather, regular bumps that are part of any and all relationships to varying degrees.) They are being intrusive, and I'm feeling uncomfortable, frustrated, and angry. My initial reaction is to blame and lash out. Then I hear my therapist's voice going, "Hey, you're not that easy to live with either!" Bam, right?

I think: This is not ok. I will find *my* part in this mess (cuz yes, I have one), own it, and recognize that only I can fix my part. I decide to be more clear with my loved one about where my comfort zone ends instead of expecting people to know my boundaries automatically. Although I'm distressed right now, I am so grateful that this person continues to stay with me even when being with me is not easy/unpredictable. I'm going to do something *now*. Something healthy and effective. Maybe I will share my thoughts with this person; the humble thought, the grateful one, and the action one too.

Did I say I was going to provide background about how my therapist came to say such a pointed line right to my face? Let me first tell you that she's really good at what she does. She's very smart and very reputable. Most importantly, she gets me. She works with my quirks, gets how I operate, and is not afraid to get me riled up. We figured out together that a direct approach is effective with me, and she gives me an objective perspective on my blind spots. I appreciate the no-sugar-coating way, and as you can see from this share, the impact of those insightful (and sometimes incisive) remarks can have far-reaching, growth-inspiring effects.

The Path

By Anonymous

Fogginess . . .
Haziness . . .
Blackness.
Fear and confusion,
Pain and desperation
Accompany me.

I walk
Down the path.
It is rocky,
Filled with stones and pebbles,
Poorly lit,
Jagged and unpaved.

I struggle
To put one foot
In front of the other;
To create
A solid path
On what seems to be
Uncharted territory.
And, though I see
No end in sight,
I know I must continue.
For this is the path
Created especially for me
By the One Who loves me most.

The road
Of mental illness
Is terribly stormy.
I watch
My loved one agonize,
Tormented by thoughts,
Overtaken by obsessions,
Writhing in pain.

My heart
Twists and shatters
As I hurt for him.
My feelings
Get scraped and bruised
As he struggles
To make sense of the world
Through distorted lenses.

I attempt
To grab a stronghold.
I offer encouragement,
Hope, and kindness.
The sun has yet to shine,
I whisper,
To him and to myself.

But the road
Seems infinitely long.
I pass deep pits
Of endless despair.
I trudge through the darkness,
Thick and lonely.
I encounter mountains
That seem insurmountable.

I struggle
To put one foot
In front of the other;
To create
A solid path
On what seems to be
Uncharted territory.
And, though I see
No end in sight,
I know I must continue.
For this is the path
Created especially for me
By the One Who loves me most.

I hold on firmly
To the belief
That every sigh
And every tear;
Every ache
And every sob
That echoes soundlessly
On the deserted path
Will find its way
Through the storm clouds
Directly to the *כסא הכבוד*

I grasp on tightly
To the knowledge
That every drop

Of undiluted pain
Holds untold meaning.
And that one day,
When the sun will shine,
It will bring illumination and clarity
Though I know not when.

I acknowledge
That feelings
Will come and go.
There will be victories,
And there will be setbacks,
Peaks of hope
And valleys of disappointment.

But with faith
In my path's Creator
I continue
To put one foot
In front of the other;
To create
A solid path
On what seems to be
Uncharted territory.
And, though I see
No end in sight,
I know I must continue.
For this is the path
Created especially for me
By the One Who loves me most.

When the storm will subside
And the sun will shine
On the twisty road
That I have traversed
I will clearly see
My accomplishments
On the beautiful path
Created for me.



MY LIFE

in 500 Words

By Tova Goldberg

When I was 15 years old, I was diagnosed with a very serious illness. A scary illness; one which is not talked about in the frum world. No, I didn't chas v'shalom have cancer, lo aleinu. Nor was my disease life threatening, but it was definitely life changing, nonetheless.

Yes, I was one of those neshamos which Hashem chose for a nisayon that I feel is one of the hardest for a person to deal with. The challenge I faced and continue to deal with on a daily basis is one which is taboo in the frum community. It is something with so many stigmas attached to it that it is not talked about ever. There are no support groups and no organizations that take us on trips or make us shabbatons to get our minds off the pain we go through.

I have been blessed with the challenge of mental illness.

Have you ever heard the expression, "I don't suffer from insanity; I enjoy every minute of it,"? Well, personally, I really identify with the concept described in that statement. When I am feeling hyper, I feel like I am on the top of the world. I feel like I can accomplish anything I set my mind to. I feel like I can change the world. To those around me, I can be quite a pain to deal with during those times. For me, I enjoy every moment. Though I might do things that will embarrass me later, my self-esteem which is usually so low soars to way above the clouds. With my thoughts spinning out of control and speaking faster than a speeding bullet, I feel great.

If you would meet me, chances are you would have no idea about the challenges and struggles I face. To all who know me, I am a nice Bais Yaakov type girl with good middos and a fun personality. I am creative and talented, and I love to make others happy. Only my immediate family and my closest friend know my secret: that it is only with medication that I can function as a productive member of society. I take a very low dose of an anti-psychotic medication every night. Occasionally, when my parents and I realize that I am not acting like myself, and I am acting wild, hyper, and manic, I visit my psychiatrist, and he helps me to raise the dosage of my medication until I am back to myself again.

I try to be good. I really do. I truly believe that I have some control of myself even when the chemicals in my brain start acting funny and my thoughts are out of control. My doctor believes that I will be able to get married one day and have a family.

This article was written five years ago. Today, Tova works full time at a job she loves and enjoys spending time with her wonderful husband and two children. She is happy to see that in the five years since she wrote this piece, Chazkeinu has stepped up to the plate and changed a large part of what made her feel like this test was such a hard one to endure.

My Illness Defines Me

By Molly

Many people choose to believe that their mental illness does not define them. They choose to separate themselves from the monster that attacks them on a daily basis. They choose to believe that because they don't have control over how the illness plays a role in their lives, nothing that they say or do is really them, but it's actually the illness that is talking or doing.

Well, guess what, friends? I chose to believe that my mental illness defines me. My mental illness maps out who I am today. My mental illness makes me the person others see me as. My mental illness has proven to be the defining figure of the person I am.

My mental illness defines my relationship with G-d.

Before I was diagnosed with BPD, I had no, if any, relationship with G-d. Don't get me wrong, I knew there was a G-d that ran the world. I knew He was the one Who created me, and takes care of me. I knew everything happened with a purpose, and He was behind it all. I spoke to Him through my prayer book, and obeyed the commandments He set forth in the Torah, as I was taught by my family and teachers. Relationship? Not much. I just obeyed what I was told to do.

When I was diagnosed, I started to question further as to why this was happening to me, and that is when my **relationship** with G-d started. Now, let me say this, a relationship doesn't mean only good. A relationship has ups and downs, good times and hard times, and so it was with my relationship with G-d. Having never really spoken to Him on a personal level, at first I was heartbroken and begged G-d for an explanation. Being given no answer that I was satisfied with, I got angry at G-d. I started yelling at Him, giving Him the "silent treatment." I was really angry that I had to go through every day with the heavy monster of BPD eating away at my quality of life.

This went on for a while, until I met a friend who had insightful words of wisdom for me, which changed my view towards the pain G-d was choosing to bestow upon me. At once, I started to relax a bit and talk nicer to G-d, stopped questioning as much, started accepting more, and in general, calmed down from my fierce rage against G-d.

Currently, my relationship with G-d consists of many ups and downs, good days and bad days, happy days and angry days, grateful days and hateful days, but at the end of the day, I have a relationship with G-d.

So you see, my friend, that because of my mental illness, I have a relationship with G-d in the first place. My mental illness defines my relationship with G-d.

And you know what else?

My mental illness also defines my sensitivity.

BPD has made me into a very sensitive person. Say you have a burn, a really enormous, deep burn on your face. Oh how much it would hurt for a tiny bit of air to blow on it, for someone to touch it with the gentlest of hands. Oh the pain you would feel. So it is with BPD. Oh the pain when someone makes a comment or remark that burns my soul and heart. Oh the agony when I am criticized, accused or berated without understanding. This has only made me more aware of the sensitivity others may feel as well, when they are spoken to in an uncaring way, if they are spoken to in an unpleasant manner.

So you see, my friend, that because of my own sensitive, fragile soul, I have become very much aware of the sensitivity others may feel, and in turn have become more careful with comments or remarks I may say, or actions I may do, that may hurt someone in an unexpected way. I am careful that when and if I need to give someone some important criticism, to do it in a gentle way and use soft words so as not to sting their "burn" and hurt the wound more.

And you know what else?

My mental illness also defines my courage and strength.

When I was diagnosed with BPD, I did not know where to turn, what the next move should be, what kind of life I would lead, where this would bring me. I quickly learned what a long journey I had ahead of me, and boy was I in for disappointment. I did not believe I had what it would take to fight the battles I would have to, let alone accept them.

But as time goes by and with each passing struggle, I become stronger and stronger and can deal with more. G-d doesn't stop throwing me challenges, and I am still here to tell the story. This shows that I was able to pass through each one, growing bigger and better as each day goes by that I need to fight this long, unfathomable battle.

So you see, my friend, that because of my mental illness, I have become the strong, empowered person I am today, weathering storms and fighting battle I never believed I could.

And you know what else?

My mental illness defines my relationships with my siblings and parents.

I always had minimal connection to my parents and siblings. I felt misunderstood and could not relate to any of them, and they could not relate to me. I felt like I was mistreated and I always blamed them, when in reality, I myself didn't understand myself. After going to therapy for many, many months and years, after being on medication and in intense treatment, I am now able to communicate effectively with my family. I am open with them about my mental illness and they in turn are more understanding of my behaviors, both good and bad. They have learned when to tolerate and how, they learned when I need them most, they learned what I need most and all in all, they learned who the real me is.

So you see, my friend, that because of my mental illness I finally have relationships with my family like I have never had before. I can have long conversations with them and spend weekends with them, something I have never dreamed would even be possible!

And you know what else?

My mental illness defines who I am as a mother to my child.

I was not brought up in a healthy or nurturing environment. I always felt hostile and closed to myself. I was not taught how to express my feelings and emotions and talk about things. So, rather than talk out my emotions, I would use other methods, such as yelling, throwing things, and many more unpleasant behaviors that naturally sent people flying the other way. And even though my mother never taught me how to express my feelings in the right way, she would be enraged at my behavior and punish me without letting me share my pain. It wasn't fun in the least bit.

Throughout my therapy journey I have gained knowledge of many skills and techniques I can use to guide me through the ups and downs of my BPD, mainly my mood swings, intense emotions and interpersonal effectiveness.

It's frightening for me to see my own childhood behaviors in my daughter, and sometimes I wonder if I still display some of those behaviors and don't realize it. But thank G-d I am able to use my own skills to guide my daughter in regulating her emotions, instead of locking them in a closet and shipping her off to her room for the day.

We talk things through, we discuss what's going on, we come up with a plan on how to pull through, and sometimes helping my daughter cope with her dysregulation is in and of itself therapy for me. It's skill practice for me as well, and we travel the journey together.

So you see, my friend, that because of my mental illness, I am the best mother I can possibly be, and can guide and be there for my daughter so she can have opportunities as a child and adult that I, unfortunately, was unable to obtain.

And you know what else?

My mental illness defines my friendships.

I always had a hard time making friends and maintaining relationships. I can have a friend for a while, and then it gets too much for them that they would give up on me after a bit of time. I would make another friend, and fight until they, too, wanted nothing to do with me. And when I finally thought I had a real friend, I would screw up with them as well. That was the story of my life.

And then I joined Chazkeinu. Chazkeinu saved my life. Literally. I don't know how I ever lived before my Chazkeinu friends came around. These friends are real, true friends, who understand my struggles to the deepest level, who can see me as me and not as the person my BPD tries to make me. These friends never leave me; they are with me to stay - I know and feel that inside my heart.

And in turn, I am able to be a good friend to them, to help them when they are struggling, to be there for them when they need a shoulder to cry on, and as our motto goes, "We strengthen ourselves by strengthening each other"

So you see, my friend, that because of my mental illness, I have found Chazkeinu, where I have made so many real, real friends that I can hold on tight to, and who will always be there for me, no matter what and when.

So, that's it, friends. Now you know why I feel my mental illness defines me. Now you know why I feel that my mental illness has affected every part of the 'me' that I am today. And now you know the real me. ☺

How much prouder of myself can I be?

The Gift of my Rainbow Umbrella By Tova K



Hashem sent a gift directly to me.
My own Rainbow Umbrella.
He gave me this gift as a tool to use when the weather gets rough.
And it does get rough.
He gave me my Rainbow Umbrella, because He knows that I will need it to deal with all types of weather at any given moment in time, in the specific way that He chooses to send it.
And He will!
He will send it because He loves me, and He wants to give me the honor and opportunity to grow a tree!
A special tree that is for Him!
Hashem gave me my Rainbow Umbrella, and He wants me to use it. (And NEVER forget that I have it.)
So whether it is drizzling or there is a storm pouring down heavy and loud,
All I need to do is open my Rainbow Umbrella.

And...

I decide what goes on underneath the gift of my personal Rainbow Umbrella
My thoughts,
My feelings,
My emotions,
And how (or if) I want to react to what is going on outside.
Sometimes the storm may be so wild that even under the Rainbow Umbrella

I will experience fear and pain.
But there is no danger.
Because whatever weather Hashem decides to send my way
Hashem just wants one thing from me:
To hold that umbrella and hold it tightly!

When the storm comes down hard and the wind is blowing wild,
I need to protect the new, fresh, and vulnerable seedlings from being ripped out of the ground.
I need to keep them safe, help them grow, and make them stronger
Until they grow so deeply rooted that, even in a tornado, they will still stand strong.
And that Rainbow Umbrella may no longer be necessary
Because the tree has grown big and strong and deeply rooted into the ground.

And the rain and the storms
They need to be there!
Because without them nothing will grow!
And there are beautiful blossoms of every shape and color that will grow and be fruitful.
And I will be proud of the part I played in holding that Rainbow Umbrella over it
To grow this tree for Hashem.

She vs. the Demons

By Batsheva

She's not sure when she first lost control
To the mad demons that reign
Can't quite recall if ever they didn't
Run amok, round and round in her brain

Been going to sleep with the demons for years now
Alarmed if one night they're not there
She's gotten used to the vague discomfort
Accustomed to life lived in fear

The demons filter her every experience
Often flooding her being
They influence all her thoughts and decisions
Distorting her hearing and seeing

She tries to avoid potential triggers
But still, the blackness grows denser
Clarity's gone, fake thoughts become
Increasingly harder to censor

She's desperate when she first reaches out
Yet makes the move brave and bold
She's ready to actively bring on redemption
From the demons' deathly hold

Once she's begun, there's no backing out
At times she's quite overwhelmed
She soldiers on, resolute in her mission
To piece back her fragmented self

These days it's even worse than before
She doubts her chosen path
Can barely walk it, so strewn with confusion,
Pain, shame, fear, and wrath

Still, she's at it, won't give up the fight
It's She vs. the Demons within
And though nobody will promise the final outcome
I'll bet in the end she will win.

My Three Precious Gifts

By Estie



My Three Precious Gifts
They raise me higher than lifts,
So elevated and pure,
They are bringing Moshiach for sure.
They keep me on my toes,
Wanting to know how that works?
And why this way the other thing goes?!
Listening to their quirks
Can sure be a menial task.
Creations they construct - from what?
Don't even ask!
And their pride that makes them glow
Is worth more than we know!
And when they get along-
It's the most magnificent melodious song.

However....

At times they fight.
I want to take flight.
I close my eyes tight.
I tell G-d, you know my fright
You see my plight
Please shine upon me some extra light
So I may once again be part of a most magical sight.
Of peace and harmony that's stronger than steel.
Where the presence of G-d is palpable; a real feel.

And above all I must say,
Thank You, Hashem, for sending Chazkeinu my way.
A year ago on that auspicious day.

So that now I can truly live life,
Aim to be the best friend, daughter, mother, and wife,
Spread my wings,
And learn to appreciate all my blessings.

Dating with Mental Illness

By Devorah

There are many things that come up while dating. A mental health issue complicates things a lot. Living with the stigma of mental illness makes it harder to break that already tough wall of dating. I struggled many years with the complicated question of when to share and when not to disclose my health condition. After over a decade of dating I have finally come to somewhat of a conclusion. I have had the guidance of my Rav and Rebbetzin and together with a devoted shadchan I decided to share my information minimally to a prospective match. All of this came as a result of many years of pain and hurt as well as evaluating what I truly want, and a growing curiosity of who I am and what am I truly looking for. I hope that each of you can gain something because my story is not just mine, it's too many of my friends and their friends too!

I know this is a loaded topic. I myself am in the dating scene for almost a decade, I know that dating is difficult and having mental illness can make it even more difficult. Here are just a few stories of hope before I start.

A highly accomplished young woman decided she will never get married. Having reached her 30s she decided to build a wall of "being ok" with singlehood. Then out of nowhere came the call of the person she ultimately married. This was someone who never thought she would get married!!

Another example is more complicated. After being divorced for over a decade, Frayda, who struggled with depression, has settled with being single forever. Now Frayda is married to none other than someone who lives a mile away from her home.

This story is about Shimon. He struggled with physical illness and was very open minded, never giving up hope. When Sheina was suggested with baggage of her own and two sweet children under the age of five, Shimon had to re-evaluate his values and they are now B"H happily married and working through all the struggles they face as a family together.

Here's my story... I'm ready to be open, ready to be vulnerable, ready to challenge myself. Because I know I

want a long lasting relationship and I will put my best foot forward to get there. I wrote this a while back and shared it with you, my Chazkeinu sisters, who struggle together, who laugh together, and who understand each other.

I want to tell you about a secret.
Something I haven't shared with many.

Something that makes me cry,
Something that makes me think I may want to die.

Something that eats at my heart,
And makes me feel from people apart.

Something I take with me everywhere,
It's closed, it's tight but in my body,
It's the darkness of night.

Sometimes it turns around at me,
Smiles and says hi, and then beats me.

Sometimes it makes me run miles and miles
But the smiles that come are not true smiles.

So here is the secret,
I'm ready to share,
My broken heart,
My smiles so dear.

I have Bipolar, my dear friends
This is not an end.

It is only the beginning to a deep, insightful life,
With hours of hard work and strife.

But here is the biggest part of all,
To a matchmaker never tell,
For they may make you fall.

But yet the opposite is true,
When I told I was held up through and through.

She held my hand and said how does it actually affect you?
I said, "Well... I need to exercise like everyone else,
I need to eat healthy and sleep enough."

"Does it stop you from doing things,
Can you cook? Can you clean?"

"Of course I can, I am a beauty queen."

Frayda is whom I met last night.
And my secret was shared with much fright.

I was vulnerable, brave, open, and it truly felt painful,
But I know this is something gainful.

I tell you my secret so you will tell yours,
Remember the only thing it can do is open many, many doors.

May blessings come from honesty and vulnerability
And warmth and true smiles to keep me going for miles.

When is one ready to date?

There are a few factors to take into consideration:

- **Do you want to?** If someone is dating and isn't interested in having a committed relationship, both parties may get hurt.
- **Have you been stable for a long enough period of time that you know you will be able to control your mental health?** This is very individual. Your future partner has no idea what your struggles are, therefore YOU need to be able to recognize your triggers and have proper care so that you can take care of yourself. I definitely have a dream of having someone taking care of me, someone understanding, and validating. This is something you need to teach your spouse because he doesn't know what you need and how things will affect you. One of the keys is communication, and not while you're in a state of distress because he may feel helpless at those moments if he just met you.

Time to date. Now what??

What are you looking for? What are your ethics and values? What are things that are important to you? What can you compromise on? What are you looking to give?

There is so much more that happens when someone does get married, many unexpected things can come up. Prepare yourself for change and remember life is like the ocean, many times it's calm, and many times there may be storms. Yet remember they ebb and flow like the waves. Therefore, something that you may be stuck on as very important may be worth re-evaluating to see if this is something you can forgive and move forward.

Remember you can't change him, you can only change yourself.

Telling the shadchan or not telling

In my own experience, I've spent years meeting guys and then telling them after a seventh date. It was very painful for me and for them. After many years, I have decided to find a shadchan who is invested in helping me. Together with the advice of my Rav and Rebbitzin, I have decided to tell the shadchan and the prospective match beforehand. I explained it in simple terms; I did not have to mention all my past history. More important was that I am under good care and honestly taking care of myself. I had my doctor speak to the shadchan and so she could get answers to any questions she may have. All my references are aware of my mental health issue and are all on the same page regarding how much to share and how much NOT TO!

Once I do meet guys who have heard from the shadchan about my condition, I don't mention anything about my mental health issue. Rather, I try to discuss all the other things I do in my life; my job, my hobbies, living alone in an apartment, my family, and more... unless he brings it up, when I'm comfortable we will discuss it.

It is a truly humbling and painful experience...
To sum it up, there are few things to look at before telling a shadchan.:

- Do you feel they have your best interest in mind?
- When sharing, keep it to a minimum so as not to overwhelm the shadchan or a prospective match.
- Be open with them and let them communicate with your doctor and make sure all your references are on the same page.
- *Trust is the basis of a healthy marriage and therefore, I have re-evaluated before I tell and it has made a tremendous difference.*

In closing, I've dated, it's hard. I've made myself vulnerable, I've shared my story... I have been broken by something I didn't do to myself... I've supported the ice cream store. I've had a good time. I've met new people... I have re-evaluated what's important to me. And I still continue to try because I know Hashem will make it happen...

TOGETHER WE ARE BETTER

And without each other Chazkeinu wouldn't be possible

Dear Chazkeinu sisters,

I had an idea of an article for our 'Rise' newsletter, I only needed to decide how to present it. Should I write it as a story, or maybe a poem?

My decision was to write it as a letter to all of you. It's way more personal, and I also want you to know that I am addressing each and every one of you.

Do you remember those puzzles that we played with as a kid? Those large pieces that needed to be put together?

Have you ever wondered why puzzle pieces are shaped the way they are? Some pieces come with an extra round piece protruding, and other with a round hole at the side?

The answer is simple. In order for them to stick together and stay in place, the protruding piece needs to link into a piece that has that exact shape missing. If all the pieces were square, the puzzle would not be able to be completed.

I think you will agree with me, that the holes are just as important as those extra circles.

This is the secret to our existence in this world, and this is also the reason Chazkeinu is such a flourishing and bonded family.

We all have extras in our lives – the talents, the ability to extend ourselves, our coping tools, the way we can listen to each other and validate each other. We also have those holes, the pain we carry with us, the isolated feeling we all experience at times, the yearning for things to change... Both of them are equally valid in the beautiful puzzle called Chazkeinu....

It's been almost two years. Each of you is such a vital part of the Chazkeinu picture. Every time you share, every time you ask a question, every time you submit an article, every time you comment.. not only on the lines, but to each others.. every time you answer the phone to a Chazkeinu sister, every time you send an encouraging text message, you are piecing together the beautiful picture that we know.

And...

Every time you allow yourself to be vulnerable, every time you share your pain, every time you allow others to comfort you, every time you accept the support, encouragement and gifts... you complete the beautiful picture that we know.

Chanukah is at our doorstep. When we gaze at those little flames, we are reminded of a generation far gone, but still very much a part of who we are. A generation that banded together to restore light into the Beis Hamikdash, and excise the bad...

It has been so many years, but aren't we very much alike?

We, too, are forming a tight knit family with one mission – to restore the light and self-acceptance of each others, and excise the bad – the stigma. The message of Chanukah is a lot closer to us than we imagine...

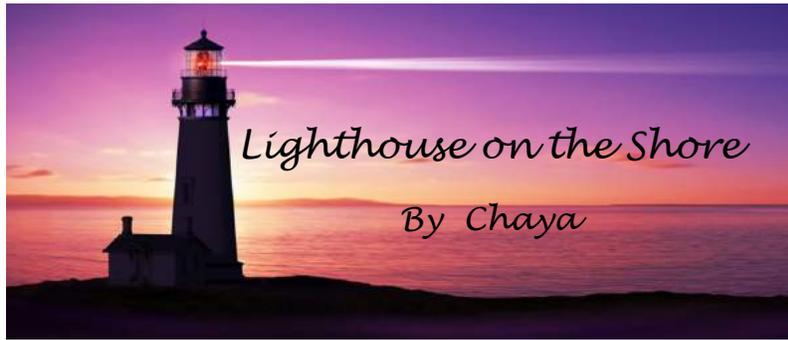
When we ignite those flames, connect to each other's spark, we bring forth a warmth that will keep us going for decades.

I know Chanukah can be a difficult time for many of us, even more so those who want to be in a completely different place right now. I am preparing myself to use this knowledge of how to complete a puzzle to help me through those days. What I keep telling myself is, that needs to go both ways though. Not only should I reach out and offer support, friendship and invite Chazkeinu sisters to enjoy Chanukah with me, but I will try to work on reaching out too – and expressing my pain, share my desire to help each other out, and make it a completed puzzle.

I want to thank you for being such a vital part of Chazkeinu. Remember, Chazkeinu could not be what it is without you playing your part. I know I wouldn't be what I am without you....

Wishing you a warm, lechtigge Chanukah,

Chanie from London



The wind is howling; the thunder crashes as lightning strikes yet again. The waves let out a deafening roar as they threaten to capsize the helpless little ship trying to stay afloat in the tempest. Each time it rights itself and breathes a sigh of relief, another wave rushes over it, nearly drowning the vessel. The storm seems as though it will never abate. The little ship fights valiantly, but for how long? How much more can it take before the wind rips the mast to shreds sending the crew hurtling over the deck? Suddenly, a glimmer of hope appears in the darkness. The little ship, grasping at straws, peers anxiously towards the direction of the light, and yes, it is really there! She has sighted land! The glow of the light shining from the tall, beautiful lighthouse sends a rush of excitement through her. Maybe she can get through this storm after all! The shore is so near, yet so far, but she knows she can do it. Following the reflection of the light on the waves, she steers mightily through the crashing foam, desperately pushing onward to land. Though she is terrified of the swelling waters, she forges on. She guides the ship to ride the waves, hurled up to what feels like the heavens and then plunged back under the freezing waters, but looking ahead, always, to the shimmering gold beckoning from the shore. And so she rides out the storms, struggling with every last ounce of her strength to reach her destination. Throughout the fear, the pain, and the gasping for breath, the light propels her onward. She knows she can make it home if she only pushes just a bit harder. And, oh, is it hard! But that light beckons, winking its encouragement, lovingly waiting to embrace her as she reaches her goal.

We all fight against the odds. Life has a way of throwing them at us in bundles. At times it seems like victory is impossible, a distant, unattainable dream. Know though that there is hope for a brighter tomorrow. And we can each be that hope for one another, even when it's so hard to believe in it ourselves. Be a lighthouse for someone else, hold their hope, show them that there is a better future ahead. Shine your light, and help them navigate their stormy sea to safety. We can't fight anyone else's battle - it's hard enough as it is to fight our own. We can't calm the waves, nor can we magically rescue them in a coast guard helicopter, definitely not in those winds! Yet we can always be that miracle, that bastion of encouragement to guide another through the mighty waves in the ocean of life. Share your love, give of yourself, and make their fight just a little bit easier. When we know we can look towards the lighthouse on the shore, it gives us the strength to make it there. We believe we can pull through.

That is what I learn from the Chanukah lights. At their posts by our windows and doors, they twinkle brightly into the gloomy, black sky reminding us that no darkness is too powerful for the light to overcome. When the very last hope slips away and we begin to drown in despair, the lichtlach, the flames spread their glow into the night and give us another chance at life. We see the flickering flames, an additional one each night, and know that together we can accomplish anything. We are unshakable in our faith that we will prevail; no matter what the world tells us, we will rise above our challenges as we light up each other's nights and reach the shore together. IY"YH we will succeed in breaking down all barriers to our personal redemption and ultimately to the general redemption with the coming of Moshiach, may it be speedily in our days!



Together we are better. Yes! What a beautiful and appropriate theme! Now... What can I submit that will fit that theme? Well, as a "writer" (which is apparently a title I received after joining Chazkeinu), I stopped to think about the theme and my first thought was WHY?

Why are we better when we are together? Of course my initial response was, "Cuz that's the way it is! It just makes sense! Duh!" But aside from the fact that I cannot submit an article with such 'unprofound' ideas, (according to most dictionaries I made up that word, but now that I am a "writer" I get to do that!) I also have not satisfied my own craving to understand the true meaning of the theme. Why is it that together we are better? So here are some thoughts that I came up with:

- Alone, one person will sit down and eat the entire cake... But together, we will share it! Saving someone from the agony, guilt and physical pain of binging on the entire cake; now, that's better together!
- Alone, singing and dancing can make others wonder whether they need to call in a "team"... But together, singing is beautiful and dancing is just loads of fun! (And I don't mean to discourage anyone from singing and dancing alone in the shower or in the privacy of their own home. In Walmart?...Discouraging that!)
- Alone, listening to a professional lecture can be very awkward and uncomfortable... But together, at least there is the option to think, "Obviously, the speaker is referring to some other person in the room!"
And one more thing...
- Alone, it is just one person going to some stranger's house for some 'unknown reason'... But together, it is a "Shabbaton"!

All these reasons, I must admit, are really good reasons, but, I do have some other thoughts as well.

I Googled the exact definition for the word "together." But because the word can be used in so many ways and in such different contexts, each website had countless definitions. Which made me wonder... How

many translations would there be for the word "together" in Hebrew. Well, there is just one. "B'yachad". From the same root word as "echad", meaning "oneness". So "b'yachad" would be explained as "two entities that join in oneness." Understanding this, we can now go back to our theme and again ask, Why? Why is it better for us to be two entities joining in oneness, as opposed to remaining apart, as two separate entities?

Well let's bring it into context. (And this is where it starts to make sense.) Each one of us is an individual entity in need of healing and support for a similar reason. Not the same, but of similar context, all dealing with challenges related to mental health. We are all aware that one of the great challenges to our mental health is experiencing feelings of loneliness. I recently read a quote written by a famous comedian who suffered from depression. He said, "I used to think that the worst thing in life was to end up all alone. It's not. It's to end up with people that make you feel all alone." However, knowing that he suffered from depression, I would say it is more accurate to understand that his feelings of loneliness were not caused by the people around him but rather, his experience was based on his feelings and thoughts while he was around others. Therefore I believe that if he were to better understand the reality of his situation he would have said, "I used to think that the worst thing in life was to end up all alone. It's not. It's to end up WITH people, but to still FEEL alone."

Trying to heal and cope while also experiencing feelings of loneliness simply creates a greater challenge! When one is healing from any kind of experience, creating a bond with another person is an instrumental part of the process. Support groups make you feel less isolated and have fewer feelings of loneliness. It has been documented by thousands of studies that the power of joining together with others that are going through similar experiences has greatly increased the rate of healing and the ability to continue to cope.

In Israel when there is a death of a victim from a terrorist attack, even on the first day of mourning when typically only relatives and close family members come to give their condolences, it has now become a custom that even if they are strangers, those who have also had family members that were victims of terrorist attacks come on that first day as well. There is no comfort as strong as someone saying, "I am with you in your pain and can understand its depth because I have been there myself. I am here to show you I am living through the pain. It does not disappear, but I will support you and help you cope."

There are certain aspects of healing and coping that are achieved through joining together. You may be the quiet person on the side just listening to other peoples' stories, maybe sometimes joining in on the laughing and maybe sometimes joining in on the tears. Or you may be the one telling your story, and together laughing and crying. But

facts are that when we are together, we get new insights. We learn more coping skills and techniques. We gain more knowledge on dealing with the logistics of our situation. Joining together gives us that feeling that we are not isolated individuals no one can relate to. Joining together is part of your healing, and it's part of our healing too!!

Chazkeinu gives us the opportunity to be separate entities that join in oneness, to gain strength and support. And as a result of that joining together, we each become individually better. We all have a lot to deal with. Let's just take one thing off that list! Choose to be "b'yachad"! Choose to be together! Because... Together We are Better!

So my dear Chazkeinu sisters, Thank you! You have rid me of the feelings of loneliness and isolation. And you have spared me from the agony, guilt, and pain of having alone, binged on the entire kokosh cake. May we share in many simchos and have the opportunity to share the cakes as well!



*All it takes is one small candle
One small flickering shining candle
That is all it takes to penetrate the dark
All it takes is one soft word
One soft soothing gentle word
That is all it takes to mend a broken heart*

*Chorus:
When we/if we/let's all put our hearts and minds
together
A thousand glowing candles burning bright
Then we/we'll become a force that can't be meas-
ured
And together we/we'll (can) drive away the night*

*All it takes is one small tear
One small glistening earnest tear
That is all takes to melt a heart of stone
All it takes is one bright smile*

*One sweet caring loving smile
That it is all it really takes to know you're not alone*

Chorus

*Let's raise our voices in harmony
Someday soon we'll all be free
If only we could all stand together*

*All we have is one small dream
One small glorious hopeful dream
That is all we've ever had to help to pull us through
All we ask for is one more miracle
One last long awaited miracle
That is all we need to make our dreams come true*

Chorus

Dear Chazkeinu Sisters,

Sometimes we feel like nobody gets us and nobody understands us. While it may be true, we can't let it push us down to the point that we feel we can't go on. We need to push ourselves up, be our own best friend and we need to tell ourselves "I am worthy. I am a somebody and I have value and hope." We need to remember this and say it over and over all the time. If it happens that we can't or we get to the point that we don't like or trust ourselves, know you are not alone. Remember that others have walked and are walking this path. One must also remember that Hashem truly and fully believes in you. FULLY and He won't give up on you. Even if you do, He will never give up.

Hashem loves you so much and He wants to hear from you. He is waiting for you with outstretched arms. Go on, talk to Him. He is listening. Karov Hashem L'nishbirei Lev. Hashem is close to the broken hearted. Yes, you feel alone, but let me tell you dear sister a yid is never, ever alone. Hashem is right there by your side waiting for you. If you look for Him you will find Him. He wants to help you. He wants to hear from you.

Hashem is your Father. He is your Mother and He is your Creator. He doesn't judge you or berate you. He never will because he is the one that gave you these challenges and struggles. He gave it to you and still He loves you so much. You might not love Him, but that's ok because He understands. He understands because He is your father, mother and creator. Imagine the love a parent has for their child, but imagine this ten times more. He is both father and mother. Call out to Him. Beg and plea. Children make many requests of their parents and demand a lot because they trust and accept that their parents are the source of all they need. Likewise, Hashem is our only address in Tefillah.

Hashem wants you to ask, you are not a burden, and you are His beloved and cherished child. In Hashem's eyes you are a shining diamond crystal and clear. You are not bent, tarnished, or worn out. Kodesh Atem L'H-Shem.. You are Holy to Hashem. Even if you don't feel like you are. If you do not feel Hashem's love at this moment, don't panic. Don't jump. It is okay. Hashem understands you. He gave you this pain and He knows it's hard.

So many times when I was in acute and severe panic attack in middle of the night and couldn't sleep and had no one to talk to, I cried to Hashem, where are You? Take away my pain. I can't take it anymore. I am relying on You, please help. Don't ignore me, show me where You are. It may have come in the form of a phone call from a friend overseas or a song that played to my heart, and I would feel Hashem's loving outstretched arm stroking me and saying- I am here, I hear you.

We are everything to Hashem. He believes in us and wants us to grow in ways we never could have done without these challenges. It is actually a privilege and a Zechus to be given the chance to work on ourselves. Never, ever give up. Keep trying, keep climbing, keep fighting. When you feel you can't get any lower, as you have reached the bottom, the only other way to go is up. When all seems lost there is one thing to hold onto and that is hope. Hope is never lost.

H...Hold

O...On

P...Pain

E...End

With all my love, Baila



Chanukah: Beyond Logic

By Sarala

“They were small in the hands of many.”

Upon examining this pasuk (verse), we are led to think something along the lines of: “How did they do it? How is it even humanly possible?”

Although logic dictates the exact opposite of the above verse (that the Greeks should win and not the Jews), we as believing people know that the *opposite* is true. An army of 100 should lose against an army of 200. But, we don’t follow that formula. What formula do we follow? ***The “army” of effort and perseverance is the one that wins.*** As you can see, there’s no logic here.

The Choshmonaim could have easily given up. They could have justified themselves by saying, “Our army is too small compared to the Yivanom.” And according to logic, they would have been absolutely right! Except, they would have been very wrong. *Instead of thinking small, they chose to think big. Instead of thinking weak, they chose to think courage.*

Throughout our history, Hashem has constantly told us that it’s not the big and mighty that win. It’s not about numbers, and it’s not about logic. It’s the opposite of logic. ***It’s the persistence, motivation, and belief that I can win which enables the “weak” to win.*** Hence, this is the power of the mind.

How many times have we fought internal battles with the initial thought of, “How am I going to do this?” How many of those times did we feel like we just couldn’t do it anymore, and yet, we somehow found the strength to do it? We found the strength we didn’t know we had. We found the courage and will we didn’t know we possessed.

I recall hearing a popular story of a grandmother who lifted a car after seeing a little boy pinned under it. She didn’t know who this boy was. But she did know it was someone who needed help, and *she* was going to help. Little did she know it was her own grandson! How is it humanly possible to pick up a car? Where did she get the strength from? Perhaps she worked out in the gym. Perhaps she went running every day. The above can be

true but isn’t the full truth. What led her to save her grandson was her inner will and her inner drive. Her thought process of, “That child is in danger, and I will save him” was precisely how she was able to do the impossible.

How many times do we hear our voice telling us to “Stop trying so hard and just give in.” Stop trying so hard. We know we’re up against thick and impenetrable brick walls. We know those walls are very solid. And we’re scared, very scared. Yet, we try (and win)! Why do we try? Because we know we can do it and need to do it. We try because that’s what we were taught about Jewish history.

Our forefathers underwent incredibly hard nisyonos (tests) and withstood them all. In Parshas Lech Lecha (the Torah Portion of Lech Lecha), we read how Hashem told Avraham our Forefather to leave his land, his birthplace, and his family and to just go. Avraham went and heeded Hashem’s call even though he had no idea where he was going. While Avraham was a highly spiritual man, we can still learn from him. We can learn that no matter how hard it is, we still try. We still go. We rise up to the occasion and put one foot in front of the other.

Sometimes, we are going through something incredibly hard and don’t know how things will turn out. Those times are filled with incredible and intense emotions that drain us of energy. Yet, we pick ourselves up, rise to the occasion and “go!”

I have to say that I am personally very inspired by the strength and courage that each Chazkeinu member possesses. I’m inspired and filled with renewed passion and strength each and every time that I’m on the line.

I would like to wish you all a beautiful Chanukah! The light of the Chanukah candles should flood into our personal life filling us with health and happiness!



Hi, my name is Molly, and I live in my head. That's right, you read correctly. When I am at work, I am in My Head. When I am at the supermarket, I am in My Head. When I am visiting my grandmother, I am in My Head. When I go to the beach to relax, I am really in My Head. When I do laundry, play with my daughter, serve supper, or get ready for bed, I am still in My Head.

Let me tell you a little about the place where I live. It's not an upper class area. I am looking to move. I actually have another home I am in the process of building. It needs a lot of work. I hope that one day I will be able to move in. The transition will take a long, long while, maybe even a life time, but I hope I will be able to get there sooner than later!

My Head is a really ugly place to live in. It's messy and very, very noisy; the kind of noise that one cannot quiet down. In My Head, I am constantly scurrying from room to room trying to find a place where I want to be. A place where I can be. A place where there is no noise, no mess, and no trouble, but unfortunately there is no room like that in My Head. This is why I am looking to move. I don't like it; not one little bit. I don't choose to stay there. Most of the time I am locked in there, and the few times I do manage to try and escape I am caught and dragged right back in. Despite my dire efforts to escape the pain of the noise, the torture of the trouble caused there, and the intense struggle of the mess, I have little say in the matter.

There is a huge monster that guards me from leaving My Head. This monster is called Borderline Personality Disorder. I can hit it, scream at it, stab it, or burn it; however, this monster is so strong, nothing can kill it. Oh, how I try so hard every day, every living minute, to fight this big ugly monster. To close my ears tight from his shrilling torturous screams, to run away when he chases me around My Head, and to escape his vicious

attacks, but try as I may, he won't let me go. He won't let me leave. He won't leave me alone. There is more action in My Head than any other place in this world! Have no fear of me ever being bored.

I barely know what the entrance of my house looks like. I have hardly been out there, if at all, because I have little choice but to stay in My Head.

My Head consists of many different rooms and corridors, and like any other house, each room serves a purpose. However, unlike any other house where the bedroom is for sleeping, the kitchen is for cooking, and the playroom is for playing, the rooms in My Head don't serve any of those purposes. As a matter of fact, the rooms are used for just the opposite. There is no room to sleep, there is no time to play, and I barely have energy to even think about cooking a meal in this house of mine. There is, however, a room for anxiety, one for depression, another room for hatred and intense emotions, yet another filled with confusion and self doubt, and many other rooms as well.

Most of the time, I am running around from room to room deciding where I want to rest or stay and trying to figure out where I can find any tiny bit of peace, but to no avail. I end up heading for the front door where I can leave My Head and go out for some air, but Monster attacks me and shoves me back into My Head. I cry for mercy. I plead with it and beg for it to let me go, but it doesn't. I frantically try to lock myself into a room where he won't follow me, but when I close the door, I realize I am in the room filled with anxiety. My stomach feels loose, my head is spinning, and it's so loud in this room. Monster is banging on the door. It wants to come in. I want it to go away and leave me alone!!! BPD keeps banging on the door to that room. I can't handle the yelling and shouting anymore.

I open the door to let Monster in. I see it snicker. I run out of the room, and my body draws me to the

suicidal ideation room. I don't want to go there, but I just need to escape the thunderous barks of my hostile enemy! I need to find something that will relieve the pain; something that will shield me from my inner torment. At first I feel a magnetic pull to this room, but then my body is pulling me somewhere else. BPD is peeking through the door. I hear it say, "Go for it; it will relieve you. You will feel much better. Trust me." I don't trust it! I never believe it, but I gravitate so strongly to what I see in this room. I am scared of my own shadow. I want to use, but I am being pulled somewhere else. Somewhere I don't know. Somewhere I can't describe. I don't use. Instead, I struggle and run out of the room.

Monster is coming after me again. It was not happy with my decision. He is screaming and barking at me. I feel his heavy feet pounding on the floor behind me. BPD is quick; I almost feel it touching me. Oh, how I wish I can just leave My Head! I don't want to be here!! I know that if I head for the front door I will be thrown back in again and Monster will just put an extra lock on the door.

Outside My Head, I am driving to work. Is that music I hear in the car? I am not sure, because the voices in My Head are too loud and overbearing.

Outside My Head, I hear my boss saying something to me, but I can barely make out what she says. It's too noisy in My Head!! My thoughts are racing and following them is Monster!!

Outside My Head, I hear my children playing, but I am busy running away from suicidal ideation.

Outside My Head, my neighbor passes by. Did she say something to me? Monster- why won't you just let me hear what she says?????

Outside My Head, I hear the sink running and I feel my hands washing the dishes. Inside My Head, I am trying to hit the monster and kill it. He is so strong!

Outside My Head, I am winding down and getting ready to end my day and relax in bed, but BPD is yelling at me; it's shrieking blasts my eardrums.

Outside My Head, I am smiling, laughing, schmoozing, but inside My Head, I am silently screaming;

my cry piercing the heavens. But no one knows. Only I know, because only me and Monster are in My Head.

Outside My Head, the world goes on. The traffic stops and goes, the clock is ticking by, the day is turning into night, AND I AM LOCKED IN MY HEAD!! Help!! Get me out of here!! I try to silence all those voices, but BPD is at full force!! It's burning with a fierce rage!! The flames are tangible!

Where can I go now??! Where will Monster not follow me?!? Is there even such a thing?!? This happens every day, every hour, every minute, so why would this time be any different??

I need a break. I have no energy anymore. I am at the end of my rope. I drag my feet to depression room. I crash on the floor. I hear Monster slam the door shut. The big heavy glass door. Finally it's silent; no more noise. No more shrills. It's quiet. But I am still in My Head, and I

Where can I go now??! Where will Monster not follow me?!? Is there even such a thing?!?

can't get out of this room. Monster is guarding the door with all its force. I look around the room, and I see a couch. I can finally sit and relax. Oh, how good it feels. I don't want to leave. I just want to sit here all day away from Monster. I really want to leave My Head, but Monster isn't giving me that option. It's either run around the

house with BPD chasing me, or staying in depression room and doing nothing. All day. Nothing. I find a lot of food, and after I eat it all, I still want to eat more. I stare at the wall trying to find something else to do, but there isn't much else to do. I can play games on my phone, but I am bored of all of them already. I am in this room for too long, and I want to go out. But I have no energy left to face Monster and fight him, so I stay in this room. I stay here for a long, long time. I don't do much. I stare at the wall. I stare at the ceiling.

I look out the window and see the playground filled with children. I see my friend stopping by to say hi, and I wish I was out there with them. Physically I am but cognitively and emotionally I am still in My Head. I don't want to stay in this room anymore, but I have no motivation to argue with Monster or to try and escape

its tenacious grip. I am completely numb; devoid of emotions and devoid of feeling. What is better- to feel or not to feel? To stay here in depression, or to fight the devil? Which is the worse of two evils? I tell myself that I will try once again to exit this room and fight Monster.

As soon as I open the door, the noises begin. I am once again under attack. I know I don't want to go back to suicidal ideation or anxiety. I also tried the anger room, but they all didn't do me any good. Oh, where should I go now?? Where can I run?? Where will I be safe??

(Fast forward a few hard, long months after being in a Partial Hospitalization Program and being on heavy medications to stabilize my moods and emotions.)

I am finally able to defeat the deadly monster called BPD. I have medications. I have a therapist, and I have the skills. I use the skills called DBT, Dialectical Behavior Therapy, to quiet Monster and put him in his place. It takes a lot of work, and it's a constant battle!! Monster is still strong, very strong, but DBT and the medications are stronger. With the help of my therapist, we use these weapons to defeat BPD.

Unfortunately, Monster is here to stay; BPD won't go away. But I no longer feel like I have nowhere to go! I still live in My Head, but I am able to go out for walks, listen to my neighbors talk and join the

conversations, play with my children, enjoy nature, and much more.

I started building a new home for myself. It's called, "My Life Worth Living" home. Each day, I add something new to it to make it look pretty. I have many beautiful rooms, such as Mindfulness, Distress Tolerance, Emotion Regulation, Interpersonal Effectiveness, and many others. I even have a plaque on the wall in the entranceway dedicated to Marsha Linehan who, without even knowing it, was the biggest hero in helping me design my new home. I owe my life to her.

I don't yet live in my new home. BPD is still holding me hostage to some degree, but I visit it very often. When I feel Monster really coming to attack me, I am able to slip out the back door and go visit my new home for a while. I hang out there for as long as I can, but sometimes I feel myself gravitating towards Monster again. He is still powerful and strong, but I will not give up. I will NOT let him have complete control over me anymore! The process is hard and long, but I believe that, one day, I will be able to move in to my new home and leave Monster behind to perish. I don't want to live in My Head anymore, but for now, I need to accept that this is where I am and to hold on to the hope that one day, very soon, I will be free at last!!!

My Child *By Ahuva*

My child,

I am here with you. I am here with you now. I am with you as the world you know is turned upside down, and I am with you in the haunted house that has become your mind. I am with you when you are feeling unsafe, and I am with you when you are feeling frightened. I am here with you, right now. You feel like there is no one you can trust, but you can trust Me. You can trust that even in the darkest moments, I am holding you... I'm taking care of you. I won't let you down.

I am with you on Shabbos, and I am with you during the days of the week. When you cry into your Tehillim, I am here listening to everything you say and catching your tears in My hand. I am with you My child. I feel your pain, and I am in pain together with you. I am caressing the broken pieces of your heart... know that I care.

With love,
Your loving Father

Chanukah

By Esther



They say time flies.

It feels like Chanukah was just over, and we feel its arrival in the air once again. A full year of being a single mother has passed. When looking back at all the Yomim Tovim, I won't deny the fact that at times it was a little hard, but all in all, they were beautiful. For me, Chanukah was the most challenging of all.

Chanukah is a week when you get to spend some quality time with your family. Everyone stands around the gleaming menorah while the head of the household recites the brachos in a loud clear voice. The small flickering flames emit a very warm and special glow. The singing of Ma-oz Tzur, the sound of spinning dreidels, and the yummy smell of frying latkes permeate the house. The spirit in the air is something out of the ordinary!

A year ago, on the first night of Chanukah, I found myself feeling very down. It just didn't feel right being the one preparing to light the menorah. I was pushing for time. I couldn't get myself to do it. The night was moving on and the children were getting more and more edgy which added some salt to the open wound. Until at one point, I just pushed myself, took that candle into my hand, and lit the menorah.

B"H, Chanukah passed. With each passing night, it became more of a reality that this is another one of my life's challenges. The last night of Chanukah my children weren't home with me, and I found myself pouring my heart out to our Father in Heaven. Those dancing flames were flames of hope! I saw the light at the end of the tunnel. While singing, tears of joy and hope rolled down my cheeks. When it came time to part with my spark of hope, it was a very emotional moment.

Chanukah is once again approaching. Deep down I'm dreading it; I'm not really looking forward to its arrival. I ask Hashem to please help me find the joy and hope in those dancing flames and to help me enjoy some quality time with my children!

May we all merit a life full of happiness and light! A Freilichen Chanukah!!!

*“Individually we are one drop.
Together we are an ocean”*



*2nd Annual Chazkeinu Shabbaton Schedule:
December 8th - 10th,
Shabbos Parshas Vayeshev*



Friday:

Starting at **1:00pm** *Welcome and check in.*

*Agudas Yisroel Bircas Yaakov of Passaic
262 Terhune Ave. Passaic, NJ 07055*

We will be delighted to welcome you to our second annual Shabbaton. We will be providing some refreshments, so you can rest a little from your journey and eat in company. You will then have time to get ready for Shabbos at your host's home.

4:10pm *Candlelighting* - You can either light in your host's home, or we will have lighting opportunities in the Shul.

GOOD SHABBOS!

~Introductions by Zahava and Tamar, who will open the door to our very exciting journey together.

~Introduction by Yocheved Rabinowitz, LCSW - our Clinical Adviser.

~Getting to know you game - a chance to get to know our 'Chazkeinu family' in a fun way!

~Presentation of new Shabbaton song to add to the already popular theme song!

5:30pm *Friday night meal*

~Enjoy a meaningful and delicious meal with Rabbi and Mrs. Grossberg who will be leading the seudah.

~We will also hear Divrei Torah from two Chazkeinu sisters- Baila and Tova

~Chananyah Silverman, LMSW - "The Shabbos Rest"

After the meal:

8:00pm *Live Chazkeinu meeting* - just like our support phone meetings, but where we can share in much more intimate and personal environment!

Our speaker will be Shira G, who will be sharing her personal story and experience with us.

9:00pm *Oneg* - a chance to sit, relax, eat and schmooze in company!

9:45pm *'Ask the Rabbi' panel* -

Question and answer with Rabbi Yisroel Grossberg and Rabbi Ron Eisenman. We will have a chance to hear a Rabbinical perspective on many of our unanswered questions.

Shabbos Morning

8:30am If you want to go daven in the shul with a minyan, you will have an opportunity to do so.

9:00am Breakfast will be available

11:45am Shabbos meal

~Rabbi and Mrs. Grossberg will honor us again with their presence.

~Inspiring Divrei Torah from 2 Chazkeinu members, Chanie and Chaya Rochel.

~ Rabbi and Mrs. Steier will join us for the meal and Rabbi Steier will share a message with us.

After the meal there will be some time to relax, schmooze, connect, or play games.

2:15pm Meaningful Workshops (45 min)

A choice of:

Mrs. Leah Grossberg- "The Ultimate Gift"- a personal experience.

Rabbi Avrohom Steier -"Why Bad Things Happen to You" –understanding life's challenges

Chananyah Silverman, LMSW "Appreciating Ourselves and Self-Nurture"

Deborah Weinstock, LCSW "Reinventing the Past"



4:00pm Shalosh Seudos (for women only)

Hearing from our members: Personal panel with panelists: Malky, Miriam, Malka, and Tamar,

Moderated by Ciril.

5:41pm Our beautiful Shabbos will come to an end with wonderful memories to last a lifetime.

6:00pm Havdallah led by Rabbi Grossberg

We will then have time to go back to our host homes, change and freshen up.

Motzei Shabbos Program:

8:00pm Dr. Pelcovitz Keynote address: "Togetherness: strategies for coping; connection and creating meaning in dealing with emotional challenges"

9:00pm A delicious and delightful *Melave Malka!!!* Sora will share how special the role of a peer specialist can be.

10:00pm A live concert by the world renowned singer and entertainer **Malky Giniger**

There will be dancing/kumzitz/singing - connecting through music.

Sunday Morning:

We ask that you pack up all your luggage from your hosts home and bring your things to the Shul.

9:00am Breakfast

Relaxation and self-care workshops - A choice of two workshops

9:45-10:45am Workshop I

10:45-11:00am Break

11:00am-12:00pm Workshop II

Choices of:

Art therapy by Rachel Garbarsky - Painting, and connecting to our real selves (simcha room right)

Music therapy by Riki Zoltan - An interactive music workshop (simcha room left)

Meditation by Dr. Talya Schmidt - "Acceptance in order to move forward" (boardroom second floor)

Movement by Atara Weisberger - An "all -in- one" exercise class (women's gallery)

12:00pm *A memorable lunch/closing banquet*

~Closing remarks by Yael Walfish, LCSW - "Inspiring Greatness"

~Presentation by Chaya, a Chazkeinu sister

~ *A Chanukah Drama*

2:00 Goodbye for now, looking forward to meeting again soon ☺

2nd Annual Shabbaton

Theme Song



On my journey I embark
All alone I'm in the dark
Where I am? Where to go?
Full of fear
Then I see not far away
A tiny spark, that shining ray
Hope is up
My Chazkeinu family's near

And a feeling so secure
As I open up that door
Oh the hardships
So much easier to bare
Though I struggle to go on
There is hope, it can be done
Cuz I know
My Chazkeinu family's here

Chorus:

***Chazkeinu Shabbaton is here
Excitement's in the atmosphere
All for one and one for all
As one we stand
Connecting for eternity
A sisterhood, it's you and me
Holding tight together
As were walking hand in hand***

***Cuz were am echad, shir echad
No more do we walk levad
A closeness that we feel at heart
And cherish so
Alone we can move on somehow
But together we are better now
Joining arm in arm at
Our home away from home***

And a feeling so secure
As we open up that door
Oh the hardships
So much easier to bare
Though we struggle to go on
There is hope, it can be done
Cuz we know
Our Chazkeinu family's here

(Chorus)



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