

UNVEILED

LIFE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS #2

Soon after our wedding, my husband and I settled in Eretz Yisrael. From the outset, I was leading the dream life. I was happily married and had landed a great job working one-on-one with a girl who had special needs and also as a tutor in seminaries. I not only enjoyed a vibrant work life, but I gradually integrated into the *kollel* community we were part of. While I was doing my best to get accustomed to my new surroundings, we learned that we would soon become parents.

In the beginning, I welcomed the news with excitement. I looked forward to having a baby of my own, of showering my child with love and warmth. But as the months passed and the winter season set in, I gradually found myself losing interest in the things I had so enjoyed in my previous life. Instead of continuing to acclimate, I was retreating into a shell.

On some days, I would sleep until 2 p.m. My husband would return home from his morning seder to find me still in bed. Often, I would cancel my work sessions at the last minute. My transition from being a dynamic teacher to a withdrawn loner was rapid.

At the beginning of my pregnancy, I enjoyed visiting family members and friends. I wanted to connect, to get to know people, to interact with others. By the time my parents arrived to visit us when I was in my sixth month, what appealed to me most was the suitcase of food they had brought along. In my depressed state, I tried making myself happy with the comfort foods.

At other times, I was totally with the program. I wasn't in bed all day, every day. It was more of an unpredictable situation, but the pregnancy definitely wasn't pleasant overall.

When it was finally time to give birth, the experience was long and traumatic. With an experienced labor coach at my side, I not only gave birth to a healthy beautiful baby boy, but, as I know today, it was then that I finally gave birth to the trauma I had bottled up inside all those years. Everything that was inside me that I had never been able to express suddenly rushed out in torrents, and my life would never be the same. Along with the challenge of mental illness came the *berachah* of true, unadulterated release. ♥

In Hindsight

While I was going through this phase, I didn't realize how the shift was happening. Until I got married, I had been living life totally out of myself. Gradually, various events were bringing my past traumas back to the front burner.

One important thing I learned was that when emotional difficulties emerge in different aspects pertaining to marriage, it's not necessarily about the marriage. It requires a deeper look into underlying issues.

My downward spiral happened drastically. It was as if everything hit me all at once. It's like you're driving down the street, oblivious to what's going on behind you, and suddenly, out of nowhere, something stops you. You wonder where it came from, and only then do you look back and realize how everything beforehand was leading you this way. Then you have to get back into the driver's seat and figure out where you're going from there. I needed my wakeup call to figure out what was going on inside me.

To be continued...

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