

SPRING 5779

RISE

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A Project of Chazkeinu





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

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

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

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

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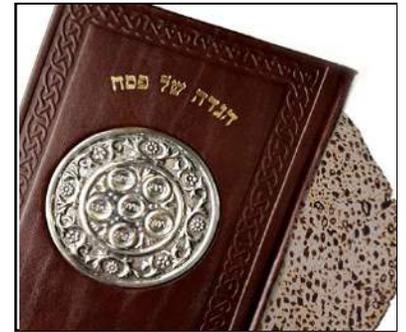
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| Letters |

Dearest Chazkeinu Sisters,

I feel tremendous gratitude to once again welcome you to another edition of RISE. I thank Tzippy, our editor, and all the gifted writers and co-editors for making this newsletter the success that it is.

There are many reasons why Pesach comes during the spring time. When I think of the connection, I think about the concept of true freedom. Freedom from clouds and gray hovering over the dry land. The sun can now shine, the fruits can grow, and fresh air can permeate around us. We too can experience this. To be able to blossom into the person who I really am inside without the fear of stigma or judgment hovering over me. Freedom to become who I truly want to be. Pesach is a time that we became free from the bondage of slavery. We too no longer need to be slaves to our illness. This is a time that we can embrace the growth and blossoming around us and, most importantly, from within.

Let's keep strengthening each other and make the world a better place.

I sincerely thank all of you, the entire Chazkeinu family, for showing me what true freedom really is.

*All my love and admiration,
Zahava, Chazkeinu co-founder*

It is an honor to be writing for the Rise Newsletter and even more so for the Pesach edition. Pesach has an interesting dichotomy to it. It's the holiday that women often dread the most, complain about the amount of hard work, and yet the holiday which we celebrate freedom....particularly freedom from hard work. This dichotomy has intrigued me.

However, what I have come to realize is that this in fact is not a dichotomy at all; but rather these are two phenomenon that can only work hand in hand. What I have come to recognize is that there is no freedom without hard work; freedom insinuates that there is something to feel free from. Growth and freedom only arise from hard work.

Those that struggle with mental illness can understand and appreciate a good day. A day where you can see and feel the sun shining. A day where you can look at children giggling and allow it to warm your heart. A day where you can connect with the people around you. A day of freedom inside of yourself!

You also know that these moments arise from the inner and hard work you engage in. Those that do the work, who understand that work needs to be done, are those that can celebrate the freedom.

I hope that through all the work you have done throughout the year, that this Yom Tov/Holiday brings you freedom from emotional pain, freedom from loneliness, freedom from isolation, and freedom from any and all demons that might be enslaving your brain.

Hope you have a restful, peaceful, and connected Yom Tov/Holiday!

Best,

Yocheved Rabinowitz, Clinical Advisor

Mailbox



Dear Chazkeinu Sister,
Pesach is almost upon us, and it's a time of year that brings along with it so many emotions. The word 'freedom' evokes a lot

of them. For some of us, it's something we dream of, but we feel unable to achieve. For others, it's a word that personifies their own personal journey. For me, it's a combination of both.

I know I am free and away from a lot of self-doubt. I know I am free and away from so much blame and shame. I know I am free and away from a lot of negativity brought along by actions of those around me. I am free and away from letting others define who I am.

Despite this impressive list, there is still a deeper level of freedom I aspire to obtain. I want to be free of letting trauma define my life. I want to be free of guilt that isn't coming to me. I want to be free to do what's right, even though others don't like it.

My goal, and my wish to all of you is: May Pesach be easy for you, wherever you are. May you experience the freedom of knowing how amazing and special you are, despite anything. May you be able to use this pivotal time of year to reflect on how many doors you have opened in your life in the last year. May we all be able to use this upcoming Yom Tov to celebrate our own liberation and the liberation brought about by our Chazkeinu family.

Sending you all my love, and warm Yom Tov wishes,
Chanie (from London, currently in London:))



Chazkeinu continues to wow me once again! With its never ending support, events, projects and programs- they assist oh so

many sisters in the most loving and caring manner!

I am so proud and privileged to be a part of our family!!

Wishing all of you a Chag Sameach and relish the true freedom this Yom Tov brings! With Chazkeinu - the impossible becomes possible!!!

Minky

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



To my dear Chazkeinu Sisters,

Even though times may be hard sometimes, try to remember that every person in this world feels down, frustrated, lonely, and upset at times... Never give up hope. Things do get better. There are always going to be ups and downs, that is just part of life. Our struggles and challenges are part of the journey. Try to remember good times and most importantly that you did get through the hard times...

Try to take good care of yourselves this holiday time. It's wonderful to try to do something for yourself every day, more than that is even better!! You don't have to have a reason or an excuse, just because you are and G-d loves you.

If you are feeling down try to reach out to someone else. This does miracles for us and for them!!

Wishing everyone a peaceful, rejuvenating, meaningful, enjoyable and restful Yom Tov!!

All the best!!

Sincerely,
Chaya Leah



Hello dear Chazkeinu Sisters, Chag sameach! I would like to wish you all the ability to feel the freedom that this Yom Tov

represents. The freedom to be and act yourself. The freedom to feel your feelings and just be without pressure to be or act like somebody else. You don't have to impress anyone but Hashem. Have a wonderful and amazing Pesach.

Wishing you the best,
Baila



Dear Chazkeinu Family, As Pesach approaches blissfully, eating the matzo resembles humility. We are eager to clean

our hearts and mind of negativity, leading us to serenity and true liberty. May we all merit redemption personally, and welcome Masiach ultimately.

Chag Sameach and Best wishes,
Zissy

Crying Out in Silence

By Avrohom Steier

Those who suffer from mental illness know of the challenges to daily living brought about by their illness. They know of the anxiety and depression that rob them of their peace of mind and withhold from them the ability to function the way they would prefer. They know of the many things that they would love to engage in were it not for the shackles of their illness that immobilize them, chaining them to pain and frustration and not allowing them to connect to all that life has to offer.

One of the aspects of the life of an Orthodox Jew that is particularly difficult for those who struggle with mental illness is prayer. Whether due to 1) depression that makes even simple, mundane tasks seem like insurmountable challenges, let alone trying to read from a set text while working to keep your mind focused on the words, 2) anxiety that insists that every word must be said perfectly and with the greatest concentration to the degree that avoidance becomes easier than engagement, or 3) a difficult relationship with parents that does not allow you to view Hashem as the loving, kind, and compassionate Father that He is, the fact is that many people who suffer from mental illness find praying to be a very difficult challenge.

We are rapidly approaching the Yom Tov of Pesach, a time when we are reminded of our ancestor's bitter enslavement at the hands of the Egyptians and their joyous redemption from their plight. While under the merciless control of the Egyptians, the Torah says

(Shemos, 2, 23), "And the Bnei Yisrael groaned from their work, *and they cried out*. And their prayers [which came as a result of the work] ascended to Hashem." HaRav Shimshon Pincus zt"l, in his work Shearim B'Tefilah, explains that this potent form of prayer referred to as "crying out" is actually the most beloved of all forms of prayer and never returns empty-handed. This powerful type of prayer comes when the person is so overwhelmed with the urgency of the request that he is unable to express his request in words, rather nothing more than a scream is able to leave his lips. As Rav Pincus explains, the

scream need not be uttered vocally; even a mental scream of pain and anguish directed toward Hashem has great power.

This concept has great implications for all Jews, especially those who find praying from prepared texts challenging. Some of the most powerful prayers ever uttered were sent without any words, many of them without any vocalization. This is because the power of prayer lies in the emotion

behind it. When all of one's anguish and pain are channeled into a silent scream to Hashem, there is no greater recognition of your dependence and reliance on our Father in Heaven. (Of course, one should consult with a Rav, preferably in collaboration with their therapist, to determine how much, if any, of the regular prayer they should say.)

While the concept we have described thus far hopefully sheds new light on the concept of prayer, the

"When all of one's anguish and pain are channeled into a silent scream to Hashem, there is no greater recognition of your dependence and reliance on our Father in Heaven."

| Features |

Spending Pesach with those Who Have Caused Trauma or Emotional Distress

Dr. Yossi Shafer, Ph.D.



Growing up, we have all encountered children's books portraying the Seder night as a majestic event filled with everyone smiling at each other, family members sitting next to each other schmoozing, and with the parents, who are revered by all, at the head of the table. Similarly, with our social media climate, one will come across countless pictures and videos of the most creative Seder table setups and children dressed to perfection with the underlying assumption that stress and friction has been non-existent during the entire preparation.

The reality is however, that Yom Tov comes along with its own dialectics – feelings of joy and happiness as well as stress and, often times, friction. For some, Yomim Tovim can actually bring on more pain than typical days of the year. For example, Purim and Simchas Torah can be dreadful for an alcoholic trying to remain sober as well as for a couple plagued by infertility pained that they do not have children to dress up in costumes or to carry on their shoulders while dancing around the *Torah*.

While we all struggle with attempting to balance the stressors of Yom Tov with attempting to create a calm and happy environment, there is a significant challenge for those joining family members or friends who have caused them trauma or emotional distress in the past. This may include spending Yom Tov with a father/mother who has always been physically/critically abusive or has neglected you as a child, a sibling that has spent most of childhood trying to push you out of their lives and make you feel insignificant, or even an in-law who you feel is responsible for your spouse's addictive behaviors, intolerable character, or emotional shutdowns. Additionally, knowing that you will be seeing people at

Shul or at a Chol Hamoed event who have taken advantage of you as a child can cause you a lot of pain and anxiety even weeks before Yom Tov.

Even when these family members have apologized and changed their behaviors over time and even with all the logic screaming at them "this happened so many years ago," or "just forgive them and move on," one can get stuck in their own emotional pain. Scientifically, our brain is divided into two. The left side of the brain is responsible for logical processing, and our right side is responsible for emotional processing. The two sides of the brain are completely separate. It is for this reason that we can read a fictional book knowing logically that the story and characters are fake, yet still feel sad or afraid while reading the book. Why is our logical brain not strong enough to stop the emotions by telling us the story is fake? It is because we can stay *stuck* in the right side of the brain (emotional side) even with the logic right there in front of us.

When one experiences trauma at any point in life, the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain which deals with logic, shuts down. Instead, the traumatized individual operates completely from his/her amygdala, the section of the brain which controls emotions. Furthermore, the amygdala does not register the concept of time and therefore does not differentiate between past and present traumas. The trauma triggers the amygdala sending the person into *fight or flight* mode even if currently there is no danger to fight or flight from. This explains the phenomena experienced by some where a few weeks before Yom Tov they are excited to go away to their parents or in-laws, and an hour into their arrival,

they turn to their spouse stating, “Now I remember why last Yom Tov, I promised never to come back here for Yom Tov.”

While there are many skills that the general population can use to lessen stressors that are expected to come up on Yom Tov such as open communication, structuring the meals and trips, establishing healthy boundaries etc., this may not be enough and perhaps not effective when dealing with past trauma and emotional distress. For example, open communication and addressing the “pink elephant in the room” can be counterproductive when a parent or sibling caused physical or emotional abuse yet they are still in denial about your claims. Alternatively, you may have not yet healed from the trauma enough to go ahead and have an open conversation about it.

How should one go about spending this coming Yom Tov of Pesach with those who have caused trauma or emotional distress? Not coming prepared and facing those individuals can automatically stir up amygdala arousal. This can make you vulnerable to any slight provocation and often times, makes you regress to coping mechanisms that you used as a child (screaming, yelling, needing to get the last word etc.), since the logical prefrontal cortex shuts down and adult-like responses are not able to be accessed. It is important to note, that at times it is best not to focus on eliminating the problem (at least not for right now...), rather to focus on how to at least *lessen* the pain.

Here are some suggestions and tips that can help for the short term, and perhaps the long term. Keep in mind that, often, the best idea may be to seek professional help to heal from the trauma and emotional distress, so that you can ultimately *enjoy* your Yom Tov even when spent with the individuals who caused you trauma and emotional distress.

1. Shifting Cognitively: As a clinical psychologist, the first question I would have for clients who are struggling with this Yom Tov dilemma is why they are even spending Yom Tov with these family members in the first

place. Their response is often similar to “I *have to* go to them, because I don’t have anywhere else to go,” or “I *need to* go as they are my parents at the end of the day.” When we come into a situation thinking we *have to* or we *need to*, it brings on an added amount of stress and makes us feel less in control of our situations (similar to an addict who *needs* alcohol versus a healthy individual who *wants* alcohol). It may be helpful to look at coming to your family member’s home like a business deal: “I don’t *have to* be here, rather, I *want* to be here so that I don’t end up at home alone or at some random person’s home.” You are choosing the pain of being by someone who caused you trauma and emotional distress rather than the alternatives. It is similar to where someone offers you a million dollars if you let them punch you in the arm which you would likely agree to as the million dollars are worth the pain.

2. Support: Educate your spouse or support person about what it is like for you spending time with those who have caused you emotional pain. This will be helpful for you to feel validated as well as to avoid anger and frustration with your spouse or friend due to misunderstanding your mood shift or change in behavior. Set up times beforehand or hint to your spouse when you feel that you need to step away from the table or the house for a few minutes.

3. Radical Acceptance: Radically accepting a painful reality is an effective DBT skill that can help individuals lessen and perhaps eliminate the pain that is caused by someone or something that is out of their control. In the words of Marsha Linehan, DBT founder, “Radical acceptance rests on letting go of the illusion of control and a will-ingness to notice and accept things as they are right now, without judging.”

4. Be Patient with Yourself: It’s natural to feel like you are “not yourself” when you are with those that caused you trauma or emotional distress. Don’t judge yourself harshly. Accept your feelings and reactions; your feelings are normal, and so are you. In the words of Viktor Frankl, “An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal behavior.”

“It’s natural to feel like you are “not yourself” when you are with those that caused you trauma or emotional distress. Don’t judge yourself harshly.”

5. Keep in Mind *Their* Mental Health: Often, the family member who caused you trauma or emotional distress did not act the way they did out of cruelty (as hard as that may be to hear), rather from their own mental health challenges. Recognize and identify their mental health challenges such as depression, anger management, or stress tolerance levels, as perhaps these have been the underlying issues that triggered their behavior. Don't forget: "Hurt people, hurt people."

6. 5 Stages of Grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. In order to properly grieve and finally deal with the pain, one may need to go through these stages in order to reach acceptance of a healthy childhood that was taken from you, or to accept family members who are likely to never reach the expectations you have for them. According to the Kübler-Ross model, one must go through all the stages (not necessarily in the exact order) in order to reach the final stage of acceptance. Acceptance does not necessarily

mean that I am happy with my situation, rather that I can adapt my current life to a happy one even with the loss at hand.

7. Seek Professional Help: Never be ashamed to seek professional help. If you have utilized traditional coping skills and have not found them to be effective for you, reach out to a professional who is trained and knowledgeable in guiding individuals who have went through trauma or emotional distress with family members.

Dr. Yossi Shafer, PhD is the clinical director and a clinical psychologist at Empower Health Center, a private practice of multispecialty psychotherapists. Their expert team of male and female therapists provide individual and couples psychotherapy, as well as group therapy including DBT, eating disorder, and psychodrama group therapy. Phone therapy and Yiddish therapists are available. They can be reached at: Office Phone: 732-666-9898 or Email: office@empowerhealthcenter.net

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closing words of Rav Pincus regarding this idea are extremely relevant to our discussion and are worth quoting in their entirety.

In truth, this scenario is very common when a person, due to great sorrow, is unable to open his mouth in prayer. Sometimes this is due to great pain and a broken heart, and sometimes this is because he feels that he stands at a great distance from his Creator and that he is not worthy of coming close to His Holiness. Due to these reasons, he stops praying. However, listen closely [as I explain] to what this is comparable. Imagine a person who is searching for a hidden sapphire, and he digs in the ground in various locations in order to find it. Suddenly, he reaches an area where the ground is so hard that he cannot break it open by any means. He tries this and that, but he is unable [to break it open.] What does this man do? He moves on from there to go find another place to dig. How foolish is this person! You have found the sapphire itself, and the proof is that you are unable to dig in this location. Do not leave this location until you figure

out how to [obtain the treasure and] bring it to your home.

So it is with this matter. If you have reached the point where your heart is broken and you are unable to open your mouth in prayer due to great pain, you must know that the most valuable treasure is available to you; the most beautiful form of prayer, "crying out".

I do not know if Rav Pincus was referring to mental illness when he wrote this piece, but I believe the words describe the feelings of many who do suffer from mental illness and are unable to pray as a result. The message is clear. While you may be unable to pray in the conventional way, you can pray in a way that is extremely potent and beloved by Hashem.

So, go ahead. Cry out in silence.

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

| Meet a Member |



Meet a Member

My story begins during my childhood. I grew up in a chaotic and emotionally unhealthy family. I have to mention that my parents love all of their children very much, but at times, they are unable to express that love in a receptive and normal way.

During the pregnancy of my fourth child, when I had three other small children B"H, I started feeling depressed. This was probably due to the chemicals of pregnancy as well as various other stress factors and lack of support from parents. At that point, I recognized these feelings from previous experiences and went for help through an organization for PPD. I started taking medication and going to therapy.

Since that time, due to various circumstances, there have been many ups and downs both big and small. I eventually realized, after a very difficult period, that this wasn't just PPD or Perinatal Depression, but something that doesn't go away and that I will constantly have to deal with. I tried different medications, and it took a long time to reach something that would keep up my mood. It was very embarrassing for me to go to the pharmacy to pick up my medications, and I felt bad that I had to take them. However, whenever I felt this way, I told myself that Hashem wants us to live by the mitzvos and that we are required to guard our health very well. I also learned various self-care methods to help myself. Slowly I started to accept that this is my condition in life.

At that point, I discovered Chazkeinu through a Google search as well as from a friend. Chazkeinu has given me primarily two messages: that I'm not the only one dealing with chronic depression and that it's just like any other illness. This awareness helped me accept my situation. While it is not a replacement at all for medication and therapy, it is encouraging to read the newsletters and hear some of the recorded conferences, although I don't get to listen to them too often.

I think that I and all of the other Chazkeinu sisters are stronger people who are more in touch with themselves. I think that my challenges make me turn to Hashem and experience more of a real connection to Him, as I constantly have to accept my situation and family of birth with Emuna, trust, in Him. I am very fortunate to have a very supportive husband and in-law family, and I thank Hashem for that. I think that this is another benefit of my challenges; I don't know if I would have had this relationship with my husband and my in-law family if I had come from a "normal" emotionally loving family. I also think that the challenges I had growing up are a powerful tool that help me deal with my situation, as I usually feel as though I have dealt with this issue before and have been successful overcoming it. I believe that everyone is born with the tools to deal with his or her challenges, though some people have more obvious challenges and some have more hidden challenges.

I commend Chazkeinu for providing an outlet for women like me and for trying to spread the awareness in the Jewish community that mental illness is similar to other illnesses. I conclude with the hope that Mashiach comes soon to redeem us and heal all of our sicknesses, both emotional and physical.



Meet a Member

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

My name is Chaya, and I am 27 years old. I have a wonderful husband and four adorable children ka”h. My first brush with mental illness occurred more than six years ago. Shortly before the birth of my oldest child, I was going through an extremely stressful situation at work. As a result, my self-confidence took a severe blow, and I literally felt myself slipping into a depression. This depression deepened and was accompanied by severe anxiety and OCD. B”H, by the time my baby was six months old, I was mostly back to myself. Through my subsequent pregnancies, I certainly had some anxiety and mood swings, but fortunately we were able to keep matters from spiraling with the help of a low dose of antidepressants. However, a few weeks after the birth of my baby five months ago, I once again was overcome by anxiety and depression, which I am still currently recovering from.

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

By going for help! Hashem sent the most wonderful doctors and therapist into my life to guide me toward recovery. Although I resisted it at first, and it took a long time to see results, medication was crucial to my recovery during my first bout of depression. (I’m currently still waiting to feel the full benefits of the medication that I started a couple of months ago.) Although therapy is both time-consuming and financially draining, I understand its necessity, and I make every effort to do the work, though at times it is very, very hard. I try to take time to exercise and to reduce any self-imposed stress and perfectionism. Mostly, I’ve learned to accept and float with painful feelings. Feelings aren’t right or wrong, and they don’t make me a bad or incapable person... and with time, they will pass! I constantly remind myself how wonderful I will feel once I recover, and this thought motivates me to do everything in my power to get there.

What is the most difficult part of your challenge?

Can I paraphrase that question as “What is **not** difficult about your challenge?” As anyone who has suffered with depression knows, depression is all-encompassing and greatly affects – and smothers – every aspect of one’s life. I can narrow it down to the three most difficult parts of my challenge: a) the way the depression dupes me into believing that I will never feel better, b) the anxiety about how my depression is affecting my children, and c) the way my intrusive thoughts make me feel terrible about myself as a Jew.

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

I heard Zahava’s story on Chazak and immediately contacted Chazkeinu to become a member. I joined one phone meeting and was hooked! I now try not to miss any meetings if I can help it. I’ve also spent countless hours listening to the recordings of previous phone meetings – they’ve given me so much chizuk during many very low

moments. I've also benefitted from the peer support gained on the online forum. I'm considering joining the partner program as well, though I find that I'd like to wait till I really "feel all better" and can truly be supportive to someone else.

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

Firstly, be very persistent in finding a doctor and a therapist that you feel are understanding and encouraging. Hashem has been so good to me and has always sent the kindest, most encouraging psychiatrists my way. Recently, I had been seeing a therapist whom I felt did not understand me at all. After a few tries with her I realized that I wasn't getting anywhere, so I decided to get back in touch with my old therapist. (Because I no longer live in the same city, we now meet by Skype.) I picked up the phone to ask her if she could see me, and just speaking to her for those five minutes was so encouraging and comforting – it was the first time since this depression began that I began to feel some hope. The right therapist can truly be a life-saver!

One thing that has been very helpful along my journey is to look out for and treasure the good times, as small or insignificant as they may seem. "Wow, for the past half-hour I had no thoughts or feelings of depression, anxiety, or obsessions!" "Even though I'm feeling horrible today, I felt good almost the entire Shabbos! Thank you, Hashem!"

My therapist likes to end off each session with the words, "Respect the process." Though I really don't like the way I'm feeling now, I remind myself that I am working hard, and I ought to be very proud of myself. My goal is not just to reach recovery and healing – I also strive to appreciate and cherish each step I take in that direction.



You are VALUABLE.

You have INFLUENCE.

You can do ANYTHING.

You are APPRECIATED.

You are LOVED.

You are TALENTED.

You make a DIFFERENCE.

You are AMAZING.

You MATTER.



Spotlight on:

My Somatic Experience: *Feeling Feelings and Feeling Better*

By Batsheva

My first attempt at somatic work was a disaster. I will detail it below anyhow.

Me: “I’ve done the DBT curriculum. I’m still jumpy and highly reactive. I want to do somatic stuff.”

Therapist: “Somatic experiencing might actually be very good for you.”

Me: “Can we start right now?” (I can be like that.)

Therapist: “My specialties are in other areas, but I’ve done some online trainings similar to somatic experiencing. We could try.”

(I know, red flag...)

Me: “I take that as a yes. Let’s do this!”

We try.

I’m sitting on the couch. (Its therapy; of course I’m on a couch.) I’m restless, stressed out and I’m basically vibrating head to toe. My eyes are darting, shoulders twisting, I’m sitting on my hands and rocking. All my muscles are tense, and my feet are tapping the carpet.

Like she said, a perfect candidate for somatic experiencing.

Although my body was on adrenaline overload, I wasn’t connected to any of it. I was unaware. I’d spent years of winters without wearing a jacket, schlepped pounds and pounds of stuff without noticing the strain – disconnecting from my feelings was just the way I coped. I was used to being constantly in motion, and more or less, I was fine with it.

Except it was starting to take a toll on different areas of my life. Hence, the sudden interest in somatic work which aims to connect the client to their body experiences.

So we were going to try somatic experiencing. Well, what happened next brought a swift end to any productivity that session. My therapist attempted to draw my attention to the movement and sensations in my body. “Notice how you’re shaking back and forth, how you’re sitting on your hands.” This is a classic somatic intervention.

Instinctively, I shot off the couch like a bullet, crashed into the closet door, and rattled a few wall ornaments (plus my therapist). I was sweating and babbling incoherently.

Why the extreme reaction? I was not used to feeling *anything*, and to suddenly notice my hands and legs made me very uncomfortable.

“That didn’t go over well,” I muttered. My therapist was in agreement.

We went back to DBT oriented treatment. (She is very good at DBT.)

Somatic Experiencing

Somatic Experiencing is a form of alternative therapy aimed at relieving the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other mental and physical trauma-related health problems by focusing on the client's perceived body sensations (or somatic experiences). It was created by trauma therapist, Peter A. Levine.

“Trauma is a fact of life but it doesn’t have to be a life sentence.”-

Peter Levine, PhD

A few months later and a lot more self-aware B”H, we revisited the issue.

“I really want to do somatic work,” I tried again. But this time I added, “Can you recommend someone who’s trained in it?”

She did.

In all fairness, the first session with my somatic therapist was very similar to the disaster above. I was once again sitting on the (edge of the) couch and rocking back and forth. She had me notice my movements... and again, I flew off the handle. Most un-composedly. Feeling my feelings made me very dysregulated and my fight/flight system exploded in a fit of sweat, fists, and wild eyeballs. Two seconds into somatic therapy and I was a mess. Great.

But she wasn’t fazed, this new therapist, and she broke it down into smaller bits. First I re-raveled. If feeling my body on the couch was too much, we’d start with “safer” feelings, she said. We discovered that I feel more comfortable with hard surfaces, so I moved to the floor. We learned to work very gradually, as I needed to feel safe with basic sensations before moving on to anything broader. For me, this meant noticing as my hand held a rock, rolled a stick, or pressed firmly into the floor. We also figured out that I was very triggered by being told what to do. (You can imagine how much fun that must have been.....) Instead of directly guiding me, my therapist now phrases her directives as suggestions like, “Is it okay if we _____?” or “Would you be open to _____?” Her genuine concern for how I’m doing and what feels safe for me has taught me to trust her as a safe guide in this process.

My understanding of somatic work is that it’s about noticing your body sensations and going from a dysregulated, reactive state to a more regulated state. Once you notice movement or feeling in your body, you become curious about it in a non-threatening way (which is a technique used in IFS and other therapies as well). You wonder about it (which sounds very weird, and probably is) and somehow, as you do that, the intensity dissipates. It’s that simple! Let’s say you are very anxious. You first check – where do I feel that in my body? Let’s say it’s your shoulders, or your gut. You shift your focus to that area without judgment, and it starts relaxing. This isn’t magic, (though I totally get it if you are rolling your eyes) I promise.

This description does not include all elements of somatic experiencing. I’ve only been exploring this stuff for a few weeks, but it’s had such a dramatic impact on my life that I’m sharing it with you. The payoff is really between sessions, when I’m living my life and feeling overwhelmed. Focusing on my body sensations is a great tool (what am I holding right now? where are my feet?) to ground myself in the present and deal with my life more effectively. This trick also works with more abstract feelings, like emotions. (Raise your hand if you are totally mystified by emotions.....) If I’m feeling an unhealthy urge, I know I can observe it as it grows, peaks, and then goes down in intensity. Which is a really cool hack, if you ask me.

Do you have any therapy hacks to share?

Somatic Experiencing is used for both *shock trauma* and *developmental trauma*. Shock trauma is loosely defined as a single-episode traumatic event such as a car accident, natural disaster such as an earthquake, battlefield incident, physical attack, etc. Developmental trauma refers to various kinds of psychological damage that occur during child development when a child has insufficient or detrimental attention from the primary caregivers.

"Resources" are defined as anything that helps the client's autonomic nervous system return to a regulated state. This might be the memory of someone close to them, a physical item that might ground them in the present moment, or other supportive elements that minimize distress. In the face of arousal, "discharge" is facilitated to allow the client's body to return to a regulated state. Discharge may be in the form of tears, a warm sensation, unconscious movement, the ability to breathe easily again, or other responses which demonstrate the autonomic nervous system returning to its baseline. The intention of this process is to reinforce the client's inherent capacity to self-regulate.



Ask the Therapist

By Dr. Rebecca Holczer, PsyD and

Dr. David H. Rosmarin PHD, ABPP

Dear Center for Anxiety,

I am working through childhood trauma in therapy. It seems like healing is never really finished – it's a lifelong process. I'm single and I'd like to start dating. At what point am I healthy enough to consider marriage? I wouldn't want to get married before I'm "ready," but I also can't wait till I'm entirely done therapy.

Sincerely,

Am I ready to get married?

Dear Ready to Get Married,

Thank you for your thoughtful question. It's true that there are always things to learn from our life histories, and the process of personal growth is lifelong. Further, healing is individualized and can take longer or shorter for some people relative to others. Without an evaluation including basic information about the nature of your traumatic past, it's difficult for us to provide specific guidance about your unique psychological profile and whether you are ready to get married. However, here are a few general guidelines and questions to keep in mind:

Before dating:

- The most important question to ask yourself is not *when* you want to consider marriage, but *why* you want to consider it. Some people enter the dating scene by default, mostly because it's expected of them given their current age, community standards, and/or status in life. Others enter it because it is an opportunity for long-term connection with a life partner and because they want to start a family. All of these could potentially be healthy reasons for starting to date. However, if you find yourself wanting to get married primarily to escape a difficult environment at home or memories of the past, marriage may not provide the respite you are looking for.
- Similarly, what are your emotional needs to be happily married? Some trauma survivors have learned effective coping skills to remain emotionally regulated when they are struggling. Others are still learning and may be more sensitive to others' moods and behaviors. Other individuals go a step further and feel ashamed for having unique emotional needs. Are you aware of your needs, accepting of your limitations, and do you have skills to cope? Most of all, would you be able to express them to a prospective marriage partner? If the answer is "no" to any of these questions, it's worth addressing these issues with your therapist.

- Do you have a stable support network? Some traumatic events are accompanied by losing out on role models during one's formative years. In such cases, some individuals are able to establish other support networks (e.g., with friends, teachers, rabbis, etc.), but others are unable to do so. The more support you have, the more chances you will have of being successful in dating and marriage.

During dating and onwards:

- Keep in mind that when you do enter a meaningful relationship with a prospective shidduch, at some point it will be important to discuss your trauma history, at least to some extent. Importantly, you always have the right to your privacy and don't need to disclose information or details if you feel uncomfortable doing so. However, trauma researchers have observed that couples who speak more freely about their experiences and emotions tend to have better relationships. More specifically, disclosing trauma histories facilitates self-awareness, self-acceptance, and gives partners an opportunity to be more emotionally responsive, which creates greater connection.
- As you said so eloquently, "healing is never finished." Thus, keep in mind that it is possible that you may choose to continue therapy even into marriage or you may choose to stop now but need to continue at a later point.

Finally, remember that a traumatic past is only one piece of what makes you a unique individual. Research tells us that experiencing a trauma is not nearly as formative as the way in which we respond to that trauma. Therefore, may you grow from your past and all of your life experiences and merit to build a beautiful *binyan bayis adei ad*.

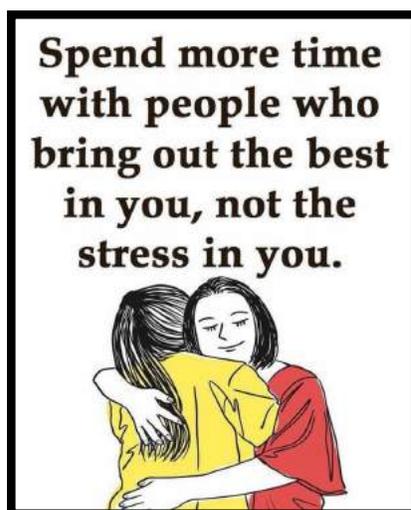
All our best,

Rebecca Holczer & David H. Rosmarin

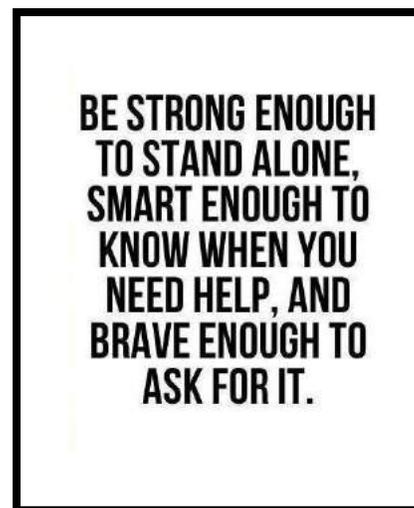
Rebecca Holczer, PsyD is a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Anxiety's Monsey office. She has received extensive training in the application of various exposure therapies, as well as Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) to adolescents and adults experiencing anxiety, depression, chronic pain, and other disorders. Her clinical style is collaborative and highly individualized to the needs of each patient. David H. Rosmarin, PhD, ABPP, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, part-time, and Director of the Center for Anxiety, which has offices in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Monsey, and Boston. They can be contacted at 646.837.5557 or info@centerforanxiety.org



Credits: Chaya Sury



Credits: Baila



Credits: Tzippy

| Chazkeinu Sisters Share |



Alone By Rochel Leah

I'm alone
Abandoned
My heart aches
Bleeds
Everything is quiet
Silent
Nobody listens
Understands
But suddenly
A hand holds me
Around my shoulder
Tight
In a huge hug
I feel loved
I feel like I belong
We are two together
We leap from joy
Laughter fills my heart
There is a shoulder to lean on
What a special friend

Blow Away the Smoke By Rachel

It's trying to accomplish.
But cutting corners
Is literally missing the point.

It's the process,
Not the product,
That is the purpose.

Hiding behind the smoke screen
Of a 'discussion' to gain clarity
Is akin to asking for the formula
So that I can figure out the answer
'By myself',
When the whole point of the test
Is for me to apply the principles
On my own.

There is no 'tutorial' on honest introspection.
It is solely dependent on an individual's
Tefillah (prayer) and hishtadlus (effort).

Nobody can tell me what to take on,
How much to push myself,
Or in which areas to grow.

That was a misconception
That I nurtured
Over my last two years of high school.

Now it is time to blow away the smoke,
Alone,
And figure out my own process,
Through trial and error,
And tears and sighs and success and friendship,
And more error,
To reach the point of creating
My own product,
Thereby achieving the purpose.

I am Abandoned

By Rochel Leah

I am abandoned
ALONE!
Nobody cares
Listens
Understands
My tears are falling
Quietly
Gracefully
Into the quiet night
So lonely
So afraid
Crying on my own
Will anybody hear?
Listen?
Wipe away my tears?
Say an encouraging word?
The tears are coming full force
They don't want to stop

I can't do this anymore!
Will it ever end?
Someone, please!
Hug me tight!
Show me you're here!
Does anyone still remember me?
Are my struggles all for naught?
I'm sitting in the darkness
Waiting to be heard
Nobody reaches out
Not even a kind word
I see there is no choice
I lift my head
Look in the mirror
Stare myself in the eye
And say
I love you dear
Don't cry

You are so special
You are doing great
Keep it up
Just a bit more
I take my hands
Wrap them around myself
Tight! Strong!
Yes! You deserve this!
You are someone to be loved!
And one day
Hopefully real soon
You'll be out of the dark
Smiling to the world
And maybe even be so lucky
To have someone whisper to you
In your ear
You were great!
And envelop you
In a strong firm hug!



Journeys
I'm on a journey,
The Journey called Life,
It takes me down windy roads,
Windy paths,
I climb up steep hills, and walk on bumpy roads,
Sometimes I encounter a fork, and I'm unsure where to
go,
Right?
Left?
One is bumpier than the other and one is smoother,
But then I realize that it's *my* journey,
My unique path,
My unique mission,
But no!
I want that road because my friend is on it and there are
no bumps,
When I look at her, talk with her,
All looks well,
So I hop on that road,
Waiting to feel great and experiencing her life,

Waiting to feel great,
But after some time I realize,
That no, I do not like this,
I'm not being my true me,
I'm trying to be her with the tools that I have,
And it's not working,
I feel stifled and I'm doing things at a rapid pace,
Trying to win they're approval,
So, what do I do?
I resign,
And I tell myself that I do not need her approval,
I need to be me,
To nourish myself,
To take care of myself,
Too see the beauty that's in me,
To unlock the beauty that Hashem gave me,
And just to reassure myself and that doubtful voice,
That I know my friends "approve of me,"
And although I still feel the need to impress them,
I know that I don't need to,
I will acknowledge that voice and return to being me

IT'S THE
◀ little ▶
THINGS
in life

By Perry

Tatty, Mommy, listen to this.
It's the little things that bring bliss.
Yup, the little things in life.

Hugs and cuddles,
Smiles and snuggles,
Playing silly and tickles
With lots of giggles.
Bubble baths,
And a birthday cake smash,
It's the little things in life.

A game of Peek-a-boo,
And a visit to the zoo,
A piggy back ride,
And fun on the slide.
Just sitting in the sun,
Watching me run,
It's the little things in life.

Blowing bubbles,
And easing my troubles,
Feeding the birds,
And using calming words.
A listening ear
When my eyes start to tear,
It's the little things in life.

Lifting me up high
Like a bird in the sky,
Fizzle my hair,
And hold me dear.
Running carefree,
And climbing a tree,
It's the little things in life.

Sharing an ice cream pop,
And laughing a whole lot,
While skipping down the block
With my beloved Pop,

Licking batter together,
And a visit to the park in every
weather,
It's the little things in life.

Just taking a moment to see
That child that's residing deep inside
me.
Believe in her.
Trust her.
Show her you love her.
That's all she needs to hear.
It's the little things in life.

Putting down the phone
When I get home.
Pushing me to my potential,
Boy is that essential.
A loving embrace,
A kiss on my face,
It's the little things in life.

Loads of trust,
Gentle mussar if you must,
A bear hug
For when I feel like a bug.
The moments of just you and me,
Realize how precious they can be.
It's the little things in life.

Don't get tired of praising
The child that you're raising.
Take a moment to ask,
"How did you complete that task?"
Say, "Wow, I'm in awe
For the potential you have in store."
It's the little things in life.

Don't fight back my anger
With a sharp dagger.

Do some thinking and digging
Discover the triggering.
Don't ever tire of saying,
"I love you," even if your hair I'm
graying.
It's the little things in life.

All I ever need to know
Is how much you love me so.
Even if I choose a different route
Don't shame me out loud.
Many roads lead to Jerusalem you
know,
All that really matters is that you help
me grow.
It's the little things in life.

Through nurturing, encouraging, and
believing
The results won't be deceiving.
Oh, I wish you would've had this
wisdom way back,
Then my life wouldn't lack.
Unfortunately, that was not meant to
be.
Now I'm left with the job of uncovering
me.
I just want to point out one more thing,
A lot of pain this lack of knowledge did
bring.
I couldn't enjoy the little things
Which, in turn, left a void; no emotions
and feelings.
All I know is shame, self-blame, and
pain,
But now that I do have that wisdom I
have lots to gain.
With God's help, happiness will once
again reign!



Memories of my Tante Leah, A”H

By Baila



How can I put on paper everything there is to say about my dear Tante Leah? She was my life. She was everything to me. We had such a close bond. She always knew what I was thinking or about to say. She always had a positive word. Her children never heard her scream. Her friend of twenty years said by the shloshim that she never heard a word of lashon hara escape Tante Leah’s mouth. She was so patient with me and never made me feel bad about the amount of times I called her. She always so lovingly answered the phone with the words, "Hi sweetie." She loved me like a daughter. By the levayah (funeral) Leah’s daughter and I hugged and hugged and cried and cried. While embracing me she told me to continue talking to her mother which is something I do all the time. I cry every night and talk to her. I know she hears me and is doing whatever she can now that she is so close to the Kisei Hakavod (Heavenly Throne). How do I know? I know because I feel a special Hashgachas Hashem around me since her death. On the night of her mother’s death, Tante Leah’s daughter texted my friend and told her to take care of me. During shivah (mourning), my friend questioned her and asked, "How were you able to send such a text on the night your mother passed away?" Tante Leah’s daughter answered and said, "I know that's what my mother would have wanted."

Tante Leah constantly looked for new ways to help me and my family. People asked me all the time if she really was my aunt, and I always said, "NO!" I called her Tante Leah out of respect for all she did for me and my family and out of pure love. She was not a blood relative, but we shared an unusually close bond. The fact that she did so much for me and my family, even though she wasn’t a blood relative, demonstrated how special Tante Leah was. Her chessed was unusual. She was the 'queen of Chessed' as her friend put it. She loved helping people. It’s not surprising, as I was just one person, and she did so much for me. By the shloshim, another friend said, "Everyone considered Tante Leah their best friend." She truly treated all her friends with a tremendous amount of warmth, love, and closeness, and she treated everybody she came across with the highest respect and love. She was everybody’s best friend.

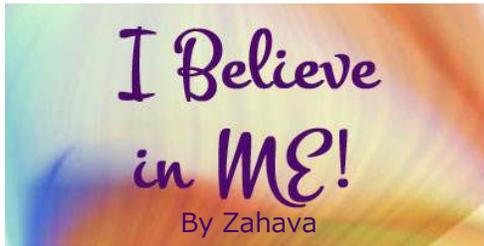
The last email I received from Tante Leahs was right before Shabbos. Tante Leah was nifteres (passed away) shortly after Shabbos, and her daughter told me that I was the last person that she emailed. Her daughter also told me that many times when she walked into her mother's room during the last few weeks of her life she would find her in middle of emailing me. Tante Leah always knew how to comfort me, and I'll forever miss her. She was a gem of a person. She was my gift, and now Hashem has decided that He wants this gift for Himself. I have to accept that. May Tante Leah’s neshamah (soul) be uplifted, and may we merit to see Mashiach VERY soon so I can hold my Tante Leah’s hand once again.

“Never would I have imagined that my life would be this way; yet it's more beautiful because of the pain I endure.”

Credits: Raziel

“Watching sunrise this morning proved to me that there is light after dark.”

Credits: Raziel



For doing the best that I can
To find my place in a world so unclear
For all that I do to stay strong
To accept and to face what I fear

For each step I take to move on
To bring healing and comfort to my pain and my grief
For willing to give it my all
To strengthen my hope and belief

CHORUS:

Curve balls I catch
The game never ends
Some highs and some lows
I can climb
And reach to the stars
I got this I know
Yes I believe in me

For all the missing pieces I see
To find the full picture I strive to explore
For although I cannot understand
To see Hashem who knows what it's for

For hearing my inner voice
To lead myself and my parts - find clarity
For looking in the mirror and seeing
I have so much inside of me

Trapped

By Tova Leah

Feeling like I can't go on,
Too many emotions intertwined,
In which direction shall I turn,
I just can't seem to make up my mind.

Enjoying having kids around,
Knowing I'll never have my own
So why do I get upset,
When they're the ones answering the phone

Up and down, all around,
Mixed emotions all the time
Feeling anxious and confused,
When the medication isn't fine

What am I to do,
When food is my friend
It's my enemy too at the same time,
Help! What will be the solution in the end?

I must learn how to cope,
I've got my toolbox full of tricks
Can't seem to find them at the right time,
Because I know it won't be a quick fix.

Although it is quite a journey,
A long and winding road,
Thank you Chazkeinu for guiding my way,
To begin releasing my heavy load.

There's a famous saying that goes like this:

An Apple a Day, Keeps the Doctor Away

I would venture to re-word that quote as this:

A Kindness a Day, Keeps (our) the Critics Away

I know that might sound cheesy, but if you think about it, there's truth to it. How often are we critical of ourselves, critical of what we did or didn't do, what we should have, could have or would have done? I believe that a good antidote to this is kindness. Kindness has unbelievable power to soften the edge. It takes the sharp edge off the wound. It heals and provides a soothing relief to our crushed souls. It nurtures us and gently whispers words of consolation. I think I'm hooked and more than ready to continue giving it a try. Are you?

Credits: Sarahah



Skimming through a newsletter, I stumbled upon a quote, "If the game of Tetris taught me anything it is that mistakes pile up and accomplishment disappears." The words hit the right spot in my mind and took a life of their own, or maybe rather, a lesson of their own. I was thirteen at the time and was somewhat past the stage of sitting over a boring Tetris game for any length of time, but I did insist that something was amiss in the quote above. It is my relationship with those blocks that has set me on track with the lesson they have taught me. And no. Not that when there are blocks they pile up and choke you till your neck, but in fact, how to deal with the mistakes that pile up and turn them into accomplishments that change you and help you grow in the long run...

* * *

Unlike most of my sixth grade classmates, I strongly disfavored the Gameboy. Though it kept my friends occupied for hours, it did not interest me in the least. But when the perfect life I knew turned its back on me, and I was in dire need of something to distract me of the loneliness and misery, I did turn to it from time to time, usually inserting the Tetris disc, trying to fight the torrent of colorful blocks, in every size and shape, and win over them.

So sitting in my corner of the house, I played my game and it appeared to be absolutely endless. I promised myself to win this time but these blocks were piling up and chances for winning were decreasing at an alarming rate. In my sluggish mood, I tried to get some rows off the screen but was not quite successful. The drastic change in the music signaled yet another loss, and I closed the Gameboy with a sigh.

"This is how life goes," I heard myself mutter in disgust. I picked myself up to answer the ringing phone

and let my very own words take new dimensions in my roaring mind. This is how life goes. Let the phrase wear a positive connotation. Uhum. This is how life goes; like a Tetris game. There are many levels and forms but basically all of us are given our own complex blocks to deal with and set them into place; to get past some of them and use others as foundations to continue to build on. The blocks keep coming. Every day brings new challenges appearing on our screens. Some are simple while others overtake our existence and feed into our every breath and move. But we must fight them and find ways for them to fit in and help us grow. We must not put them aside or simply ignore them, for they will only pile up, and no magic wand will have them disappear. He has blessed us all with the tools and strength required to overcome the obstacles in our way. Winning the game is possible if we only learn how to do it. Every single piece must be considered, as in a Tetris game, where even if you choose to close your eyes, the block will proceed in falling.

Sometimes an ordeal shows up of a difficult and complex kind. Our hands are tied backward, and we must watch the most painful and uncomfortable things happen. Our chances of winning, of withstanding, and achieving seem to be utterly hopeless. The time space between one block and another appears to be diminished, and we just wish to give in to our unfortunate reality. The pain in our chest becomes unbearable. Surviving becomes unthinkable. Misery sets in, and we choke on our tears. We want to just let them pile up one on top of another until they reach the top of our screen and we lose. Giving up is so much easier than fighting to overcome and get through only to have to deal with yet another twisted block when we are finally done. We wish to sit in the void of our hearts and let the heavens fall on our shoulders.

But is this really what we want? Or is it because we are so overwhelmed and exhausted, drained from every particle of courage and strength? We can press on our pause button for a short while to catch our breath. We can pray and cry our pain filled hearts out to Hashem. He's the One who will help us learn how to win over all the odds. One day, we will be true winners! Soaring way above on

the eagle's back, free from pain and sorrow, we will realize how all this pain was pure love.

True, we do often fail, but it's all about learning to start again and not surrender to our lifetime enemy. We will be rewarded for every time we lift ourselves up to try once more and, on top of that, accomplishment will pile up and mistakes and aches will disappear.



Selective Mutism: Emerging Butterflies

By Chana

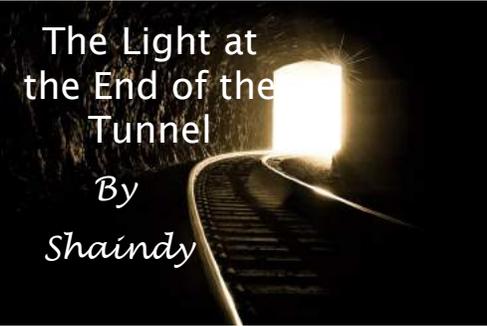
It is truly a milestone when a child goes to school for the first time. The new experience is exciting and exhilarating for most children – except for some. These children suffer from a mild form of an anxiety that prevents them from talking in school. In a school setting they clam up and are effectively mute. This condition that they suffer from is known as Selective Mutism (SM) and is prevalent. I am grateful for the ability to cure many such children over the last decade while working in different classrooms.

The negative effects SM has on these young children are obviously disastrous, as they are emotionally paralyzed and are unable to open up to their teachers and peers. This hampers them scholastically, and more importantly, socially, at a formative stage in a child's life where developing interpersonal relationships, trust, and self-confidence is crucial. A child with SM lives in a self-contained prison, at least during the school day. The world-renown expert in SM, Mrs. Shaindel Cohen opines that every day a child suffers from SM leaves indelible scars that remain on the child's psyche. Hence, the importance of helping these precious souls expeditiously cannot be overstated.

Often, the parents are unaware of the problem, because the child talks freely at home. Teachers and educators are at a loss on how to deal with these children, and sometimes try to compel the child to talk; something that is counter-productive. The most effective method is by slowly and methodically building the pupil's confidence and comfort. It is very important to give him or her the tools to discover, and realize that the ability to talk in school is within reach, and is readily attainable.

Not unlike a sapling that needs exposure to constant sunlight and air in order to grow, a child with SM needs continual individualized attention. Children with SM need an adult figure in the class room – the anxiety laden location – that can give them the tools to emerge from their protective cocoons. It also helps their true colors to shine, and for their latent capabilities to emerge. I create and cultivate a special relationship with these children. Encouragement and the showering of compliments that specifically highlight strengths and accomplishments, even seemingly minor ones, is paramount. Flexibility and good humor are priceless, as evincing a heartfelt laugh; increases comfort levels, just like adults in an awkward social setting.

Furthermore, it is important to learn what interests the child who is suffering with SM. Starting conversations about their favorite things is a time-tested manner of connecting with human beings. Specifically, each child is unique and the specific method of developing a relationship and slowly, methodically and incrementally getting them to emerge from their cocoons is one that requires hands on interaction as well as a keen sense of intuition. The feeling of injecting life into these children is exhilarating and rewarding.



The Light at
the End of the
Tunnel

By
Shaindy

I blink
In the darkness
Of the inky tunnel
That has become my home.
Though the mustiness
Stilts my breathing,
The murkiness
Confounds me,
And the twists and turns
Startle me,
I have become accustomed
To its gloominess.

I have learned
To breathe in the dank air.
I have tried
To see through the dimness
Using pinpricks of light
That I find along the way.
I have navigated
Unexpected curves
Using a variety of tools and
strategies.

Suddenly,
I sense a shift.
Up ahead
A shaft appears,
A ray of light,
Unlike the tiny pinpricks
That had graced my walls on
occasion.
It beams,
Beckoning,
Inviting me,
Calling me,
Ready to embrace –
The light at the end of the tunnel.

The shining glimmer
That had seemed so elusive.
The magnificent rays

Of which I had only dreamed.
The sunny brightness
Of which I was told
But could not quite visualize
When surrounded by hopelessness
In an endless tunnel.

A tremor
Overtakes me.
Apprehension
Fills my being.
I cannot persist.
I refuse
To unite
In its warm embrace.

For in the comfort of the light
Lies the terrifying possibility
Of slipping,
Falling,
Regressing,
Sliding back
Into the despondency
That has robbed me
Of life as I knew it to be.

I am paralyzed,
Torn by indecision.
To remain
In the blackness,
The doom,
The familiar?
Or to forge ahead,
Actualize my dream,
With the inherent risks
And possibility of failure?

I contemplate
The nature
Of my surroundings –
The pain,
The melancholy,

The despair.
I analyze
The makeup
Of the sun's shining rays –
The clarity,
The wholesomeness,
The renewal.

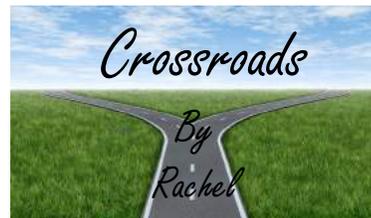
I recall
That the Creator
Of my dark surroundings,
The One who set me
Upon this course
And accompanied me
Through tunnels of gloom,
Is the very same Creator
Of that which illuminates.
I can feel the presence
Of the *Yotzeir ohr u'Borei choshech*
On any terrain,
In any locale,
Throughout every segment
Of my journey.

It is the *Borei ohr v'choshech*
Who determines
The events in my life,
The timing of the occurrences,
And the coloring with which they will
be perceived.
It is in my hands
To make the decision
To embrace it,
To experience it,
To absorb it,
To ultimately emerge victorious.

With anticipation and trepidation,
With hope mixed with fear,
With excitement and apprehension,
I take one tentative step
Toward a brighter future.



A burning flame
A yearning desire
Keep going,
Keep fighting,
Staying strong,
Staying alive,
Holding on tight,
Not allowing
That spark
To get diminished.
Searching for
Lights of hope,
Rays of sunshine,
Finding Hashem's hand,
Looking for His miracles,
Seeing the good
I learn to share,
I learn to ignite,
My fire
My flame
On to others
Giving them that spark
That reason to survive
That reason to fight.



I've been at the crossroads
For a little while now.
I can choose
To revert back to the past few months,
Full of pain and care and 'special treatment.'

Or, I can choose
To revert back to the previous years,
Full of satisfaction and accomplishment and pride.

On paper it looks so simple,
And that's how it must appear
To others too.

And maybe it is simple;
It's so clear which is better.
...But clear does not mean easy.

And anyways, I can't ever go back.
Not really.

Not to the past few months,
And not to the previous years.
I've hurt too much, healed too much,
Changed too much to go back.



This is a photo of a painting I made a few years ago, shortly after achieving greater emotional stability. It reminds me of depression and what I am not able to see while I am depressed. Even when it's covered in an overwhelming black sadness, the colors, which represent positive things in my life, are still there. Yes, I have to look for them, but they will always be there.

The painting hangs in my kitchen, the place where I spend much of my time. It's also where I cook which is something that brings me much joy. It's a constant and much needed reminder to look for the positive, even when it's not easy to see.

Painting by Miriam

Always and Forever

By Raizel

They will try
Every way
To defeat us,
To beat us,
To destroy us,
To kill us.
But it is clear
We will forever remain,
We are here for eternity
Because Hashem promised us
Am Yisroel Chai;
We will never get diminished;
No matter what
We are Hashem's chosen nation.
His love for us is
Unlimited,
Unconditional,
Unparalleled,
And indefinable,
Beyond our imagination.

IT'S OK ☺

By Miriam

It's not a problem to be down.
It's not a problem to frown.
It's ok to be sad.
It's ok to be mad.
It makes sense to feel fidgety.
It makes sense to feel pity.
Understand when I'm in doubt.
I understand when I want to shout.
But, I will collect myself,
Put all my troubles on a shelf.
It's not something I always have to carry with me.
It's not something I always have to see.
One day when I will look back,
At that old torn sack,
That has all my emotions flowing,
And all my sorrows glowing,
I will know it was worth the pain,
Because a lot I did gain.
A better person I will be.



A Letter to my Younger Self

By Yehudis

Dearest Younger Me,

I see you and I hear you
I'm watching how you play,
I know how nothing's real for you
How you're acting through the day.
You're going through the motions,
Robotic actions all day long;
You're not sure how to make things right,
When it's clearly very wrong.
It's hard for me to watch you,
Bringing sadness and much pain.
It's hard but I must do it,
So both of us can gain.
Although what's happened, happened
There's no way to change the facts,

I can stay with you and be with you,
While you live the life of acts.
I promise you that one day
You won't live a life untrue;
You'll find your place and who you are,
You'll live your life for you.
I want you to remember that
I care and love you so;
Through all the pain and hardship,
It's what I want you to know.
When life gets tough, it seems too hard,
And you want to run and hide;
Just look up and you'll see me,
With lots of love,
Your Older Self

Acceptance

By Shoshana

Talk therapy, family systems, EMDR
Relaxation, Sandtray, and mindfulness- I've traveled so far

Digging through the layers, peeling them away
Trying to reinvent myself- bring my core to light of day

The focus now has been core work- yet it's only one part
There are yet more tools I need to put into my cart

So DBT is the newest of the paths I'm taking
It's going to be quite a ride- no mistaking

There is so much that I need to accept
A lot of stuff from the past- and also the present

But fighting reality won't make it go away
All it does is cause the pain to grow and to stay

I need to let go and give back carried feelings
I am not responsible for others' troubled dealings

The pain can be excruciating, it really does hurt
But it's mine and it's real- to that I'm alert

It happened to me, it's real and it's true
I tried my hardest- there was nothing I could do

So this is all a part of me- I am connected to it
And I must accept that fact to climb out of the pit

Holding onto unhealthy legacies
Will in no way take away my disease

Quite the contrary- it's holding me back
Keeping me immature- on a no-good track

Refusing to accept reality for what it is
Denies my belief that this world is His

Aside for making me unhappy, bitter and sad
Angry and shameful, and more feelings of bad

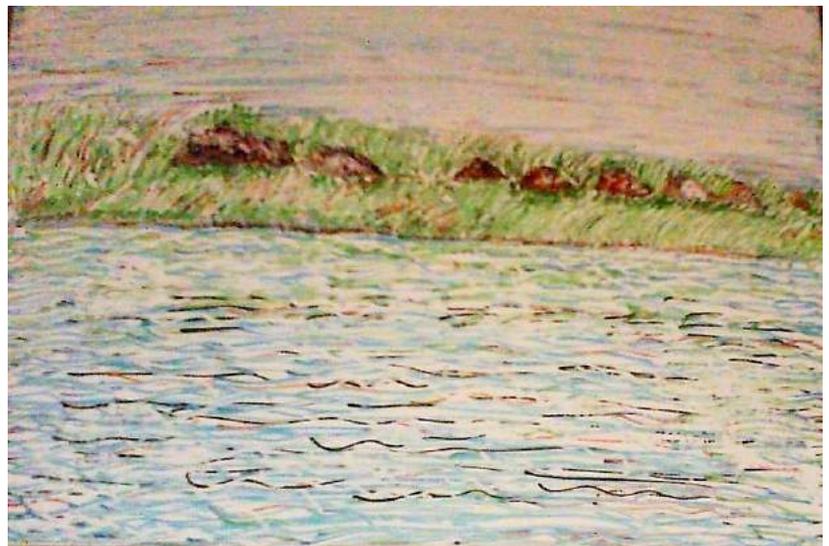
Acceptance is hard, I know I will cry
But it's about my own stuff- ain't nowhere to fly

Yet with all the pain involved, this is what I believe
That following this path, with G-d's help, will allow me to achieve

The values, the goals, the perceptions that are mine
The closeness to Hashem that allows me to shine



Vase and Arrangement
by Shayndle



Art by Aviva

Life is so Complex

By Shoshana

Life is so complex
So many pieces- flying all around
Questions, dilemmas, un-clarity does abound

Life is so complex
Where am I to go, what am I to do?
How am I meant to navigate life with all my crew?

Life is so complex
I want to do right, follow the straight and narrow
Yet- how can I know which is the correct arrow?

Life is so complex
So many distractions, so many pieces of life
Difficulties all over, internal and external strife

Life is so complex
Torah is our guide, we're meant to follow it
But growing up frum doesn't mean you'll never reach a pit

Life is so complex
I'm searching for meaning, for His love despite this mess
I am trying so very hard- I want to be a success

Life is so complex
The pains, the fears, the sadness- they make it all so tough

Can I go through and find the light- even if the way is rough?
Life is so complex
Hashem, this is so hard, I need to feel You, please
Help me see You, help me know- my burden You will ease

Emotions so tense, who can hold
So much intensity- in colors so bold?

How can one person feel so sad
And a very short time later- be almost glad?

How can I love, so deep and so pure
And then yell and be so angry- at those whom I adore?

So you'll tell me it's normal- we all go up and down
Sometimes we are happy- and other times we frown.

But the levels of intensity- are so very deep
My self shakes with emotion, my skin does creep.

G-d created me with deep capacities to feel so much
To respond with all my might to even the slightest touch

Yet I pray for mercy, to learn to bear
Each thought and emotion- as it does appear.



Photo by Aviva

Don't Give Up on Me

By Anonymous

I will fight
I will fight today
And everyday
No matter what the odds will say

And I'll hold on
I'll hold on to You
I need You to
Believe in me and take me through

I'll reach my hand out in the dark
So faithful that I'll meet my mark
I'll trust in You
So trust in me

Cuz I'm not giving up
I'm not giving up giving up no not yet
Even when I'm down to my last
breath
Even when I feel there's nothing left
So don't give up on me

And I'm not giving up
I'm not giving up giving up no not me
No curve balls will knock me off my
feet
I'm not going down that easily
So don't give up on me

| Rising up |

“Woe to a man who is unaware of his faults- he is not attentive to what needs repair. But double woe to he who is unaware of his virtues- he is unskilled in the tools of his trade.”

-Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz

A Project of



314.346.7414

www.chazkeinu.org

info@chazkeinu.org

The Chazkeinu Team

Founder and President: Zahava List

Co-Founder: Tamar Mishkin, Naomi Shulman

Rabbinical Advisor: Rabbi Yisroel Grossberg

Clinical Advisor: Yocheved Rabinowitz

Email Coordinator: Malky Rosenberg

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Online Forum Moderators: Ahuva, Devorah E, Mamela Keller

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EMPOWERED Coordinator: Bruchy

RISE Newsletter Editor: Tzippy

Web Designer: Shmuel Mitzmann from *My Custom Software*