

UNVEILED

LIFE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS #7

Although I experienced several manic episodes after the birth of my first child, my eye was constantly on the prize: on the day I would be healthy enough to have another baby, for my son to have a sibling. Finally, at around his fifth birthday, after having experienced a traumatic miscarriage in between, I gave birth to my second son.

While I did experience lows during the pregnancy, my excitement to have another child was intense. I looked forward to the birth, preparing myself as much as possible mentally and emotionally for what was to come.

The first few moments after the birth were magical. I had reached a milestone. When I was expecting my first child, I did not yet know what a gift I was being granted on a silver platter. This time around, I experienced such intense longing, a deep yearning to bring another child into this world. What a joy it was!

After the birth, I was in a good mood, which is very different from mania. While in both of them the individual appears happy, the way to understand the difference is to think about the difference between being hyper and being drunk on Purim. In the latter case, the individual says things they don't normally say and does things they don't normally do.

But then, seven days after my baby's birth,

the euphoria-turned-mania took on a life of its own, resulting in another psychotic episode.


Once again, my medication doses were increased dramatically until the psychosis subsided, after which I experienced an intense low, until I returned to the middle again.

Even when life returned to relative normalcy, bipolar disorder was always in the backdrop. When life was calm, it was calm. But I never knew when the next shoe would drop.

In Hindsight

As I learned over time from my personal perspective, not as a professional, bipolar disorder is a more extreme reaction to the ups and downs in life. While every human being experiences highs and lows in their regular life, an individual with bipolar disorder experiences them with greater intensity. In general, this intensity is sparked by a trauma that is more severe than average. When the pain is so overwhelming, the individual must exercise more extreme mechanisms in order to escape it.

With this awareness, when I look back at my life and the psychotic episodes I experienced, I notice that every time I got sick, a certain emotion came up for me. When the emotion threatened to overwhelm me, my body automatically resorted to mania as an escape mechanism.

Although all of my relapses were similar in nature, each one exhibited a bit differently. The relapse I had when my oldest was six months old, for example, was not the same as when he was two and a half. Looking back, I see each one like an onion peel. With each layer that got peeled away, I got that bit closer to my essence. And once the episode was over, I wasn't the same person anymore. Each one served as a stepping stone into the next level of recovery. 

To be continued...

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