

Caring for Your Spirit in a Time of Crisis

Assembled by Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW
Rabbinic Director, The Jewish Board



What follows is a collection of sources in connection with the March 24, 2020 webinar on “Caring for Your Spirit in a Time of Crisis,” led by Rabbi Simkha Y Weintraub, LCSW, the Jewish Board’s Rabbinic Director. This packet contains a number of different resources, including “Ten Spiritual Conflicts in Communal Disaster/Trauma,” Resources on Resilience, Prayers, Songs to Counter Fear, “Common Responses to Trauma and Coping Strategies,” and more.

One day Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov (1745-1807) told his students, “There is no quality and there is no power of man that was created without purpose. Even base and corrupt qualities can be uplifted to serve God.” One student raised his hand and asked, “Rabbi, to what end can the denial of God have been created? Surely there is no purpose to atheism.”

Rabbi Moshe paused and then replied, “This too can be uplifted through deeds of *tzedakah*. For if someone comes to you and asks your help, you shall not turn him off with pious words, saying: ‘Have faith and take your troubles to God!’ You shall act as if there were no God, as if there were only one person in all the world who could help this person - only yourself.”

For individuals who have been exposed to traumatizing conditions, the nature of their social ties and their social network can be critical to recovery. Social supports can buffer them from impending traumatic events and help them recover from those they have endured. One overcomes trauma when current attachments with safety figures outweigh the terror of the past...
-- See Bessel van der Kolk, *Trauma and development in children (video)*, New York: Bureau of Psychiatric Services, New York State Department of Mental Health.

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.
Simone Weil, 1909-1943

From generation to generation,
a person is obligated to view him/herself as if s/he emerged from Egypt.
From the Passover Haggadah

Rabbi Simcha Bunem of Pshiske (1767-1827) told his disciples:
Everyone must have two pockets, with a note in each pocket,
so that he or she can reach into the one or the other, depending on the need.

When feeling lowly and depressed, discouraged or disconsolate,
one should reach into the right pocket, and, there, find the words:
"Bishvili nivra ha'olam/For my sake was the world created."*
But when feeling high and mighty one should reach into the left pocket,
and find the words:

"Ani afar va'eifer/I am but dust and ashes."**
in Martin Buber, Tales of the Hassidim, vol. II, p.249
*Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5 **Abraham in Genesis 18:27

Seven "Classical" Jewish Spiritual Responses to Communal Trauma
Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW; in no special order of importance nor prominence

1. **Fasting** – as in *Esther 4:3*; sharing a common bond of vulnerability *and* vision, both turning inward and affirming communal strength; the “weakness before strength”
2. **Psalms** – as prayer, meditation, study, chanting, ritual, community, conversation....
For times of communal distress: 20, 28, 85, 86, 102, 130, 142
For help in troublesome times: 16, 20, 25, 26, 38, 54, 81, 85, 86, 87, 102, 130, 142
When the land of Israel is in danger: 83, 130, 142
3. **Tz'dakah** – Material/financial gifts to repair the world – especially to restore justice and expand righteousness – “lifting the material to the level of the spiritual”
4. **Hessed** – Direct, interpersonal deeds of lovingkindness, caring, compassion
5. **Torah Study** – in traditional circles, *mishnayot*
6. **Memorials** – especially to inspire us and to carry on the values/deeds of the deceased
7. **Lamentations** – Book of *Eikhah* as well as medieval and more contemporary compositions.

Weakness and Strength: A Teaching of the Koretzer

“Oftentimes apparent weakness denotes strength that is to come. At the moment of birth, no living creature is as weak and helpless as man, yet man grows up to be master of all life.

“The horse secures his rest through sleep while standing; the cattle rest while kneeling; only man is so weak that he must lie down with his entire body. This also denotes his superiority, since he rests his mind and nerves in this fashion, and awakens with renewed strength.

“We thus behold that there is frequently weakness before strength. We fast on Yom Kippur and on other days: to create weakness in order to attain the strength which follows it. It is preferable to become weak through fasting than through controversies and illness. But in any case a man’s troubles though they weaken him for the moment oftentimes cause him to be stronger, both physically and mentally, than before.

“The man who is popular and influential needs to fast at regular intervals. He cannot remain masterful of spirit for a very long time without weakening it at interludes.

“A man who was constantly cheerful and in happy mood became very ill. The Rabbi commanded him to fast and he was cured. Thus, fasting became a substitute for sickness by lowering his exorbitant good cheer at times.

“Sometimes a singer cannot reach the higher notes. Another man comes to his aid and sings in a loud tone. This gives to the first man, also, the ability to raise his voice. It is a result of the communion of two spirits, wherein each becomes a partner in the other’s strength.

“Sometimes a man does not understand the theme of his study. But when he discusses it with a comrade, it suddenly becomes clear. This results, also, from the cleaving of two souls: it gives birth to new understanding and to new wisdom.”

*From **Nofet Tzufim**, by Pinchas ben Avraham Abba Shapira of Koretz (born 1728; died 10th of Elul, 1791), a disciple of the Ba’al Shem Tov. (Published in Warsaw, 1929, pp 5-7). This teaching is reproduced in Louis I. Newman’s Hasidic Anthology (New York: Schocken pbk, 1963), pp 455-56.*

Ten Spiritual Conflicts in Communal Disaster/Trauma

Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW/Rabbinic Director, The Jewish Board

(Please note: The conflicts that are listed here are overlapping, not distinct, and in no order of experience or priority; and many people may not have/use these words for their challenge/s...)

1...Trust vs. Distrust

Can I depend on anything, anyone, the Cosmos, God...? Is there any real trust?

2...Meaning/Role/Purpose vs. Emptiness/Void

What can it all be about, what can really 'hold water'? What narrative, if any, works?

3...Order vs. Chaos

Is there really any system, any sequence, any causality in events?

4...Security/Protection vs. Vulnerability/Exposure

Is anyone safe, or are we all just targets, sitting ducks?

5...Independence/Self-Determination vs. Powerlessness/Total Neediness

What authentic choices do I have? Can my most considered, compliant behavior have any real of desired impact?

6...Direction vs. Aimlessness

What do I need to do now? How must I act, respond, change?

7...Hope vs. Despair

How can tomorrow be any better? What comfort, joy, wholeness, light, or inspiration can there really be?

8...Concern /Omnipresence of the Ultimate vs. Abandonment/Hidden Countenance

Precisely when so many needed or sought Salvation, where was the Almighty?

9...Hessed v'Rahamim/Lovingkindness & Mercy vs. Din vaOnesh/Strict Limits & Punishment

Where is the Compassion/Grace/Generous Spirit – all we have experienced is the Assault, the Destruction, the Noose?

10... Familiar, At-Home, Normal vs. Alienated, Aberrant, Unmoored

The whole equation seems to have changed; the Universe has shifted; the gap between myself and close ones is unbridgeable; I feel existentially isolated now....

Small Enough...

After an evening of talk, perhaps about the fringes of knowledge, or some new possibility of climbing into the minds and senses of animals, we would go out on the lawn, where we took turns at an amusing little astronomical rite. We searched until we found, with or without glasses, the faint, heavenly spot of light-mist beyond the lower left-hand corner of the Great Square of Pegasus, when one or the other of us would then recite:

“That is the Spiral Galaxy in Andromeda.

“It is as large as our Milky Way.

“It is one of a hundred million galaxies.

“It is 750,000 light-years away.

“It consists of one hundred billion suns,
each larger than our sun.”

After an interval, Colonel Roosevelt would grin at me and say: “Now I think we are small enough! Let’s go to bed.”

We must have repeated this salutary ceremony forty or fifty times in the course of years, and it never palled.

From *The Book of Naturalists* (w York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944, page 234); quoted in *The Interpreter’s Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956) volume V, page 436, in connection with *Isaiah 40:12-17*.

Required Helpfulness

Individuals having to contend with stressful and dangerous situations may sometimes experience enduring positive changes in their lives when they are required to perform actions that significantly help others in their personal times of need. Rachman (1979*) refers to this phenomenon as “required helpfulness.” It was originally observed among the citizens of war-torn Britain during World War II. Doctors found that after aerial bombardments, citizens who served the immediate needs of others, to essentially protect the safety and well-being of others, experienced fewer than anticipated adverse psychological reactions from the trauma of the aerial assaults. One observer even noted that individuals who were of poor mental health prior to the air raids were actually faring much better following the raids if they had a personally satisfying job to perform that others saw as socially necessary....

The phenomenon of required helpfulness has also been tested experimentally. Researchers asked a group of individuals who were very fearful of snakes to help other individuals with similar fears. By modeling effective coping strategies, the helpers actually experienced a reduction in their own fear responses...

From Mark Katz, *On Playing a Poor Hand Well* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997)

*S. Rachman, “The concept of required helpfulness,” *Behavior Research and Therapy*, 17 (1979), pages 1-6.

(What you might call) **“Ten Jewish Resilience Teachings”**

One Parent, One Power, One Mold: The Unique and Beyond-Value Nature of All

Human was created as a single individual
to teach you that anyone who destroys a single soul is as though he destroyed an entire world,
and anyone who preserves a single soul is as though he preserved an entire world;
and to preserve peace/harmony among creatures,
so that one person not say to the next, “my father is greater than your father,”
or as some might say, “there are multiple powers in heaven.”
And to show the greatness of the Holy Blessed One,
for while a person stamps many coins from a single mold,
and all that are produced come out alike,
the King of Kings, the Holy Blessed One,
has stamped every person with the mold of the first Adam,
yet not one of them is like his fellow.
And so, each and every individual is obligated to say,
“For my sake was the world created...”

Mishnah Sanhedrin, 4:5

Repress and/or Express

דאגה בלב איש ישחנה רבי אמי ורבי אסי, חד אמר: ישחנה מדעתו, וחד אמר: ישחנה לאחרים
“Anxiety in the heart of a man weighs him down...”(*Proverbs 12:25*)

R. Ammi and R. Assi [explained it differently]:

One said: One should force it down;

the other said: One should talk about it with others.*

Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 75a

*One connects the word *yashhenna* (bows/weights him down) with the Hebrew *nassah*, “to remove”; the other with the Hebrew *suh*, “to speak”. (Note: The verse from Proverbs 12 ends with: “but a good word makes him glad.”)

“And Suffering without Transgression....”

In the *Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 55b*, at the conclusion of a theological discussion that goes on for about a half a page, it states:

ושמע מינה: יש מיתה בלא חטא, ויש יסורין בלא עון

"We see from this that there is death without sin ,and there is suffering without transgression."

Paths to Healing

Anger bottled up inside can lead to an explosion

while acknowledging emotions and understanding pain leads to healing.

Rabbi Moshe b. Adrianopolis Alshikh (b. 1508, d. Damascus 1600), on Numbers 32:7-9, when Moshe upbraids the tribes of Gad and Reuven for their selfish disregard of Israel's unity

Hand-to-Hand

As one hand washes the other, so must one person help another.

Leon of Modena, in Tzemah Tzedek, 1600

Shmutzik, A Bisseleh... (translation: Dirty, just a bit)

If you want to help pull a friend out of the mire, don't hesitate to get a little dirty.

Ba'al Shem Tov (Israel ben Eliezer, 1700-1760)

Breaking the Power of the Evil Inclination and Refinding a Pathway to God

Share all your negative thoughts and feeling
-- those that oppose our holy Torah,
and are brought forth by the evil inclination –
with a spiritual mentor or trusted friend...
Do not leave out anything from these conversations
because of your shame or embarrassment.
By speaking about such things, by bringing them into the open,
you will break the power of the evil inclination,
so that it will not rise up against you at other times.
You will also retrieve the good counsel of your friend,
which is itself a wondrous treasure,
A pathway to God
R. Elimeleh of Lizhensk (1717-1787) Tzetal HaKatan, # 13

Interdependence and Mutual Bonds

Every people draws sustenance from others, from the heritage of the generations, from the achievements of the human spirit in all eras and all countries. Mutual dependence is a cosmic and eternal law. There is nothing in the world, large or small, from the invisible electron to the most massive bodies in infinite space, which has not bonds with its fellows or with unlike bodies. The whole of existence is an infinite chain of mutual bonds, and applies to the world of the spirit as well as to the world of matter.

David Ben Gurion, Atlantic Monthly, November 1961

“Times for Transcendent Actions”

People often perceive themselves in terms of their constraints as mortal beings.
Yet there are times that call for transcendent actions.
One must at times do more than one can possibly do,
for each mortal is endowed with a G*dly soul,
and G*d transcends mortal constraints.”

– *R. Menahem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994),*
known as “the Lubavitcher Rebbe” (or just “the Rebbe” among his followers),
was a prominent Hasidic rabbi, the seventh and last Rebbe of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement.

On Holding Hands

I was sitting on a beach one summer day, watching two children, a boy and a girl, playing in the sand. They were hard at work building an elaborate sandcastle by the water’s edge, with gates and towers and moats and internal passages. Just when they had nearly finished their project, a big wave came and knocked it down, reducing it to a heap of wet sand. I expected the children to burst into tears, devastated by what had happened to all their hard work. But they surprised me. Instead, they ran up the shore away from the water, laughing and holding hands, and sat down to build another castle. I realized that they had taught me an important lesson. All the things in our lives, all the complicated structures we spend so much time and energy creating, are built on sand. Only our relationships to other people endure. Sooner or later, the wave will come along and knock down what we have worked so hard to build up. When that happens, only the person who has somebody’s hand to hold will be able to laugh.

Harold Kushner, When All You’ve Ever Wanted Isn’t Enough

A Random Listing of Jewish Spiritual Resources *in no special order*

Note: These 18 categories are far from distinct, but, rather, overlap substantially!

Community, Fellowship

Torah Study (Bible in general, weekly Torah portion, special *sugyot* from the Talmud, classical commentaries, Midrashic texts, etc.)

Ethical treatises, ethical wills; *Mussar* ethical self-betterment literature

Prayer – fixed and spontaneous; for study as well as devotion

Ritual, traditional and innovative

Ritual objects – for handling, reflection, storytelling

Psalms

Poetry (from Bible through medieval through contemporary....)

Tikkun Olam/Repairing the World

Natural Resources, as/with blessings

Food, as/with blessings

Songs, Chants, *Niggunim*/Wordless Melodies

Wise Sayings

Stories from throughout the Jewish library – Biblical, Talmudic/Midrashic, medieval folk literature, Hassidic parables, Yiddish folktales, contemporary secular and religious narrative, your own stories

Humor

Meditation, Silence, Breathing

Movement, Dance

Memory

Healing Trips to Israel (Added December 2005)

© *Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW 2006*

The Three-Fold Blessing of the Ancient Kohanim/Priests
(Numbers 6: 24-26)

A Three-Part Blessing/Meditation

Y'va-reh-kh-kha A-donai v'yish-m'reh-kha;

May A-donai bless you and protect you.

Safety

Integrity

Trust

Ya-air A-donai panav ey-leh-kha vi'hu-neh-ka;

May A-donai illumine the Divine Presence for you, extending *hen*/grace to you.

Light

Memory

Insight

Yi-sa A-donai panav ey-leh-kha v'ya-seim l'kha shalom.

May A-donai lift you up with the Divine Presence, granting you *shalom*/peace.

Reintegration

Reconnection

Wholeness

© Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW, 1998

Meeting at Peter's Bench/October 28, 2004

Better to lease one garden and cultivate it, than to lease many and neglect them.

Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah, 4:6

The Holy Blessed One led Adam through the Garden of Eden, and said:

“I created all My beautiful and glorious works for your sake.

Take heed not to corrupt and destroy My world!”

Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah, 7:13

Because of the thorns, uproot not a garden! *Al-Harizi, Tahkemoni, 13th century, Chapter 1*

The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quiet, alone with the heavens, nature and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be and that God wishes to see people happy, amidst the simple beauty of nature. As long as this exists, and it certainly always will, I know that then there will always be comfort for every sorrow, whatever the circumstances may be. And I firmly believe that nature brings solace in all troubles. -- *Anne Frank, The Diary of a Young Girl, 1947*

I know that God loves beauty, for He allows it to flourish everywhere, even in unexpected places. In the woods He has scattered all kinds of wild flowers. In a ruin wrought by men, who have cut down beautiful trees and left the brush in disorder, the Creator has caused the ungainly sight to be covered over with a verdant growth: raspberry bushes have come up and new trees are growing. It is He who made the sunrise and the sunset, the towering mountains, and the sharp drop of the lowlands. He made the birds with the infinite variety of their plumage, and He wrought a child's smile.

I know, too, that God loves beauty, because He placed the love of beauty in the human heart. He inspired the vision of artists, from whose soul the beauty of the world evokes the resonance of a new beauty, of their own creating. And even those who are not so deeply inspired know instinctively how to choose the beautiful and shun the ugly. *Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser (1907-1984)*

We know ourselves to be made from this earth. We know this earth is made from our bodies. For we see ourselves. And we are nature. We are nature seeing nature. We are nature with a concept of nature. Nature weeping. Nature speaking of nature to nature.

Susan Griffin, Women and Nature, 1980

As I kneel to put the seeds in
careful as stitching, I am in love.
You are the bed we all sleep on.
You are the food we eat, the food
we ate, the food we will become.
We are walking trees rooted in you.

Marge Piercy, "The Common Living Dirt," in Stone, Paper, Knife, 1983

When you see a beautiful plant, pronounce the blessing:

”Praised be the One who creates beautiful things.”

Tosefta B'rakhot

10 Healing Activities in Nature, with Lines from Psalms/Tehillim as Kavvanot

With candle-lighting: *Ki Ata ta'ir neiri, Adonai, Elohai, ya-giah hosh-ki.*

It is You who lights my candle; Adonai, my God, illumines the darkness. (*Psalms 18:29*)

With planting seeds or nurturing plants:

*V'haya k'etz sha-tul al pal-gei mayyim,
Asher piryu yi-ten b'ito, V'a-leihu lo yi-bol,
V'khol a-sherr ya'aseh yatz-liah.*

Like a tree planted alongside streams of water,
which will yield its fruit in season, whose foliage will not fade,
and all it undertakes succeeds. (*Psalms 1:3*)

With stroking a pet: *Tov Adonai lakol, v'rahamav al kol ma'asav*

Adonai extends Goodness to all; Adonai's Compassion reaches all creatures. (*Psalms 145:9*)

With breathing slowly: *Kol ha-n'shama t'hallel Yah; Kol ha-n'shama t'hallel Yah;*

Let every breath praise Yah/God, Let every breath praise Yah/God! (*Psalms 150:6, twice*)

With walking:

*Horeini Adonai darkeh-kha, A'halekh ba'amitehkha
Ya-heid l'va-vi l'yir-ah sh'meh-kha.*

Teach me, Adonai, Your Way, I will walk in Your truth;
Make my heart one/whole, in awe of Your Name. (*Psalms 86:11*)

With walking through the woods:

Ya'aloz saddai v'khol asher bo, Az y'ra-n-nu kol atzei ya'ar!

Let the fields and everything in them exult; All the trees of the forest will shout for joy!
(*Psalms 96:12*)

With watching clouds roll by:

Ha-sha-mayim sha-mayim la-donai -- V'ha-aretz na-than liv-nei a-dahm.

The heavens belong to Adonai -- but the earth Adonai gave to humankind. (*Psalms 115: 16*)

With enjoying bodies of water

*Asherr lo ha-yam v'Hu a-sa-hu,
V'ya-beh-shet yadav yatzaru.*

God's is the sea, God made it;
The land – God's Hands fashioned. (*Psalms 95:5*)

With joining in sunrises or sunsets:

*Mi-mizrah sheh-mesh ahd m'vo-o
M'hu-lal shem Adonai!*

From the east, where the sun rises, to where it sets
Adonai's Name is praised! (*Psalms 113: 3*)

When handling or exploring rocks:

Even ma'asu ha-bonim ha-y'ta l'rosh pinah.

The stone rejected by the builders became the chief cornerstone! (*Psalms 118:22*)

Birkat HaGomel: A Blessing of Thanksgiving for Making It Through

Rab Judah said in the name of Rab:
There are four [classes of people] who have to offer thanksgiving:
those who have crossed the sea,
those who have traversed the wilderness,
one who has recovered from an illness,
and a prisoner who has been set free.
Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 54b

One who has come safely through a dangerous experience recites:

Barukh Ata

Blessed/Bountiful are You

Adonai, Eloheinu, Melekh HaOlam

Adonai, our God, Ruler of the Universe,

HaGomel l'Hayavim Tovot

Who bestows goodness even on the undeserving,

Sheh-g'malani Kol Tov

and has shown me such kindness.

To which the Congregation responds:

To a male: *Mi Sheh-g'mal-kha Kol Tov, Hu Yigmalkha Kol Tov, Selah.*

To a female: *Mi Sheh-g'malekh Kol Tov, Hu Yigmalekh Kol Tov, Selah.*

“May the One who has shown you every kindness always deal kindly with you!”

Many also say Psalm 107, as a psalm of thanksgiving.

Assembled by Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW © 2006

Al Ti-ra/Do Not Be Afraid
(Proverbs 3:25; Isaiah 8:10, 46:4)

**Al ti-ra mi-pa-had pit-om
U-mi-sho-at r'sha-im ki ta-vo.
"U-tzu ei-tza v'tu-far
Dahb-ru da-var v'lo ya-kum
Ki i-ma-nu El."**

**V'ad zik-nah, A-ni Hu;
V'ad sei-vah, A-ni ess-bol!
A-ni a-si-ti, va-a-ni eh-sa,
Va-a-ni ess-bol va-a-ma-leit!**

*Don't be afraid of sudden terror,
Nor of the calamity that comes to the wicked.
"Devise your evil plots -- they will fail!
Lay out your wicked plans -- they are doomed!
God is with us!"*

*Even to your old age, I am the same;
When you are grey-headed, still I will sustain you!
I have made you, and I will bear you;
I will sustain you and I will save you!*

Ey-leh-kha: To You I Call
(Psalms 30: 9 and 11)

**Ey-leh-ka, Ha-shem, ek-ra,
(To You, God, I call,
v'el A-doh-nai et-ha-nahn:
(and to Adonai I appeal:)**

**Sh'ma Ha-shem, v'ha-ney-nee,
(Hear, God, and have compassion on me,
Ha-shem, heh-yey oh-zer lee.
(God -- be my Help.)**

Lo-ira: I do not fear
(Psalm 3:7-8)

**Lo i-ra mei-ri-v'voht ahm
a-sherr sa-viv, sa-viv,))x2
sha-tu a-lai.
Ku-ma, HaShem, v'Ho-shi-ei-ni!**

*I do not fear the thousands of people
that have set upon me, all around.
Rise up, Adonai! Save me, my God!*

Ten Quotes from Pirke Avot*

Simon the Just...used to say,
“Upon three things the world stands:
On Torah, on (Divine) Service, and on Deeds of Lovingkindness.” *Pirke Avot 1:2*

Hillel used to say:
”If I am not for myself, who will be for me?
And if I am only for myself, what am I?
And if not now, when?” *Pirke Avot 1:14*

Simeon, the son of Rabban Gamliel, said:
“I was brought up all my life among the Sages,
and I have found nothing as good for the body as silence,
and it is not the study/explication that is the essence – but the practice/doing,
and whoever is profuse of words occasions sin.” *Pirke Avot 1:17*

Rabban Simeon, son of Gamliel, said,
“On three things the world stands: On Judgment, on Truth, and on Peace...”
Pirke Avot 1:18

Rabbi Yose said:
”Let your friend’s property be as precious to you as your own;
Give yourself to studying the Torah, for it does not come to you by inheritance;
and let all your deeds be done in the name of Heaven.” *Pirke Avot 2:12*

He (Rabbi Tarfon) also used to say,
“It is not your obligation to complete the task,
but neither are you at liberty to desist from it entirely...” *Pirke Avot 2:16*

Another teaching of Rabbi Akiva:
“Everything is foreseen, yet free will is granted;
By goodness is the universe judged, yet all depends on the preponderance of (good) deeds.” *Pirke Avot 3:1*

Ben Zoma said,
“Who is wise? The one who learns from all people...
“Who is mighty? The one who subdues the evil inclination...
“Who is rich? The one who rejoices in his portion....
“Who is honored? The one who honors other human beings...” *Pirke Avot 4:1*

Rabbi Jacob used to say,
“Better is one hour of *t’shuvah* (returning/repentance) and good deeds in this world
than the whole life of the world-to-come
and better is one hour of spiritual bliss in the world-to-come
than all the the life of this world!” *Pirke Avot 4:17*

Rabbi (Meir) said,
”Look not at the flask but at what is therein;
There may be a new flask full of old wine, and an old flask wherein is not even new wine.”
Pirke Avot 4:20

* *Pirke Avot*, lit. “Chapters of the Fathers,” is the only nonlegal tractate of the Mishnah, included toward the end of *Nezikin*, the fourth of the six “orders” of the Mishnah (which is the codification of the Oral Law, based on biblical passages, recorded by Rabbi Judah HaNassi in 200 BCE, the end of 400-600 years of exegesis/teaching.). A brief, very accessible book, it is comprised of six chapters filled with practical insights, moral advice, and spiritual sayings of ancient sages. These quotes were selected, translated, and arranged by Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW © 2002

Common Responses to Trauma & Coping Strategies

Patti Levin, LICSW, PsyD

© 1989, 2001, 2003, 2011 by Patti Levin

www.drpatilevin.com

[Please feel free to disseminate this handout in any way, including electronically.]

After a trauma, people may go through a wide range of normal responses. Such reactions may be experienced not only by people who experienced the trauma first-hand, but by those who have witnessed or heard about the trauma, or been involved with those immediately affected. Many reactions can be triggered by persons, places, or things associated with the trauma. Some reactions may appear totally unrelated.

Here is a list of common physical and emotional reactions to trauma, as well as a list of helpful coping strategies. These are NORMAL reactions to ABNORMAL events.

Physical Reactions

- aches and pains like headaches, backaches, stomach aches
- sudden sweating and/or heart palpitations (fluttering)
- changes in sleep patterns, appetite, interest in sex
- constipation or diarrhea
- easily startled by noises or unexpected touch
- more susceptible to colds and illnesses
- increased use of alcohol or drugs and/or overeating

Emotional Reactions

- shock and disbelief
- fear and/or anxiety
- grief, disorientation, denial
- hyper-alertness or hypervigilance
- irritability, restlessness, outbursts of anger or rage
- emotional swings -- like crying and then laughing
- worrying or ruminating -- intrusive thoughts of the trauma
- nightmares
- flashbacks -- feeling like the trauma is happening now
- feelings of helplessness, panic, feeling out of control
- increased need to control everyday experiences
- minimizing the experience
- attempts to avoid anything associated with trauma
- tendency to isolate oneself
- feelings of detachment
- concern over burdening others with problems
- emotional numbing or restricted range of feelings
- difficulty trusting and/or feelings of betrayal
- difficulty concentrating or remembering
- feelings of self-blame and/or survivor guilt
- shame
- diminished interest in everyday activities or depression
- unpleasant past memories resurfacing
- suicidal thoughts
- loss of a sense of order or fairness in the world; expectation of doom and fear of the future
- anger towards religion or belief system; loss of beliefs
- desire for revenge

Helpful Coping Strategies

- mobilize a support system -- reach out and connect with others, especially those who may have shared the stressful event
- talk about the traumatic experience with empathic listeners
- cry
- hard exercise like jogging, aerobics, bicycling, walking
- relaxation exercise like yoga, stretching, massage
- humor
- prayer and/or meditation; listening to relaxing guided imagery; progressive deep muscle relaxation
- hot baths
- music and art
- maintain balanced diet and sleep cycle as much as possible
- avoid over-using stimulants like caffeine, sugar, or nicotine
- commitment to something personally meaningful and important every day
- hug those you love, pets included
- eat warm turkey, boiled onions, baked potatoes, cream-based soups -- these are tryptophane activators, which help you feel tired but good (like after Thanksgiving dinner)
- proactive responses toward personal and community safety -- organize or do something socially active
- write about your experience -- in detail, just for yourself or to share with others

People are usually surprised that reactions to trauma can last longer than they expected. It may take weeks, months, and in some cases, many years to fully regain equilibrium. Many people will get through this period with the help and support of family and friends. But sometimes friends and family may push people to "get over it" before they're ready. Let them know that such responses are not helpful for you right now, though you appreciate that they are trying to help. Many people find that individual, group, or family counseling are helpful, and in particular, EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) is a phenomenally rapid and wonderful therapeutic method. Another superior therapeutic method is IFS (Internal Family Systems). Either way, the key word is CONNECTION -- ask for help, support, understanding, and opportunities to talk.

The Chinese character for crisis is a combination of two words -- danger and opportunity. People who fully engage in recovery from trauma discover unexpected benefits. As they gradually heal their wounds, survivors find that they are also developing inner strength, compassion for others, increasing self-awareness, and often the most surprising -- a greater ability to experience joy and serenity than ever before.

Other Resources

- David Baldwin's Trauma Pages: www.trauma-pages.com
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing International Assoc.: www.emdria.org
- The Center for Self-Leadership (IFS): www.selfleadership.org
- International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies: www.istss.org
- Jim Hopper's Trauma Website: www.jimhopper.com

[Return](#)

Provided by Trauma Information Pages
Eugene, Oregon USA * <http://www.trauma-pages.com>

Seven Guidelines of Helping People Ask for, and Accept, Help

Summary © Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW, August 2009

* **Outreach/Education/Exposure:** Regular, consistent promotion of services and programs (name and literature visible and prominent, even ubiquitous!) – “For Everybody in Need.”

* **Testimonies/Normalizing/Destigmatizing:** Concrete stories/examples of *need-and-helpful-response* that make asking for/accepting help more and more familiar, routine, expected, and respected – through sermons, divrei Torah, bulletin pieces, courses, committee meetings, etc.

* **Flexibility, Openness, Fluidity:** People need a variety of opportunities and channels in order to get help: Gifts, Loans, Shared Equipment, Business Transactions, Networking Connections, Service Bartering, Moral Support and Informal Encouragement, Help with Marketing, etc., etc. (“It was taught in the name of R. Joshua: ‘More than the householder does for the poor man does the poor man do for the householder’...”-- *Midrash Ruth Rabbah 5:9 on 2:18*)

* **Required Helpfulness -- Key is Empowerment:** So many folks do not want to be (or be perceived to be) dependent – *and* it is an important part of people’s healing and growth for them to do for others. Utilizing their hard-won skills, and also developing new ones, can be a great blessing and an important aspect of growth and healing. (“Even a poor man who lives off *Tz’dakah* must perform acts of *Tz’dakah*. (translation: Just, Righteous Acts of Helping Another, sometimes referring to deeds, often connoting material assistance.)” -- *Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 7a*)

* **Tactful, Judicious, Discreet, Compassionate Partnering:** Interpersonal stance of leaders and of the community is critical – accompanying words need to be sensitive and supportive. (Consider, e.g., metaphor of *Hashavat Aveidot*. translation: The obligation of returning lost possessions to their rightful owner.)

* **Building a Tolerance for Change and the Cyclical Nature of Socioeconomics:** Part of our human nature relies heavily on routine, predictability, and consistency – but social, political, and economic realities shift, sometimes rapidly. (“Poverty is a Wheel” – *Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 151b*)

* **The Ultimate Value, and Imperfection, of any Community:** The extended *mishpucha* (translation: family) of the Jewish community will do its best – and make some mistakes, as mortals.