

Some Jewish and Clinical Tools for Spiritual Recovery after Communal Trauma

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Some Materials for Our Exploration

Assembled by Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW

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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*

Phase Model for how communities respond to disasters:

I. Impact Phase: Disaster strikes, bringing death, injury, destruction...

Victims and survivors take stock of their immediate losses

Fear is the dominant emotion, arousal is high, often heroic activities of rescue and recovery

II. Post-Impact; “Honeymoon” Phase – after initial recovery, may last several weeks

Altruistic responses and attention/assistance create “therapeutic community” with a kinship bond among those who endured the experience together

“Super-volunteers,” unready to deal with their own losses, work for extremely long hours

May be unrealistic expectations of help from government agencies

III. Disillusionment Phase – when disaster is off the front pages, organized support starts to be withdrawn

Realities of losses, bureaucratic constraints, breakdown of informal support networks, financial insecurity, and permanent changes must now be faced

Anger and frustration soar

Questions arise about whether the disaster could have been avoided

May result in depression, social withdrawal, estrangement from family, domestic violence, and alcohol or drug misuse

When severe and chronic, these problems are seen as a “second disaster”

Disillusionment can persist for months or one or two years following a disaster

IV. Recovery Phase – prolonged period of return to community and individual adjustment or equilibrium; may take years

Survivors come to realize that rebuilding their property, restoring order in their lives, and getting back to normal are primarily their responsibility

Adapted from B. Raphael, *When Disaster Strikes: How Individuals and Communities Cope with Catastrophe* (New York: Basic Books, 1986)

Tasks in Coping with Public Tragedy: Proactive approach to coping.....

Fosters empowerment...Identifies what a person is trying to do in his or her coping

Can suggest to potential helpers what they might support, assist, redirect for the one being helped

Goal, in general, ought to be to enable individuals to help themselves

- I. **Physical Tasks** (save, rescue, shield, emergency care, provide haven...)
- II. **Psychological Tasks** (diminish terror, renew security...)
- III. **Social Tasks** (command structure; organize helpers; communicate/inform...)
- IV. **Spiritual Tasks** (how/why/what now: meaning, connection, transcendence...)

.....

Responses to loss and trauma will be mediated by many variables, including:

1. The nature of the **prior relationships** that are affected by the tragic events, relationships whose values and roles may only be fully appreciated in hindsight
2. The **way** in which the loss and trauma take place
3. The **concurrent circumstances** of those affected by the tragic events
4. The **coping strategies** that the bereaved person has learned to use in efforts to manage previous encounters with loss and trauma
5. The **developmental status** of the bereaved person....
6. The **support or assistance** that the bereaved person receives from others after the loss, including the nature of the support or assistance, how it is offered or made available, and how the bereaved person perceives that support

Adapted from Charles A. Corr, "Loss, Grief, and Trauma in Public Tragedy," Chap. 6 in *Living with Grief: Coping with Public Tragedy*, ed. by Marcia Lattanzi-Licht and Kenneth J. Doka (Washington, DC: Hospice Foundation of America, 2003); pages 71-74.

Common reactions to traumatic death/loss may include:

1. When a loss or death is sudden and unanticipated, its shock effects tend to **overwhelm a mourner's capacity to cope**. There is no opportunity to say good-bye and finish unfinished business....There may be an obsessive effort to reconstruct events so as to comprehend and prepare for them in a retrospective way.
2. The violence, mutilation, and destruction in traumatic events may produce feelings of **terror, fear, and anxiety**. These feelings may be accompanied by a sense of vulnerability, victimization, and powerlessness. May also be fantasies of grotesque dying and aggressive thoughts of revenge.
3. When a traumatic event is perceived as preventable, those who are left alive tend to view it as something that could have been avoided. It appears to be both a wilful or irresponsibly negligent event as well as an unprovoked violation. As a result, victims of trauma may become **angry, outraged, and frustrated**. Hence they strive intensely to find the cause of the event, fix responsibility, and impose punishment. By contrast, when a traumatic event is perceived as random, its unpredictability and uncontrollability can be terrifying. To ward off such terror, victims **often blame themselves**...
4. Experiencing multiple deaths or losses in a traumatic encounter – especially when they occur simultaneously or in rapid succession as happened on 9/11 – can produce a form of **bereavement overload** in which mourners find it difficult to sort out and work through their losses, grief reactions, and mourning processes for each individual tragedy.
5. A mourner's personal encounter with death in a traumatic event can involve a significant threat to personal survival or can follow a massive or shocking confrontation with the death and mutilation of others. In the former instance, one is likely to experience **fear, terror, heightened arousal, a sense of abandonment and helplessness, and increased vulnerability**; in the latter instance, horrifying sensory stimuli (sights, sounds, smells) often produce reactive phenomena, such as **nightmares, flashbacks, and intrusive images or memories**.

Adapted from Therese A. Rando, "Complications in mourning traumatic death," in Kenneth J. Doka (Ed.), *Living with Grief: After Sudden Loss, Suicide, Homicide, Accident, Heart Attack, Stroke* (Washington, DC: Hospice Foundation of America, 1996)

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....

The Role(s) of the Rabbi in Trauma Recovery
Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW and Brian Grobois, MD
Workshop at JBFCS “Building Safe Communities” Conference
October 7, 2002/1 Heshvan 5763

Seven Roles that Rabbis/Cantors/Educators Might Play in Trauma Recovery
In no special order; not separate and discreet but integrated and “interflowing”

Educator

Shiurim, Sermons, Divrei Torah and T’fillah
Synagogue bulletin pieces
One-on-one

Rabbinic/Spiritual Counselor

One-on-one
With couples and family groups

Symbolic Exemplar; “Spiritual Sherpa”

Representing/standing for something
Role modeling; non-verbal embodying

Public/Communal Relations & Media Persona

Respond to TV, radio, print press
Liaison with government
Connections with other denominations and religious groups

“Healer”

Helping people to integrate the suffering and loss into the life of the community
E.g., MiSheberakh, Birkat HaGomel, Comments that bring people’s real concerns into the davvening/laining, Niggunim/breathing

Referral Source/Agent

Connecting people successfully to resources out there
Following up beyond the in-person conversation or meeting

Outreach Worker and Organizer

Initiating efforts (for example, shul phone-tree on the night of 9/11/01, or special use of the Sukkah two weeks later, or expanded Hanukkah program as a “Tish’im” on 12/11/01)
Team Manager

How to reach us for Consultation:

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**The Role(s) of the Rabbi /Cantor/Jewish Educator, etc. in Trauma Recovery:
Ten Things to Watch Out For...**

in no special order

- * Clash between roles
- * Imbalance among roles: Emotional, Spiritual, Physical tolls
- * Bad fit between pressing demands and your particular experience, preference, or mood at the moment
- * "Secondary retraumatization"; "vicarious retraumatization"
- * Expectations that people have of one-stop shopping or one-stop triage
- * Exigencies of pulpit demands colliding or competing with trauma demands
- * Difficulty maintaining presence, sensitivity, connectedness; and potential for slipping into a pro-forma "I feel your pain"
- * Danger inherent in "expert" role, image, or stance
- * Need to take oneself out of the center frequently
- * Need to call upon or cultivate an "interpretive" or "narrative" stance, to complement the "what to do" approach

Seven Areas/Categories of Spiritual Self –Care for *K’lei Kodesh*/Clergy
in no special order, and definitely overlapping
Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW © April 2005

1. Regular *Spiritual Self-Assessment* and Re-Assessment;
Perennial Personal Pastoral Pulse-taking
2. Substantive *Peer & Collegial Support*; Sustaining Sustaining Relationships
3. *Syntonic Strategies* – Repertoire of Spiritual Resources that Strengthen and Support
(Including, of course, Jewish spiritual texts, rituals, and practices -- but also nature walks,
music, humor, “retail therapy,” carbohydrates, journal writing, etc. etc.)
4. “*Uncovering the Obvious*” – e.g., pausing for 2-3 minutes in davvening
5. *Saying No*: Boundary Setting, Clarifying, and Maintaining
Knowing ones limits and even rejoicing in them
6. Considering/Maintaining *The BIG PICTURE**
7. Blank/White *Space*; Silence; Breathing

* Consider this ‘exercise’ of Teddy Roosevelt’s:
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* (New 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*.

(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...

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) Tzetel 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

The funeral is an organized, purposeful, flexible, time-limited, and group-centered response to a loss (W. Lamers, “Psychological reactions to loss,” in *The Director*, pages 29-32, May, 1959.) In earlier societies, funerals consisted of several distinct stages that extended for months to a year. The funeral of a leader in earlier societies evoked participation of the entire community with those related to the deceased most closely involved. M. Eisenbruch (“Cross-cultural aspects of bereavement: A conceptual framework for comparative analysis,” *Cross-cultural Medicine and Psychiatry*, 8, 1984, pages 283-309) details the sequence of rituals in a number of earlier societies from rituals of **separation** to later rituals of **transition** (dealing with the spirit world), and final rituals of **integration** that served to release the community from the period of formal mourning and restore social order.

Adapted from William M. Lamers, Jr., MD, “When a Public Figure Dies,” chapter 5 in *Living with Grief: Coping with Public Tragedy*, edited by Marcia Lattanzi-Licht and Kenneth J. Doka (Washington, DC: Hospice Foundation of America, 2003); p. 58

Roles of Ritual in Public Tragedy

1. Meaningful action: do something; respond, reorganize, reassure
2. Reaffirm community, when potentially or actually fragmented
3. Recognition; Solidarity with victims; Social validation
4. Structure public grief; offering cues/models
5. Reconstructs the narrative – interpreting the tragedy in philosophical, spiritual, and/or historical frameworks

Kinds/Forms of Rituals in Public Tragedy

1. Spontaneous
 Rise out of collective impulse, to symbolically define and master the tragedy
 Do something; Serve as sources of information and action
 Great value in their inclusiveness;
 reaffirm collective stake, social recognition and support
2. Planned
 - a. Private: Personalized; specific to that unique person
 - b. Organizational: Members who share in the loss are given unique opportunity and permission to grieve; can educate people about grief and trauma; frame a definition of the event; offer collective action
 - c. Public: Offer reassurance and support, reaffirms community, shows solidarity, structures grief, and offers a narrative of what happened and how to respond.
 Binding/Centering role: hold societal attention and suggest collective meaning and action.
3. Ongoing
 Making cycles and events as the public grieves;
 Anniversary rituals educate public about grief, offers the opportunity to reframe the significance of the tragedy; serve as rites of intensification, strengthening unity within and between groups.

Therapeutic Rituals:

Rituals offer powerful therapeutic interventions for individuals and groups:

- * **Rituals of continuity** reaffirm that the person is not forgotten
- * **Rituals of transition** reflect changes, points in the grief journey or collective response to the tragedy
- * **Rituals of reconciliation** allow individuals to finish business interrupted by tragedy
- * **Rituals of affirmation** celebrate the life of the person who died

In designing therapeutic rituals, need to keep in mind:

1. Be clear about the purpose
2. Should have elements that are both visible and symbolic
3. The goal, audience, and elements must arise from the narrative and collective experience of the group. Participants must have a key role in planning.
4. Allow participants to discuss and process the experienced

Adapted from Kenneth J. Doka, "Memorialization, Ritual, and Public Tragedy," Chapter 15 in *Living with Grief: Coping with Public Tragedy*, edited by Marcia Lattanzi-Licht and Kenneth J. Doka (Washington, DC: Hospice Foundation of America, 2003); pages 179-189.

“Be Strong Inside...”(Psalm 27:14):
On Approaching the *Yahrzeit* of 9/11/01, as Jewish Families
Some Ideas Organized by Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW,
Rabbinic Director, JBFCS; August 2002

Jewish parents face unique challenges -- and have at their disposal, unique spiritual resources -- as the *yahrzeit* (year-anniversary) of the 9/11 attacks approaches.

On the one hand, with the ongoing and murderous terror afflicting Israel, and rising anti-Semitic violence around the world, our pain and suffering, individually and collectively, have only exacerbated that of the already monumental tragedy and horrors of 9/11/01. Our people, our family have been subject to repeated assaults and losses, and in our hearts and in our children's minds, it can all merge into a terrifying and unrelenting state.

In the face of this, however, Jews are far from impotent or adrift, but have been shown (throughout history) to have some tools, some approaches, some strengths that can help us make it through. Simply put: Jews have resources of community, tradition, and faith to bolster ourselves through dark times.

The purpose of this memo, which should be read in conjunction with Dr. Robert Abramovitz's clinical guidance for this juncture, is simply to begin to flesh out some of these texts and strategies. Every community, every family, every child, every moment is different, so please consider this a general guide or a pointer to possibilities, and adapt it to your particular situation and needs. Before jumping in with any of these, it's a good idea to assess who you're dealing with (e.g., ages, histories, personalities of children); what you've been sensing from them (e.g., hypervigilance or denial/avoidance of all this); what you yourself might find comforting and engaging; and the like.

The goal of turning to these resources together is really just that – *to be together*. It is not to neatly package or explain away the inexplicable, to deny pain or silence anger, nor to insist on “getting over it” or (in current parlance) “achieving closure.” It is, rather, to enable people to relate to one another, to the broader community, and to an age-old tradition in light of both the horrors and the *hessed* (lovingkindness) of the past year(s), perhaps to experience some care and transcendence, a sense of hope and direction. Some of these, thus, entail discussion of ideas and insights, while others are more about simply spending dedicated time together.

With that, let me point to some possibilities, in no special order. These resources are not discreet, but rather overlap substantially. Since this season in the Jewish calendar is already replete with opportunities for expanded prayer and ritual, we focus here on seven other categories: Music, Wise Sayings, Stories, Tz'dakah, Psalms, Torah, and Nature.

Again, remember to begin by considering your needs and what is most “syntonic” for you and your family:

I. Music...Songs...Niggunim/Wordless Chants
--

Few healing resources can match the power of music. Even (especially?) for those of us who cannot read music, and cannot (alas) play any instrument, hearing, singing, humming, swaying to, and otherwise giving oneself over to music is a very potent Jewish medicine for the spirit. You may wish to incorporate this into the bedtime ritual, at the dinner table, when walking the dog, etc.

Here are 18 songs, derived from the Book of Psalms, which your family or community might utilize, and a short description of what a *niggun* is:

INSERT

It is beyond the scope of this memo to provide the musical notation, but consider this omission an invitation to reach out to others (cantors, Jewish educators and musicians, community members), and join together in learning or re-learning tunes. I have had the pleasure of both receiving and leaving *niggunim* on voice mail messages.

2. Quotes and Wise Sayings

Our tradition and community is rich with aphorisms that embody profound guidance at once timely and timeless, reminding us of truths and possibilities that may be obscured in times of turmoil and distress. Here is a somewhat idiosyncratic selection of some 25 that may be related to 9/11 *yahrzeit* issues, in some way. These may be right to explore with your family, or they may simply remind you of some sources to turn to for pithy sayings and wise instruction -- from the Bible (e.g., Proverbs) and Talmud (e.g., Pirke Avot/Ethics of the Fathers), from the Middle Ages, from the Hassidic world, from centuries of Yiddish culture, etc.

Remember to be open to discussing the “ins and outs” of these -- what seems right *and* what is difficult, what feels helpful *and* what less so. Some children may find it helpful to make an illuminated poster out of one of these, some may want to expand upon it with their own original written commentary. You may want to explore one a night, for a week or more. Go with the flow.

INSERT

3. Stories

It is interesting that the verb used to tell a story is to *relate* a story, because the process of sharing a narrative offers profound opportunities for expanding and deepening *relationship* -- to one another, to the community, to God, and to tradition. No one story will be “the ultimate one,” universally helpful, inspiring, and comforting to all, but the goal should be to have a shared experience, a shared journey that may facilitate opening up and reaching for a common vocabulary to express what one has been through and what one feels/knows. Indeed, the goal of a shared “external” story in this context might be to stimulate the sharing of personal/“internal” stories from the past year. I would not over-curricularize any story, but travel through it together as a multifaceted prism, or an open-ended catalyst, for remembering and taking stock.

Once again, take seriously your family’s/your children’s profiles (including, perhaps, your “theology”) – but also don’t be afraid to take some risks. Somebody once asked: Sp how many stories are there? And there are two answers, really: an infinite number, or simply One. On the *yahrzeit* of 9/11, we seek both to relate our many stories and at the very same time to link them together in a/the transcendent Narrative.

Here are seven stories, mostly parables, that might be of use (feel free to change gender of protagonists, as desirable/helpful!):

INSERT:

One Recipe for Solace

Hard Heart and Helpful Hammer

King on the Road

Reb Elhanan’s Parable of the Farm

Stems Out of Scratches

Zeide – the One who Responds

All Kinds of Shapes

4. Tz'dakah/Tikkun Olam

At this juncture, as we simultaneously look back and look forward, it is very Jewish to remember those who have died by contributing to a better world, through both financial donations and (quite importantly for children and indeed for all of us) through concrete actions of care, justice, lovingkindness. The traditions of *Tz'dakah/Tikkun Olam* both empower us precisely at times when we may feel disempowered, enabling us to heal by doing something constructive – and, of course, it helps us fulfill the commandments to right society's inequities, to reach out to those less fortunate, etc., while marking the memory of those who died in an ennobling, future-oriented manner.

Consider both giving money to important causes – Jewish, Israeli, medical, political, intergroup relations, environmental, and so on – as well as taking on a physical task that you may not have otherwise undertaken (helping an elderly neighbor, cleaning a public park, cooking for a homeless shelter, etc.) *in the memory of those who have died*. In the course of this dedicated act, you will be re-aligning the material with the spiritual and erecting a living, spiritual memorial, as well as simply helping to build a better world.

5. Psalms

When we circulated some resources on September 12 of last year, we described how Jews have turned to Psalms, for thousands of years, in times of distress, with Psalms 20, 38, 85, 86, 102, 130, and 142 forming one cluster of seven psalms that have been read, chanted, and studied when the community itself was threatened.

Our tradition offers the Psalms as a flexible resource, which one may turn to, as needed, in small groups or large assemblies. In considering utilizing a Psalm within your family, consider its particular profile and needs. Some Psalms may be too complex or difficult to be useful for certain children, though even some of these may well contain a thought, a phrase, or a word that triggers meaningful associations/discussion.

One “re-writing” exercise that many teachers have used is a modified version of the infamous “MadLibs.” One takes a section of a psalm – perhaps one praising God, or petitioning God, or expressing distress or hope -- and in place of certain verbs and nouns, one substitutes images that may be culturally closer to home or carry more contemporary meaning or familiar resonance.

As it was last year, the Psalm that is said from Rosh Hodesh Ellul through the holiday of Sukkot, Psalm 27, can be most helpful in its messages and images, as well as in the tunes that have developed for some of its verses. Here is my translation.

INSERT

If your children are old enough and so inclined, here is a loose structure that may be used in exploring a psalm; it might be particularly useful if you haven't done this before.

INSERT

6. Torah

Torah is Life, of course, to the Jew, and we naturally turn to Torah study on the anniversary of a loss, dedicating this study to the memory of those who have gone, while nurturing our own spirits and rededicating our own lives. Depending on the ages and interests of your family, you might choose to study texts such as Job, *Eikhah*/ Lamentations or *Midrash Eikhah*, and the like, which, of course, deal with the challenges of suffering and devastation -- or you could turn to biblical stories (e.g., Noah) or prophetic texts (e.g., Jeremiah) or the Writings (e.g., Proverbs.) Families can join in studying a text with some commentaries, and then join in developing their own interpretations (with attribution), in written

form (prose, poetry, or dramatic form), on audiotape, through visual illumination, etc. These can, in turn, be shared with extended family members, synagogue or school community, and so on.

7. Nature

For many religious communities, and certainly for the Jewish world, re/turning to Creation is an age-old, potent healing direction to take. Enjoying the woods, relating to animals, observing the flow of bodies of water, contemplating a burning candle, appreciating sunsets, etc. can help restore a sense of peace and the possibility of wholeness and reconciliation.

Taking into account your particular situation and needs, consider integrating activities involving Nature that you might otherwise not enjoy. Remember to allow some silent moments wherein the encounter with Creation is direct and unmediated by too many words – a “metaverbal” experience.

On the other hand, you may want to utilize a line from Psalms as a focussing *kavvanah*/ meditation, or a prayer such as this one attributed to Reb Nahman of Bratslav:

INSERT

These are, then, some ideas for Jewish spiritual resources that can support families as we recall 9/11/01 and seek to come together, to heal and to grow. They come with sincere wishes for strength, consolation, and support, and with prayers for a 5763 and a world of peace, justice, and hope.

Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW
New York Jewish Healing Center -- National Center for Jewish Healing/
Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services

* Two other helpful pamphlets that have recently crossed my desk include:

Helping Children Cope with Terror/For Parents and Educators: What You Need to Help Children Feel Strong, published by Project Liberty at Ohel, 718/851-6300

Fears Through the Years: A Parent's Guide to Helping Children Cope, published by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (1/800-38NAESP) and TIAA CREF (www.tiaa-cref.org)

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

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

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.

*THE NEW YORK JEWISH HEALING CENTER/
JEWISH BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP PROGRAM
A JEWISH CONNECTIONS PROGRAM OF JBFCS*

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER IN MANHATTAN

WARMLY INVITES YOU TO JOIN US FOR

LIGHTS IN THE DARKNESS:

**A HANUKKAH PROGRAM
FOR BEREAVED JEWS**

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2001

7:00 – 9:00 P.M.

Congregation Habonim

44 West 66th Street

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MYRA SHENDELL, C.S.W.

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DISCUSSION OF THE HEALING RESOURCES OF THE SEASON,
AND HOLIDAY REFRESHMENTS**

PLEASE NOTE:

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90 DAYS SINCE THE WORLD TRADE CENTER DISASTER,
SPECIAL MEMORIALS WILL BE INCLUDED.**

THIS PROGRAM IS FREE OF CHARGE

PLEASE RSVP TO MYRA SHENDELL AT 212/399-2320, EXT. 211

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!*

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.



“Black Also Has Many Shades” Art Workshop led by Tamar Hazut, MA
with the Jewish Board’s 9/11 Group in Jerusalem, Israel, December 2005

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 piryo 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-arets 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*)

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

Partners in Healing and Restoration:
Among the “Necessary Communal Relationships”
that a Synagogue/Rabbi/Cantor/Etc May Need
in Helping after a Communal Trauma

A beginning attempt at a listing – not in order of priority, accessibility, or anything else

Police Precinct(s)

Fire Department(s)

Trauma Centers at Hospitals

Jewish Family Service Agency (esp. Trauma specialists)

UJA/Federation and Jewish Communal Relations Offices

Other Mental Health/Trauma Agencies and Organizations

Closest FEMA Office

NAJC and Local Chaplains’ Association(s)

Interfaith Clergy Association(s)

American Red Cross Office

Mayor’s Office of Emergency Preparedness

Mayor’s Office of Disaster Services

Safe Horizon 1-800-621-HOPE

Neighboring Houses of Worship

Local Food Programs

Emergency Charitable Funds

Expecting the Unexpected: Can We Prepare for Communal Trauma?

Consider developing, far in advance:

- A Congregational Trauma Response Team
- Training Sessions on Trauma Preparedness
- Toolkits/Ready-Made and Handy Materials
- “Congregational Inventory” (six-page example available)

Maintain (and update regularly) a Resource List of community members who can provide various kinds of help, everything from:

trauma/mental health consultation

construction

carpentry and plumbing repairs

laundry and dry cleaning

cooking (also food storage)

shopping

babysitting

transportation (e.g., to doctors appointments)

housecleaning

groundskeeping

temporary housing

yoga, meditation instructors

writing workshop leaders

singing/*niggun* leaders

musicians, drumming and percussion leaders

nurses, doctors, physical and occupational therapists

pharmaceutical guidance and assistance

specialists in Reiki, Alexander Technique, etc.

art and movement therapists

bicycling, jogging, aerobics, walking leaders

pet therapists

humorists, raconteurs, comedians

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*.” -- *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*.)

* **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* of the Jewish community will do its best – and make some mistakes, as mortals.