

Coping with the in-between



THE DOCTOR IS IN
DR. BATYA L. LUDMAN

How am I today, I wonder as I check in with my body. Did I say today? Oops no, right now that sounds way too long. How am I in this minute? This very minute? That is much better.

The goal of terrorism is to try to terrorize us. For most of us, we are not actually “in” danger but are rather worrying about danger. That said, I try to remind myself to be mindful. I remind myself that in this minute I really am safe and okay, and this approach, along with a few healthy breaths, and at times a soothing hand on my heart, definitely helps.

If you are having trouble sleeping, are eating too much or can’t look at food, if you are teary at the drop of a hat, can’t focus or concentrate, don’t remember what day or month it is or where you were when, and jump at a sound that feels like it might just be the beginning of a siren or a boom, your reactions, while they don’t feel at all good, are absolutely normal in these very abnormal times. You are not going crazy. It just may feel like it, as you are probably feeling deregulated or off balance.

Given that many of you reading this have never been through anything as difficult as this war and are finding it hard to feel safe in your own body, let alone your world, it is important to acknowledge your level of stress and unease. With things literally coming at us from all directions, how can we not be feeling it? This in itself is okay. Please God, this will all end, and end well, but not soon enough for any of us. In addition to our prayers for our hostages and our loved ones, we all pray never to have to go through this again.

In the past month, we have all managed to do okay and cope as we look around and hear too many stories that would be almost unbelievable if they were not unfortunately true. Writing them down or telling others may take out some of the sting and enable us to see the bizarreness of it all. Who makes an evacuation plan from a kiddie pool or the local park with two young children should a siren go off? Who plans outings around when a siren “might” go off, and who wonders when is the best time to go to the bathroom based on the same lack of information? What senior citizen has to think about how they are going to get up off the ground on the

side of the road where they lay down when the siren went off while they were driving? I’m sure you have your own stories that bear witness to this time.

I SPEND a lot of my time these days doing grief and bereavement counseling. Sadly, too many of us have been to not one or two, but many funerals. What stage are we in, I ask myself? Don’t quote me on this, but it’s best to say for many of us, we are in the “neither here nor there” stage. We can acknowledge that we are in a very uncomfortable place at the moment, and in many ways this is adaptive; but how and when will it end? It is not in sight just yet, and this is extremely hard on everyone.

Often, we can handle things in the short term, but when they stretch out for what seems like an endless amount of time, it becomes that much more difficult to cope, day after day. We feel exhausted and drained, but at times we have too much energy and too much on our minds and wonder what to worry about first.

We may revisit that initial disbelief and the sense of surrealism we felt in the early days; but unfortunately, as reality has started to sink in, it has created yet another type of “hard” to deal with. We are grieving individually and collectively for so many things – both very big and very small. But, in part, even though we may have lost loved ones, our homes, and even our whole community

and already have attended many funerals and *shivas* during this war, much of our grieving will be delayed, as we are far from done with it. Having no idea how long it will be or even how far we are into the war, it is not yet “safe” to fully grieve. That time will come. We may be very sad and feel these tremendous losses, but there are so many and they are so close in time, one after the other, that it is sometimes almost impossible to comprehend.

As we went through three years of COVID-19, we thought we were living in unprecedented and very difficult times, but that seems to pale by comparison for many right now. All we want is a sense of normalcy back – to be in control, to feel safe, not feel exhausted or overwhelmed, and to love our loved ones as we once did.

IN SPITE of these days, it is extremely important to remember and remind yourself that this war too shall end. Hopefully sooner, more successfully, and with fewer losses than our already shocked brains can imagine.

Whether you have lost someone, are worried about someone, are waiting for news,



WHO MAKES an evacuation plan from a playground?



EXERCISE HELPS.

have a totally disrupted schedule, or no schedule at all, you are probably grieving with your entire body in ways you never thought possible. Because we are still in the middle of things, you may not even be able to start to grieve because for whatever reason, you are being asked to or need to hold it together for others. Your job right now is to get through your day as well as you can. Some days, this is more difficult than others.

One way to hold it together is to be there for yourself as best as you can. If something will not be good for you, don't do it. I have debriefed many

Remind yourself that this war too shall end.

people in the last month who have suffered graphic exposure to some horrific sights, sounds, and smells. I can't suggest strongly enough that you take a break from this, unless you are forced to or have a good reason to keep your exposure level high.

Turn off the television, put down your phone, and listen to the news only once or twice a day. Try to put yourself on a need-to-know basis. Your nervous system will thank you for it.

While none of us is in a party mood, you may find yourself with a lot of energy that needs to be released. Whether you hit the pavement for a run, do jumping jacks, or an exercise video at home – try to meet up with a trusted friend who makes you feel good, help someone out, volunteer, learn with others, write up your stories, sing, paint, cook, bake, meditate, or pray. Try to see what your body needs in order for you to relax and turn off, even for a short period of time.

You must refuel. You owe it to yourself and to those around you.

ELISABETH KUBLER-ROSS has written about the various stages of grief.

While we may still be in shock over the enormity of the situation, none of us living here can deny that we are at war. In fact, it's not uncommon to vacillate between lethargy and anger. Recognize that although your feelings are legitimate, some may have no place at the moment, and you may be forced to put them on the back burner. This may be especially true in the case of anger.

As we deal more and more with the hostages, the underground tunnels, the well-being of our precious soldiers, our daily sanity and that of our children and grandchildren, we need to remind ourselves that each person's grief is their own, and each is legitimate. No one person's story is easier to bear or trivial.

Every person brings to this war his or her own personal story – whether in the present or from a previous trauma or even a history of intergenerational trauma with family who have been through the Holocaust and thought “never again.”



YOU ARE not going crazy. (Towfiqu Barbhuiya/Unsplash)

remember all the good and empower them to just notice even a small amount? Do you look around and see the tons of flags, the feeling of “together we will win,” and appreciate the massive amounts of volunteering going on? In what ways have you contributed to making this past month bearable for someone else? Working to help others out will improve your mood and state of mind.

FINALLY, IT is important to point out that how you view the situation will determine how you will cope.

As I write this now, I am hearing many red alerts on my phone. Thankfully, they are not in my area. However, just after two sirens went off in the area in which we were located, within a few short hours last night we needed to drive an hour to our home. Yes, we said a prayer and I counted down every five to 10 minutes that passed, and we focused on driving more quickly through more difficult areas, and we did some relaxation breathing as we drove, but we did it.

If you truly believe that you not only can, but will, get through this very difficult time, you will put your energy and driven-ness to work for you. You will cope by creating meaning. You will be more positive and find other things to focus on and give you hope. You will win this war personally for yourself, as well as for our beloved country and Jews worldwide, and you and all of us will recover.

We are resilient. This is not something to be taken lightly, as things may for now feel as if they are getting worse before they start to get better.

We will work together, life will get better, and we will win this war. Please don't forget that. ■

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WE PRAY we never have to go through this again. (Photos: Flash90)