

Make each minute count



THE DOCTOR IS IN
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We've been through a tough 15 months and while thankfully things have opened up, allowing us to move forward, each in our own way, we have now been hit with further tragedy.

The loss of lives in Meron has filled us with tremendous sadness – the stories and pictures horrific – which has impacted our thoughts, feelings, mood and more. We have not just had to deal with one sudden, unexpected, traumatic event – but now another.

One can only hope that the lessons learned from the pandemic have changed our lives and our relationships sufficiently such that we will not go back to our old ways of responding and judging others unfavorably.

Rather, we will incorporate and focus on the good things that came out of it as we slowly emerge from the safety and shelter we have built for ourselves and our families. As a Hatzalah first responder on the Psychotrauma Crisis and Response Unit, I can attest that the tremendous caring and outpouring of help, love and attention I have witnessed in the past week is something of which we here in Israel should be incredibly proud.

While no one could have gone through all that we have and not be affected, we need to align where we are now in our heads and our bodies with our current situation. It is probably safe to say that almost everyone, from the youngest to the young at heart, has been experiencing battle fatigue, exhaustion and sadness.

As we begin to lower our masks – figuratively and literally – and socialize more, it is crucial to move into the next phase in a way that enables us to look after ourselves and others with the care and compassion we all so deserve and need. We have been true heroes and the first thing we must do is to recognize all we've been through, acknowledge our losses out loud, and pat ourselves on the back for all we have endured. This lends credence to all that has happened and allows our brain and body to slow down long enough to truly register it.

While not everyone has lost a loved one or suffered financial losses, with all of the uncertainty, we have all lost time, privacy, freedom, companionship, the celebration of life events in ways previously imagined, mobility and so much more.

Having recently spent six days at a (thankfully) virtual international conference on grief, death and dying, I have been once again reminded about the tremendous importance of self-care. If we don't strengthen and look after ourselves, we will be hard-pressed to be present enough to take care of our needs, let alone those of the people around us, both now and for the future. We have been forced to slow down in what we hope is a meaningful way. Now we must not forget, but rather take forward these valuable lessons we have learned.

For example, telecommuting has transformed our bedrooms and living rooms into home offices. While travel might have enjoyably been minimized to the time it took to walk to our computer, boundaries have been blurred in every way imaginable, and our work life never seems to end. That one little assignment inadvertently gets dealt with outside of business hours, albeit often in bedroom slippers and sweatpants.

If you can't get away from work, and if you can't enjoy a break, how can you rejuvenate? On the other hand, if you are working at home and are constantly interrupted by children who need supervision or help in scheduling the next Zoom, how can you focus on your work? Your sense of effectiveness and self-worth, as both parent and employee, may feel diminished – leaving you feeling lost and unmotivated.

For the most part, Israelis have shown themselves to be very resilient, making the best of a difficult situation and even prospering. That said, an event such as this, especially the longer it goes on, combined with concurrent high levels of uncertainty, wreaks havoc on emotional and physical health. While our "numbers" look better than ever, now we are just beginning to see the true impact of this pan-



(StandSome Worklifestyle/Unsplash)

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democratic. Marriages, the parent-child dyad and other relationships are showing the wear and tear of prolonged stress due to mental and physical exhaustion at home, school, workplace, synagogue and elsewhere.

THE BEST gift you can give now to yourself and your loved ones now is to take care of yourself in a way that makes you feel better. Acknowledging how you feel is an important first step. This involves bringing awareness to and checking in with yourself or being mindful as to how you really are doing. You must tune into the messages that your nervous system is sending you.

What sensations, for example, are you noticing? Where in your body are they, good or bad? What are your concomitant thoughts? Have you been clenching your jaw, eating mindlessly and sleeping poorly? Is your stomach in knots? Do you suffer from headaches or are you having difficulty focusing or concentrating? Are you irritable and

impatient? Are you avoiding others or happy to be in their company? Have you resumed work or if looking for work, how is the process going? How is your commute? Which feels better – working from home or the office?

Are you working on better transitioning from work to home, even if that just involves breathing as you exit your work office at home and reminding yourself to enjoy a calm moment before opening the door? Do your introvert and extrovert parts feel okay? Are you entertaining or going out? Are you ready for large weddings and other social gatherings or do you still prefer watching from home? Are you fearful and concerned? Once you can begin to understand your triggers, you can begin to control your anxiety and lower your stress level quite quickly.

What have you missed during this time you'd like to be doing again? What don't you need to bring back into your life? Are you carving out personal time – even a little bit to begin with – to do the things you like, be it work in the garden, complete a puzzle or sit on your deck? Do you laugh, listen to music and nourish your soul? Have you gone back into a synagogue or found a way to increase your spiritual life? Are you making time for exercise?

All of these can bring a much-needed sense of calm. How does your mental and physical health feel more essential to you now after all that you've been through? Have you been able to achieve a greater sense of well-being? Have you shared your feelings and thoughts with your partner or others? Have you learned to take better control over the things you can be in control over and leave behind or let go of those many things you can't control? Have you worked to avoid over-scheduling while still scheduling time to connect with people you now realize you care about? Have you reached out to others to see how they are doing? Have you participated in a game night or Zoom trivia?

You may discover that tweaking your schedule and changing your hours will provide you with increased flexibility, enabling you to turn off your work computer and spend more time doing things you enjoy, leaving you feeling better. If you are not feeling good, now is the time to seek outside help.

It's now time to reorganize your priorities and ask, "What do I want to do and with whom?" rather than, "What do I have to do?" If it doesn't feel right, do you have to do it and if so, why? Consciously making choices and being intentional in what you do as you get back into things is a way to bring more meaning, balance and greater appreciation into your life as you move forward. Recognize that it is not easy to motivate yourself and spring into action. It takes effort, patience and kindness as you establish a new routine.

After all that we have been through, isn't it more crucial than ever to not just count the minutes – but to make each minute count? ■

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