

The day not yet after

Returning to old roles when nothing is the same



THE DOCTOR IS IN
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I can't believe that it is coming up on three months since the war began. When Hanukkah arrived, many of us felt as though it were still Simchat Torah. We felt as though time stood still. They say that everything has its season and that there is a time for everything under heaven – a time for war and a time for peace. Ah, we would so very much welcome some peace and quiet right about now, but it is not yet at hand. While perhaps I am more distracted than ever before, my prayers have nonetheless become more focused and sincere.

As my three-year-old grandson would say, "I want a lot, a lot." We all want a lot right now. Peace, safety, health, and the speedy return of our loved ones – be they our hostages or our soldiers.

For some of us in Israel, past routines are beginning to re-emerge. More frequent attendance at work or school instead of from home; an appreciation of the reduction in the number of sirens and missiles; and restaurants in the center of the country starting to fill up. Yet no matter where we go or what we do, almost all conversations sooner or later seem to return to war talk. Usually, it is sooner. It's not easy to concentrate. Sleep is still not great for most, as we overindulge in every hint of news. There is worry, too, which gets in the way of our ability to focus. We smile, though, as we come across beautiful human-interest stories: a dad who arrived home from the front within hours of his child's birth; hearing about the nonstop volunteer work that has continued long past what one might have expected; and, of course, people who have been there for one another in ways no one could ever have imagined.

Despite this, we are all holding onto some degree of sadness. We each know someone who has been displaced, had property and possessions destroyed, lost their income or sense of personal safety, was taken hostage, seriously wounded, or, God forbid, killed. While losses that are not the actual death of a loved one may seem less consequential, we cannot compare one loss to another. Each person's loss is their loss and is the worst for them. It is important to be nonjudgmental with others and gentle with ourselves.

With it comes the loss of our naivete

We are grieving for so many different things. Everyone has been impacted on some level by having their assumptive world turned upside down within a very short period of time. Nothing is the same as it was or will be again, and with that comes the loss of our naivete and, for now, our sense of routine, safety, and comfort.

We are a small country with at times zero degrees of separation with the person just mentioned in the news. As time has passed, and the enormity and gravity of the situation have become clearer, with somewhat more ability to breathe we are able to start to make space to begin to grieve. In an earlier column, I spoke about our grief having been delayed or put on hold. How can we take the time and energy to grieve when we are at war?

For some, the losses were so great that the grief was immediate, as their lives were torn apart. For others, a palpable sadness has slowly and painfully crept in. While

normal, it does not feel good. What we all wishfully had hoped would be a short-term event has become more chronic and problematic, with solutions, if any, being very difficult to envision. What may have started as disbelief for many has morphed into sadness and anger.

Exhausted by a heaviness in the air, we may note that our sleep and eating habits are not what they should be. We may even notice an increase in somatic complaints. We are still more hypervigilant than we once were, and find ourselves dealing with intrusive thoughts and images. We feel disorganized and catch ourselves blaming others and getting into petty fights, as everything feels both important and irrelevant at the same time. To make matters worse, that sadness is often tinged at times with a bit of hopelessness and helplessness. Yes, most of us are at the very least anxious and also somewhat depressed.

This is normal. This is our grief, and whether we are able to acknowledge it or not, we are mourning our many losses. It has been said that the more you love, the more you grieve, and we are grieving for many things. Most of the time, we have all loved

so much about living here. At this moment, however, we may feel overwhelmed, agitated, dysregulated, in pain, perhaps spiritually and maybe in other ways, vulnerable, anxious, and afraid. Relationships may feel strained, and we find ourselves not enjoying people or things that once gave us pleasure. They may seem in some ways meaningless or irrelevant now. And, yes, with all this heaviness comes more frequent sighing.

All is not right with our part of the world and beyond – it is truly ailing.

SO, IF you find yourself nodding at some of the feelings I have described above, I implore you not to despair as you assess where you are holding. It may feel awful, but it is very normal at this stage of your grief. None of us want to be living our lives like this now, but in fighting for our very existence we have little choice, given that we are at war. This war will end, and you need to remind yourself of that. We

are resilient, and even though it is difficult right now, we will get through this.

Ask yourself how you are doing and check in with others you know. Check in also to see how your children are doing. If you are okay, they, too, will probably be okay. You are not alone; and if you feel that your grief is more difficult than it should be, is excessive, you're feeling stuck, are having suicidal thoughts, or would simply like to talk with a professional, please seek help. There are many therapists who are seeing people – individually or in a group, in person or remotely – with similar issues. Making the first appointment is often the most difficult part.

HOW WE begin to prepare for "the day after" is a question that many are now beginning to think about. This must be addressed as a nation as we begin to determine how we want to see ourselves, moving forward. It is also a question that each of us must answer for ourselves. Given all that we have been through, what do we want and how do we get there? How do we look for the positives in our grief and appreciate the small joys?

They are there, and we must find them and be thankful. We have grown personally in the past after we have had losses; and as we find a way to put meaning into our lives, we will grow better and stronger.

What attributes do we value, and how do we pass them on to our children and our grandchildren? If you can find a way to do this, you will indeed feel transformed. ■

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OUR SENSE of routine, safety, and comfort has been shattered for now. (Chuttersnap/Unsplash)