

The light at the end of the tunnel



THE DOCTOR IS IN
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Last week was a banner one for stress. Looking back, it was actually quite funny as my colleagues were determined to take me out of the dinosaur era with respect to my patient files.

They extolled the virtues of scanning the files and saving them electronically, while I strongly endorsed paper, pen and my filing cabinets. The next morning, I went to my beloved one-year-old computer to continue working on this column and my computer was dead, and boiling hot. I did what any trained first responder would do. But even after unplugging it and placing it on the tile floor of the washroom to cool it down, it was still another two hours before it would even respond at all to my touch.

After replacing the hard drive, four days later the backup program has still only restored 15% of my files. And who knows if I will ever see many of them again? Ah... a big shout-out for the old-fashioned way. I managed to stay remarkably calm, though as of this writing I still have no idea what my back-up program will do, but I have now added other backups and a stronger anti-virus program because in this day and age one can't be too careful.

This all, of course, took place while spending valuable hours trying to call the kupat cholim and book my coronavirus vaccine on a short Friday while trying to prepare for Shabbat. Being a big fan of the "you can only be in control of what you can be in control of" theory on maintaining sanity, I thought I'd share some of my stress-busters in the event that, like most of us, you too might be able to benefit. Here we go.

1. Before doing anything, ever, breathe. Breathing properly, which takes about six minutes to learn and two minutes to do, helps you regulate your nervous system, and this is critical. When stressed, we move into flight/fight/freeze mode and our primitive brain takes over. That is important if a tiger is chasing us, but otherwise we need to use the logical part of our brain, and bringing that back online (no pun intended) requires calming our nervous system in order to strategize.
2. Set priorities. Use your time wisely. It is a gift not to be wasted. Don't allow yourself to get overwhelmed. When too much is happening at the same time, decide what are the three most important things to be done, put the rest on hold and focus on what truly needs your attention. Don't ruminate or worry about the things that you can't change but rather let those things go.
3. Acknowledge the challenges. Appreciate them as opportunities and not real disasters. Be positive and take action so that you can help determine the outcome.
4. Divide and conquer. Reach out and enlist the support of others. Who can be a resource and source of strength for you right now? Family, friends, professionals? Determine who these people are and seek them out.
5. Remember the important things in life. Over the past year you've probably had no shortage of reminders. If you have your health you really do have everything. At the end of a day, it's only a computer, right? It's only money. None of these are important if you don't have your health with which to appreciate them. Message to self: When it's your turn, make sure getting the vaccine is a high priority.
6. ASK YOURSELF what you can do to help the people who are helping you. For example, while my husband was working with the computer expert, I took over many of his Friday afternoon chores. This actually gave me a new appreciation

of all the things he does every week, which often, knee-deep in my own list, I barely noticed before.

7. Determine which relationships are really important and decide how you will show your appreciation for them. Do you take them for granted? Can you do more, and if so, how?
8. What do you do when you are stressed and physically and emotionally exhausted? While you may need to go easy on yourself, do you stick your head in the sand? Procrastinate? Fall apart? Blame and attack others, verbally or worse? Do you grab for alcohol, drugs, or foods that are not so healthy? What are your coping skills and how do they work for you?
9. I believe that often, out of something bad, something good comes. You have an opportunity for post-traumatic growth and resilience. You can improve yourself, learn and be even better than you were before. You can look at your response, assess in what ways you changed or grew and explore how you may relate to the situation in the future. Look around you to gain inspiration from so many completely selfless acts of kindness. For instance, we met someone with whom we had barely spoken before the computer crashed. Now when we meet again, we will have a very different relationship. We saw his honesty and integrity, and so appreciated how he went the extra mile when he could have simply said he didn't have time to work on it that day.



WE DESERVE to give ourselves a huge pat on the back for the hardships we have endured. (PxHere)

Before doing anything, ever, breathe

This past year has been a tough one. We deserve to give ourselves a huge pat on the back for all the hardships we have endured. Through it all we have learned to be nicer and kinder, how to laugh about the things we can't change, and be more patient with each other as we found or made the time to care about the important things in life. Experiencing the potential loss of

much – of my data, previous columns, books I've written or am in the middle of writing, special family photos or e-mails from loved ones that I may possibly never see again – is scary, very frustrating and sad. But it is not tragic, even though that was the first word that came to mind when I compare my story to so many others. Thank God, I have my health, and much of our life is in our special memories and not in the material possessions.

As we enter 2021, let's welcome it as we look forward to vaccines being administered worldwide. Let's hope this will enable us to move forward, see our loved ones again, find a way to be just where we need to be socially as we work to find a balance between what was and what is, reopen the job market, and restore decimated businesses. We can and we must do this, for ourselves, our families and our community.

As Israelis, we have had much experience learning how to be resilient. Now, yet again, we are almost, but not quite there. We must still wear our masks (over both our mouth and nose) for an undetermined period of time. We must exercise the resilience that will lead to the post-traumatic growth that has helped us get through all that we have in the past, and see that long-awaited light at the end of the tunnel. ■

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