



BARKAI

INFORMATION AND ACTIVITY BOOK

Dear Friends,

In the past few months, we have faced challenges, emotions and situations we have never expected. During this time our network of 77 rabbis and rabbaniot have brought a level of professional development only learned in crisis. **We have put this booklet together for you with the hope that it helps you meet the needs of your families and congregants as we weather this together.**

We hope that the materials speak to you – help you cope with, and perhaps even grow from, the challenging days we are now all living through.

We bless you and your families with health, fortitude and wholeness. Together, we will attempt to get through this.

Blessings,

Rabbi David Fine

Rabbi Shlomo Sobol

Founders and Deans, Barkai Center for Practical
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Table of Contents

Isolation	2
Grief	3
Gratitude	4
Gratitude Work Page	5
Journaling	6
Children	7
Serious Conversations	8
Domestic Violence	9
Substance Abuse	10
Mental Health	11
Torah Learning	12
Biographies	15

Struggling with Isolation?

You are not alone. This is completely normal! Human beings are hardwired for connection. So, it's no wonder that social distancing and quarantining have us all feeling a little bit down, sad, lonely—even if we have family members in the home with us. It is important that we find creative ways to connect with others during this time when our usual activities may be limited or cut off. Zoom, and other such video chat platforms, are a great way to see the faces of our loved ones. This doesn't just have to be a plain old conversation—mix it up! Try:

- propping up your video device on the kitchen counter while you and the other person each cook a meal from your own homes
- each person set up a checkerboard in front of them, making your own move and then copying that of the other person for their side of the board
- a group chat virtual book club
- a virtual cocktail party
- for grandparents (or any adult family members of younger children), a virtual “show & tell”. Let the child start by choosing an item to show you and talk about; then take your turn by picking something they might not otherwise be interested in (i.e. a family heirloom, knitting needles, the different gadgets on a stand mixer). This gives them the opportunity to learn something new while enjoying your company and explanation.

Quarantine is difficult. There is no getting around that, but let us try to see the silver lining. *Hitbodedut* is a practice consisting of self-secluded prayer, introspection and meditation, mostly popularized by Hassidic rabbis. Here are two lines from Instructions of *Hitbodedut* from **Rabbi Nachman of Breslov**:

“*Hitbodedut* is the highest path of all. One must therefore set aside an hour or more each day to talk with God by themselves in a room or in a field.”

“One must be very careful to accustom themselves to spend at least one hour a day in such meditation. During the rest of the day, one will then be in a state of joy and ecstasy.”

Experiencing Grief?

“If I had not fallen, I would not have picked myself up. If I did not sit in darkness, I would not have seen the light.” (Orchot Tzadikim, Shaar Hateshuvah, Shaar 26)

We most commonly associate grief with the death of a loved one, but grief is the emotion that can accompany any loss. Without much warning, our way of life changed drastically this year. We have lost many things—jobs, work setting, routine, social activities and interaction, a sense of normalcy, the comfort of predictability and certainty, and for some of us, yes we've lost loved ones too, and couldn't even have the type of funeral to which we are accustomed in order to honor them and properly mourn. All feelings that you experience now are valid. Here are some you might be noticing:

- Agitation – inability to relax, shaken up
- Anger – a strong emotion of displeasure with others or with an event
- Anxiety – feeling nervous and worried
- Loneliness – feeling alone
- Numbness- can't feel any emotion
- Powerlessness – having no control over what is happening
- Difficulty concentrating
- Continuously thinking about the loss
- Difficulty making decisions
- Low self-esteem

If you are struggling with grief or any other overwhelming emotions, there is support available.

Online/virtual therapy options include:

- <https://metiv.org/>
- <https://lifedoor.org/en/>

Speak to your rabbi for local options.

Apps on your phone that use a practice called mindfulness to help ground you are:

- Calm
- Headspace

Attitude of Gratitude!

Three times daily in our tefilla we say: מודים אנחנו לך שאתה הוא ה' אלקינו - "We thank You that You are HaShem, our God" - We thank you for all the good and blessing that You give us even during challenging times.

Did you know that a daily "gratitude practice" can dramatically help you feel better during these tough times? It's true! Research in a field called, "positive psychology" indicates that those who practice gratitude have lower self-reported levels of depression and stress. How do you do this? Easy! Just keep a journal near your bed, or anywhere you like to relax, and once a day jot down 3-5 things for which you are grateful. One idea is to do it each night before bed, reflecting on the day you just experienced. For it to be of true benefit, try not to repeat any items on the list from day to day. So if you said, 'my family' today, don't use that one too often in the future.

You can write the big things and the small things; it all matters! For instance, you might write:

- *financial security*
- *cozy blankets*
- *my best friend*
- *books*
- *the walk I took outside today*

As an added feel-good bonus, spend a few minutes after you write to pause, close your eyes, take some slow, deep breaths, and bring all your attention to the things you listed. Focus on how each one makes you feel; lean into that sense of joy or security that they bring to your heart.

Use the template on the next page to practice this for a week to see if you like it; if so, then go ahead and buy a journal to continue on your own.

Daily Gratitude Tracker

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY EVENING

SUNDAY

THIS WEEK, I'M ESPECIALLY
GRATEFUL FOR:

HIGHLIGHT OF THE WEEK:

I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO:

The Serious Stuff

We know that it is not fun to think or talk about the difficult “what ifs” of life but the seriousness of this pandemic is a reminder for all of us to make sure we have our affairs in order, should the worst happen.

We all die, every one of us, and yet somehow we don't like acknowledging it, and we rarely want to talk about it. According to the National Center on Jewish Healing rather than bringing us to despair, thinking about and discussing death and the dying process can be a life-affirming experience. As the Psalmist says, “Teach us to count our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). Facing our mortality can be a way for us to truly learn to live fully in every moment.

Some questions to consider:

- Do you have a will drawn up?
- Do you have a living will in place?
- Do you have legal arrangements for who would be responsible for your children?
- Do you have someone you trust with whom you can provide a list of important account numbers, passwords, etc?
- Do you have hidden items somewhere of which a trusted loved one should be informed?

Consider writing an Ethical will with these resources:

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethical_will
- <https://www.amazon.com/Hebrew-Ethical-Wills-Selected-Abrahams/dp/0827608276>

Halachic resource for preparing actual wills and living wills:

- <http://www.rabbis.org/pdfs/Halakhic%20Will.pdf>
- <https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/make-will-quick-checklist-29480.html>

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a serious matter. An ever present issue, domestic abuse rates have risen worldwide as a result of lockdown. Yes, in our communities too...

We want to help those who may be experiencing this abuse to protect themselves emotionally and physically.

A safety plan is a personalized, helpful tool that can help avoid dangerous situations and enable the best way to react when in danger. If you need a detailed and printable layout that can be used to start putting proper supports and resources in place, please visit:

http://www.ncdsv.org/images/DV_Safety_Plan.pdf

To help yourself or a loved one please reach out to:

<https://crisiscenter.org.il/> or 02-673-0002

Tahel - Crisis Center for Religious Women and Children

Throughout the history of the Jewish people, Jews have held an ideal standard for Jewish family life that is manifested in the term *shalom bayit*. *Shalom bayit* signifies completeness, wholeness, and fulfillment. Hence, the traditional Jewish marriage is characterized by peace, nurturing, respect, and loving kindness, through which a married couple becomes complete. It is believed that God's presence dwells in a pure and loving home.

It should go without saying that no one should be pressured to stay in a marriage in which they feel unsafe or are G-d forbid being abused. Often, women are told that *Shalom Bayit* is in their hands, but no one person is responsible for the health of a marriage.

(based on the Talmud in Tractate Sota)

Substance Abuse

The Torah obligates us to live a lifestyle that sustains a sound mind in a healthy body. “ונשמרתם מאוד לנפשותיכם”—“You shall carefully guard your life (Deuteronomy 4:15).” Addiction violates this norm because it drives us to behaviors that jeopardize health and—as in the case of substance abuse—may cause death.

Substance abuse tends to significantly alter a person’s behavior and habits, as well as show through changes in appearance.

- Increased aggression or irritability
- Changes in attitude/personality
- Lethargy
- Depression
- Sudden changes in a social network
- Dramatic changes in habits and/or priorities
- Involvement in criminal activity
- Bloodshot or glazed eyes
- Dilated or constricted pupils
- Abrupt weight changes
- Changes in hygiene
- Dental issues
- Skin changes
- Problems sleeping or sleeping too much

In addition, the Torah is committed to free will. As discussed by Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, people acting under duress are acquitted of violations. Being compelled by addiction robs a person of his or her freedom of action; therefore, he or she lacks moral responsibility, and this undercuts the moral and ethical life.

If you or someone you know is going down this path of self-destruction please contact JACS or Amudim:

- <https://ica.org.il/en/>

Mental Health

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.

Many factors contribute to mental health problems, including:

- Biological factors, such as genes or brain chemistry
- Life experiences, such as trauma or abuse
- Family history of mental health problems

Mental health problems are common but help is available. People with mental health problems can get better and many recover completely.

Early Warning Signs

Not sure if you or someone you know is living with mental health problems? Experiencing one or more of the following feelings or behaviors can be an early warning sign of a problem:

- Eating or sleeping too much or too little
- Pulling away from people and usual activities
- Having low or no energy
- Feeling numb or like nothing matters
- Having unexplained aches and pains
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Smoking, drinking, or using drugs more than usual
- Feeling confused, forgetful, on edge, angry, upset, worried, or scared
- Yelling or fighting with family and friends
- Experiencing severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships
- Having persistent thoughts and memories you can’t get out of your head
- Hearing voices or believing things that are not true
- Thinking of harming yourself or others
- Inability to perform daily tasks like taking care of your kids or getting to work or school

For resources:

- <https://gethelpisrael.com/images/directory/GHI-Directory2020-Web.pdf>
- <https://amudim.org.il/>

Torah Study

Situation:

1. A community member has been furloughed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic
2. Your child is unable to have the wedding she dreamed of due to COVID-19 restrictions
3. A friend's child is suffering from issues related to isolation

Points to Ponder:

- Tempered positivity, not aggressive zeal.
- Your friend likely needs a boost, but probably won't appreciate unbridled cheeriness and optimism.
- Losing a job, grappling with economic stress is hard. Period. Greater numbers of people will be stressed, worried, anxious and depressed.
- If you're in a position to help your friend, you have been blessed with a special opportunity.
- You can help by finding the right tone to encourage, without seeming blind to the harsh realities.
- Assure your friend that this isn't a reflection on him and that a job doesn't define who he is.
- You can be a sounding board for new career paths, networking opportunities, evaluating new pursuits.

Mindfulness of potential new realities

Areas of life that might now be different:

Dining out, joint family vacations, purchasing presents for friends (birthdays, wedding, births, Bar/Bat Mitzvot, etc.), conversations about recent successes at work, discussing your financial portfolio, retirement plans, etc.

The power of "tell me..."

Fast Company recently published an article on how this simple phrase invites the person you're conversing with to open up, share their most pressing views, and give you their perspective and definition of a problem.

"Tell me what you're going through... / tell me how I can ease the stress you're feeling..." invites your friend to emote, and for you to hear their pains, rather than force you to make assumptions.

Torah's Advice:

Deuteronomy Chapter 22 outlines the mitzva to return lost objects to its owner. The obligation is actually twofold:

(1) The 'positive commandment' to return a lost object one encounters – **הַשֶּׁבַע תְּשִׁיבֵם לְאָחִיךָ** = you must take it back to your fellow (22:1); and

(2) The 'negative commandment' not to ignore the item –

לֹא תִוְּכַל לְהִתְעַלֵּם = you must not remain indifferent (22:3).

The root **י.כ.ל** generally denotes practical ability, rather than legal/ Halachic permissibility. Accordingly, *lo tuchal*, taken literally, would mean that one does not have the ability to overlook his fellow's lost object. Why does the Torah formulate the prohibition in this strange manner?

Rav Moshe Alshich (1508-1593) suggests a beautiful idea:

Lo tuchal l'hit'alem, alludes to the ultimate function this mitzvah is meant to serve. The Torah's objective is to bring a person to the point where he treats the property of others with the same concern and vigilance as he does his own possessions. Though at first a person may return a lost item only to fulfill a Biblical command, ultimately, he should reach the point where he simply cannot ignore and overlook the crisis of his brother. The idea expands beyond returning just a lost item. The goal is to make us sensitive to any type of loss/hardship/problem that a fellow person is experiencing, to the point that we simply "cannot remain indifferent" to a friend's loss that we encounter.

Ethics of the Father 6:6

וְהַתּוֹרָה נִקְנִית בְּאַרְבָּעִים וּשְׁמֹנֶה דְבָרִים
... נוֹשָׂא בְעַל עִם חֵבְרוֹ ...

Torah is acquired by means of 48 things:
...by bearing the yoke with your fellow...

Irving Bunim (1901-1980):

"If you see someone in trouble or pain, you may feel a pang of pity and realize you ought to help him. Then you feel sympathy; but you still stand outside the situation and regard the other objectively. When you "bear the yoke with your fellow," you see and feel everything he does; you share his burden, sense his pain and suffering because you have made his plight your own. So you must help him. This is the profound human kinship that grows in the world of Torah."

Biographies

Rabbi David Fine served in pulpits in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Overland Park, Kansas before making Aliyah to Modiin in 2008. Before founding Barkai, Rabbi Fine served as the Jewish Identity Coordinator at the Modiin Community Center and the Director of Rabbinic Outreach at the Eretz Hemdah Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies in Jerusalem.

Rabbi Shlomo Sobol, a native Israeli, has headed the Tora Mizion Kollel while on shlichut in Detroit for four years and served as the rabbinic consultant for Torah Mizion upon his return to Israel. Since 2005, he has been the rabbi of the Kehillat Shaarei Yonah Menachem Congregation in Modiin where he is well known for his work in education and immigrant absorption.

Ms. Lori Rush is a licensed clinical social worker who provides both individual and group therapy in various settings. With a focus on addressing and healing trauma, she helps clients reach their greatest potential by discovering their true selves.

Mr. Binyamin Casper is a lawyer who also teaches in Yeshivat Torat Shraga. Over the past few years, he has dedicated significant time to developing Torah-related resources.



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