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CHARITY WHICH IS JUSTICE

/// Rav Meir Nehorai - Chairman of the Board ///

The main section of Parshat Emor is dedicated to the festivals with the Torah presenting an overview of the holidays according to the calendar. In the center of this section is a verse which seems not to be connected to the holidays at all, but rather to the laws of charity: "When you cut your harvest, do not destroy your field's corner as you cut, and do not gather the leftovers of your harvest, leave them for the poor and the stranger, I am the Lord your God" (Vayikra 23:22). Not only is this verse not connected to the laws of the festivals, it has also already been mentioned verbatim in the previous section: "When you cut the harvest, do not destroy your field's corner to cut it, and do not gather your harvest's leftovers" (Vayikra 19:9).

Rashi responds to both of these difficulties. The Torah repeats this mitzvah in order to teach us that one who refrains from giving gifts to the poor transgresses two prohibitions. Regarding the need to place this mitzvah specifically in the context of the holidays, Rashi says: **"...in order to teach you that anyone who gives leket, shikcha and pe'ah properly to the poor is considered as if he has built the Temple and brought sacrifices."**

The connection between giving charity and building the Temple and offering sacrifices broadens the dimensions of holiness beyond the Temple by means of compassion for the vulnerable. Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk offered the following formulation in his commentary on the Torah (Meshech Chochma): 'For God's will is that the Jewish people should not become overly physical as a result of working the land, and God gave them many mitzvot for every action and every step **so that all of a person's dealings will be directed towards God, so that all of the physical activities will become shining paths which lead to true perfection and coming closer to God**...and therefore the Parsha ends with 'And when you cut', although it was already written in Parshat Kedoshim, **in order to awaken our hearts to this message.**'

The Torah emphasizes that connecting to God comes not only from holy service in the Temple, but also from compassion towards those who are weakest. There is an additional aspect relating to gifts to the poor which can be discerned based on the difference between the formulation of the mitzvah of tzedaka and that of gifts to the poor. From the verses about tzedaka, we learn that this mitzvah is fundamentally about giving: **"Do not harden your heart or shut tight your hand from your needy brother, for you shall surely open your hands to him, and loan him in accordance with the lacking which he lacks**...For the needy will not desist from the land, therefore, I command you saying, **surely open your hand to your brother, your poor, your needy in the land**" (Devarim 15:7-11).

In contrast, regarding the gifts to the poor, we are commanded to leave the gift in the field: "Leave them for the poor and the stranger." As the Rambam says (Gifts to Poor 1:4): "One who harvests his field should not cut it all, but rather **should leave some sheaves for the poor at the edge of the field**, as it says 'Do not destroy your field's corner as you cut', both one who cuts and one who uproots, **and that which is left is called peah.**"

While the mitzvah of tzedaka is performed by giving to the poor, gifts to the poor are left in the field. The Torah emphasizes that the land belongs to all, and therefore we are not allowed to gather all of our produce. The root of the word tzedaka is tzedek, justice. When a person gives tzedaka, he is not going beyond the letter of the law. This is the letter of the law, and this is justice. Thus should be understood the unique formulation of gifts to the poor: **"Leave** them for the poor and the stranger." Leaving the gifts in the field teaches us that peah is not part of our property. We are not giving something that belonged to us, rather, we are leaving to the poor that which belongs to them. This is also the formulation of the mitzvah in Devarim (24:19-22) regarding shikcha and olelot- **"It will be** for the stranger, the orphan and the widow."

Thus we learn that although the mitzvah of tzedaka is practically fulfilled by giving to the poor, it is rooted in our limited ownership of our own property. It is not only tzedaka and graciousness, but tzedek, justice, and truth.



50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE REUNIFICATION OF JERUSALEM

/// Boaz Ordman - Executive Director of Beit Hillel ///

"שְׁמִיחָתִי, בְּאַמְרִים לִי. בֵּית ה' גִּלְךָ: עֲמֻדוֹת, הָיוּ כְּגִלְיוֹנוֹ. בְּשִׁעְרֶיךָ, יְרוּשָׁלַם: יְרוּשָׁלַם הַבְּנוּיָה. כְּעִיר, שְׁחִבְרָה-לָהּ יַחְדָּו: שְׁשָׁם עָלָיו שְׁבָטִים, שְׁבָטֵי-יִהוּדָה עֲדוֹת לְיִשְׂרָאֵל. לְהַדוֹת, לְשֵׁם ה':" (תהילים קכ"ב)

In a few days we will be celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Reunification of Jerusalem, and we are entering the 70th anniversary of the State of Israel.

What do these dates mean to us? How should they affect our thoughts and our actions?

After 70 years of developing the physical side of the State of Israel, we now face new challenges.

Rav Harlap comments that the difference between **ציון** and **ירושלים** is that the first relates to the physical and the latter to the spiritual. (מעייני הישועה)

Having reached the 50th Anniversary of the Reunification of Jerusalem we are now expected to start dealing with the spiritual and ideological challenges that the Jewish people as a whole, and the State of Israel in particular, are facing. The only way for us to carry on developing and strengthening this miraculous State, is by finding the ways to solve our inner religious and ideological disagreements in a way that unites us and reconnects us to our heritage but, at the same time, continues to magnify our different "stripes and colors".

"שְׁשָׁם עָלָיו שְׁבָטִים, שְׁבָטֵי-יִהוּדָה עֲדוֹת לְיִשְׂרָאֵל" – The Malbim comments that Jerusalem unifies all our different tribes until we reach a level of testimony "**עדות**" that we are one unified nation.

This is our generation's challenge and to this we in Beit Hillel are dedicating our thoughts and actions to hopefully succeed in sanctifying Hashem's name in the world – "**להדוֹת, לְשֵׁם ה'**"





IN MEMORY OF ELCHAI TEHARLEV

/// Rabbanit Dr Hannah Hashkes ///

After the abrupt and tragic death of Nadav and Avihu, sons of Aharon, Moshe says to Aharon:

"הוא אשר דבר ה' לאמר בקרבי אקדש וְעַל פְּנֵי כָל הָעָם אֶכְבֹּד" : "This is what the LORD meant when He said: I will show My holiness to those who are near Me, and I will reveal My glory before all the people." Aharon responds with silence: "וידם אהרון". Moshe then calls Nadav and Avihu's cousins and instructs them to carry the bodies out of the sanctuary. However, the father of the deceased, Aharon, and his two remaining sons are forbidden to show grief. They are instructed to remain in the sanctuary and continue their service. In his commentary to this incident, the Rashbam, (Rabi Shmuel Ben Yosef, 12th century Tosafist and Rashi's grandson), interprets Moshe's cryptic declaration thus: "do not mourn nor weep, and do not desist from carrying on with your priestly duties; I am telling you what I am saying in the name of God Who has said: בקרובי אקדש, I want to be sanctified by the High Priests, the ones who are "near" to Me and who perform the service for Me. This is the "honor" accorded to God's Presence that even when a person sees his sons dying, he overcomes personal grief and continues with the service to the Creator.

Some commentators understand Moshe's words as teaching that Nadav and Avihu have sanctified God's name in their death. In contrast, Rashbam understands his words as instructing the sanctifying of God's name in life - קידוש השם בחיים. Aharon's continued service shows that the call of life and the creator of life is sometimes stronger than the harshest emotional upheaval.

On the Thursday before Pesach an evil hand cut short the life of Elchai, son of Rabbi Ohad Teharlev, a member of Beit Hillel's executive board and head of the Israeli program at Midreshet Lindenbaum. Rabbi Ohad, his wife Avital and their children did not keep silent as Aharon did. However, neither did they stop, for one second, the service to their creator. During the funeral, Shiva, and memorial services for Elchai HYD, their words were heart moving and uplifting. Their words did much to sanctify God's name and give their family, friends, and students spiritual strength and guidance. During the Shiva I was able to see a book the family created for Elchai's Bar-Mitzva. Already as a child and teenager, Elchai's was described as a gift to the world, sent by God's angels to make our world a happier, more cheerful and spiritually sturdier place. Elchai's famous smile, his love of music and singing, his thoughtfulness and loyalty to his many adoring friends, and his love of learning and nature are all described by the loving parents of a 13 year old boy, seven years before they were sharing their memories and their love in his funeral.

All of us attending these difficult gatherings were awe struck by their firm belief. This was expressed in their knowledge of the spiritual mission Elchai had carried out and in their acknowledgement of the immense impact their son had on everyone around him in his short life. Both Rabbi Ohad, a leader and educator, and Avital, a therapist, showed us all what it means to seek intimacy with God and sanctify life. They continued doing the things they dedicate their lives to: placing themselves in the service of God and Israel.





BEIT HILLEL'S HALACHIC BEIT MIDRASH

/// Rav Amit Kula - Rosh Beit Hamidrash ///

The values of the Beit Hillel movement are reflected and strengthened by its Halachic Beit Midrash. The Halachic discourse created by the Beit Midrash supports and encourages the recognition that commitment to the Torah's commands can be at harmony both with a world which develops both technologically and culturally, as well as with people's modern sensibilities. This message is sharpened by the Halachic conclusions of the Beit Midrash and by its methodology.

A number of unique aspects of the Beit Midrash may be noted. First, Halachic conclusions are reached cooperatively, and are backed by many members of the movement. Essentially, this is the heart of the Beit Midrash: 'Salvation comes from counsel with many', an application of the Talmudic dictum that "The Torah is only acquired in company". Learning together, debating, analyzing, arguing in order to reach refined conclusions, which in turn, will receive broad approval. Every topic studied within the Beit Midrash is discussed and analyzed in live sessions for many hours. After initial clarifications, the discussion moves to an online forum in which doubts are clarified, conclusions are sharpened, and the formulation of the Halachic response coalesces.

Another unique aspect of this Beit Midrash is the full participation of women scholars in the discussions and decisions of the Beit Midrash. One of Beit Hillel's key missions is the advancement of women's place in the Religious world, and this demands, first and foremost, involvement of Rabbaniyot in every Halachic action in which the Beit Midrash is engaged.

A democratic spirit infuses all of the work of the Beit Midrash, in which there is no preference of the rich over the poor or the old over the young. Everyone is party to the attempt to clarify the Halacha, every understanding is considered, each opinion tested, and all contribute to a broad, deep understanding of the Halacha.

The selection of topics for Halachic study is a further unique quality of the Beit Midrash, addressing a wide range of issues of Torah and modern life, and their meaning and relevance to many different sectors of society. Topics such as: contact between secular and religious Israelis (i.e., Shabbat and Kashrut), women's status (i.e., women saying the mourner's Kaddish; women's army service; women as Halachic decision makers) the requirement to pay taxes, attitudes towards non-Jews in Israel, the status of secular courts, attitudes towards homosexuals, and more. The Beit Midrash also seeks to raise awareness about topics which are often marginalized, like the status of people with disabilities (i.e., Bar Mitzvah; Marriage), coping with mental illness, and others. Beit Hillel's Beit Midrash is a productive and creative platform for member rabbis and Rabbaniot to discuss Halachic questions and other ideological and social issues that many educators and community leaders face in a complex, modern world.

Beit Hillel periodically publishes booklets containing the Halachic rulings in connection with the issues stated above, along with other Torah and ideological positions on different issues.

These booklets are distributed in 60,000 copies throughout Israel and make the voice of the Beit Hillel organization heard on a national level. In addition, because they address timely issues of interest to Israeli society as a whole, they also receive extensive coverage in the Israeli media.

We have many more important tasks in front of us, and many more topics which demand analysis.

We invite you to partner with us in this exciting and important project. Please contact us below or visit the Beit Hillel website for additional information.

Dedication opportunities are available.

HALACHIC CONCLUSIONS FROM BEIT HILLEL'S DISCUSSION ON MENTAL ILLNESS

INTRODUCTION

Mental illness is a disease, and the suffering experienced by the mentally ill is real suffering.

Israeli society is just learning to recognize these facts, and they pose a challenge to the community and to halakha. Compassion is the key, both in guiding the halakha and in communal action.

The challenge to the community demands assisting the suffering individual and his family in overcoming shame and conquering the ignorance and stigma that occasionally exist in the community at large. Accomplishing this demands proper education and the willingness of community leaders to effect change. Ways to support the individual and his family must be found, in a practical sense and by raising awareness and overcoming stigma and unfounded beliefs.

In the Halachic context, instructions for treatment of mental illness involving the suspension of prohibitions must be sharpened. The nature of the danger involved in these illnesses must be defined, the accepted methods of treatment must be understood, and subsequently, Halachic conclusions of permitted and forbidden must be determined. This challenge demands decisions in a field which, in many of its aspects regarding the nature of each illness and the methods of treatment is subjective, whilst taking care not to impair the decisiveness of the psak, the possibility of recuperation, or the treatment methods.

This short article discusses the Halachic status of the treatment of the mentally ill¹.

PIKUAH NEFESH- LIFE THREATENING SITUATIONS

'Mental illness' is a general category which includes many psychological ailments. Halachically, it is important to distinguish between situations in which a mental illness belongs to the more severe group of impairments- those suffering from an objectively severe affliction, or those with suicidal tendencies, and those in the 'less' severe category, who suffer from other symptoms.

For one who belongs to the first category, it is permissible to violate Torah prohibitions in order to save him from this state, or to prevent his entry into such a psychological state. Poskim mention three factors that must be considered, even if they demand the desecration of Shabbat, in order to prevent a person from suffering a severe psychological blow:

The first factor is the concern that the psychological damage could lead to a life threatening situation. The mentally ill may lose their capacity to look after their own safety, and at times can pose a danger to themselves or to others.

The second factor relates to the value of the observance of the commandments. This dictates that even if a mental health professional determines that the situation is not one which is life-threatening, there is an obligation to conserve a person's spiritual strength. A person who loses his sanity is exempt from the commandments, and is considered to have lost their spiritual stature. There is a requirement to try to prevent this loss, or to return a person to a state of obligation, even if it involves the desecration of the Shabbat. One Shabbat may be desecrated so that he will be able to observe many Shabbatot.

¹ For further discussion and sources, please visit our website: www.beithillel.org.il/show.asp?id=72627#.WQC1odLyvIV

The third factor posits that losing sanity in and of itself is equivalent to a life threatening situation, because when a person loses his mind, he loses his identity and personality, and even his desire to live.

TREATMENT

The critical question regarding treatment of non life-threatening mental illness is the Halachic status of the illness. Is it to be considered an 'illness' [what Halachic decisors call 'holeh she'ein bo sakana' - non-life threatening illness] or 'meihosh be'alma', a mere feeling. If the first possibility is correct, a variety of actions which are normally forbidden can be taken in order to relieve the individual's suffering. The most reasonable position emerging from an analysis of the Halachic sources is that a mentally ill individual whose functioning is significantly impaired is considered Halachically 'ill'.

In light of this:

- One who suffers from a mood disorder and takes medicine on a regular basis during the week is allowed to continue on Shabbat because taking medicine is permissible for one defined as a 'holeh'. Moreover, it is permissible even if there is a doubt as to whether one is sick. This is especially true in our day when there is no concern that a person will transgress a prohibition in order to prepare the medicine himself.
- A young man with an anxiety disorder has trouble sleeping, and his functioning is affected after this continues intermittently for more than 24 hours. During the week, he listens to relaxing music which allows him to fall asleep. His therapist is of the opinion that this is the only way for him to do so. There is room to consider allowing him to do this even on Shabbat.

According to most contemporary poskim, activating a music playing device is a rabbinic prohibition. For the sake of a holeh she'ein bo sakana, this can be permitted when done in a different manner (shinui). However, because this allowance is innovative, the following conditions should be met, if possible: that the condition was diagnosed by a professional, that listening to music is proven to be an effective treatment for the patient. The device should be prepared before Shabbat, so that it can be activated with one push of a button, which should be done with a shinui. Earphones should be used in order to minimize the extent to which noise is produced on Shabbat.

- A person who suffers from depression discovers that playing the flute relieves his feeling of depression. His therapist attests that this indeed improves his mood. Is he allowed to play on Shabbat when suffering an episode of depression?

Playing music as a psychological treatment is attested to from ancient days. Playing an instrument on Shabbat is a rabbinic prohibition. The question of this prohibition's applicability in the post-Talmudic period was discussed by the poskim and most determined that the prohibition remains. Many poskim allowed playing music during the period of mourning prohibitions in order to heal the sick person's soul. However, regarding prohibitions of Shabbat, no such allowance is recorded. There is room to consider allowing this in the above conditions, based on an allowance for the sake of healing a 'holeh she'ein bo sakana'. However, since this is an innovative suggestion, there is room to allow the sick person himself to exercise his judgement, because 'the heart knows the bitterness of its soul'.

- A woman suffering from post-partum depression needs significant psychological support according to the doctor, and a hug from the man she loves can help save her from psychological distress. Since she has not yet immersed in the mikveh, she is forbidden to her husband. Is it permissible for him to hug her in order to help her?

A hug between a man and women who are forbidden to one another is prohibited- some say on the level of Torah law, and some saw as a rabbinic prohibition. For some poskim, it seems that the severity of forbidden touch is only when it has sexual intent. Touch without sexual intent is certainly discouraged, and even forbidden, but in circumstances of special need there is room to consider permitting it. Therefore, because in the case of depression, a hug can prevent a woman from sinking into the depression, there is room to consider permitting a hug which is not in the context of sexual intent. However, this should only be done when a number of conditions are present which limit it to necessary situations, and prevent it from slipping into forbidden territory:

1. A medical diagnosis, and the decision of a Halachic figure that the condition is one of 'holeh she'ein bo sakana'.
2. Defining this solution as necessary, and lacking other solutions (for example, if another person could provide the necessary support.)
3. The couple is responsible to maintain the boundary of only necessary hugging, without allowing slippage into forbidden actions.
4. There may be more room to be lenient in public than when the couple is alone.



AND YOU WILL SATE THE AFFLICTED SOUL, AND YOUR LIGHT WILL SHINE IN THE"
...DARKNESS, AND YOUR GLOOM WILL SHINE LIKE THE NOON

"HE WILL SATE YOUR SOUL DURING FAMINE, AND WILL STRENGTHEN YOUR BONES
(Isaiah 58:10-11)





A FEW THOUGHTS ON WELL-BEING AND DOING JEWISH LAW

/// Etan S. Geffen * ///

Well-being has gradually become a central value and goal of life for many people in western culture. For centuries, even as recently as a century ago, people's main focus was typically survival. Get food on the table, avoid sickness or disease, and have sufficient clothing and shelter from weather and enemies. Survival of identity has also always been a burning issue, as countries and social movements rose and fell over time. The Jewish people also struggled, saving a unique identity, philosophy and way of life throughout the diaspora.

The past hundred years have swiftly brought a universal (at least in the "modern", "western" world) change in mindset and focus. Modern scientific developments have enabled us to prosper and be relieved for the most part of existential worries. Now, we are engaged not only in succeeding to exist and maintaining identity, but in living well. Being well. In broad psychological terms, as a society, we have transformed from a doing state of mind, focused on actions, to a being state of mind, focused on experience and feelings.

Survival of Jewish identity has been successful mostly due to the unique way of life sketched out by the laws of the Torah. Yet we believe the Torah is not just a sociological phenomenon. The Jewish people have been passing down from generation to generation a strong belief in the divinity, deeper truth and meaning of the oral and dynamic elaboration of the Torah. Jewish life is molded by Halakha, and then again, inherently, Halakha is molded by the people and times that come together to reveal its teachings.

It seems that the main bulk of Halakha belongs to the old world, the "doing" world. The Halachic view will usually measure an individual by the actions he takes, not the way he feels. Halakha gives us guidelines addressing what to do and not to do. In special circumstances, Halakha will teach us to take other things into consideration. Life threatening situations, extreme economic difficulty, a chance of future inability to adhere to commandments – are all examples of such parameters factored into Halachic discourse.

Furthermore, the past century has also brought a huge growth of widespread study and practice of Jewish philosophy and spirituality. As westerners have been discovering the precious depth of eastern spirituality, more and more Jews have been discovering our own spiritual treasures. Our lives become enriched by the combination between "do's" and "don'ts" of halakha combined with the way to "be", pray, think and feel taught by Jewish thinkers, Hassidim and mystics.

Although it seems that the doing and being voices heard through Jewish law and thought have yet to fully combine harmoniously. In many day-to-day moments, one may be involved in a pause, standing (or sitting) still and pondering on the meaning of life or savoring the feeling of joy or enlightenment. On the contrary, other moments might include hurrying to daven Mincha or quickly getting things in order minutes before Shabbat candle-lighting. Most of us, most of the time, don't combine these two mindsets. And yet, there is a third mindset. At any given moment one may be doing something just because it is part of living (being) well.

We strive to live well, be well and do well. So long as these do not contradict, this is a rather simple, intuitive and holistic attitude towards a good fulfilling life. Questions arise when contradictions come up. Dilemmas show in various realms. For example, while western culture

* Rav Etan Geffen, a former Ram (faculty) in the Otniel yeshiva, is a psychologist and the clinical director of Beit Haggai Youth Village. Rav Geffen is a member of Beit Hillel.

guides us to well-being that encompasses manifestation of desires, in many cases Halakha guides us to avoid or funnel manifestation of certain desires. Devoted western-world Jews find themselves now and then in a conflict zone in which several inner voices and values pull in different directions.

Belief in divinity of the commandments could be a key to achieving harmony between the voices driving us to dwell on experience and voices driving us to act. We are commanded to do things, and when doing them we are realizing the will of God, bringing the abstract spirituality into the concrete world of actions. While doing the will of God, we have an opportunity to be in a spiritual closeness to the deeper essence of life. Rabbi Nachman of Braslev taught his disciples to "make the teachings into prayers" (La'asot me'ha'Torot Tefilot). His suggestion is to use the action-oriented aspects of the Torah as a vessel for acting-out inner emotional and spiritual states.

The will to achieve well-being contributes to the deepening and reviving of our religious repertoire. Awareness of the value of experience and feelings motivates us to look more deeply into the practices we hold by and to find ways to actually experience the ideas we learn about. The flip side of that is a growing awareness of the value of well-being even when it seems that Halachic guidelines have undermined it. Understanding that well-being is a value, and ultimately a religious goal, brings us two great challenges. One challenge is discovering how the Torah paints the picture of well-being, what is in the picture, what is not, and how things look there. What do we seek to make this life look and feel like. Another challenge is incorporating well-being, and specifically mental aspects of well-being, as relevant parameters in Halachic discourse.





MY TOWER'S COLLAPSE

/// Rav Chaim Garber ///

I studied at Yeshivat Otniel for more than a few years, and even taught there. I was deeply involved in the world of halacha, Torah and spirituality. I even studied in a halacha kollel and finished five out of six tests for rabbinic ordination.

And then, the major crisis which forced me to be bed-ridden for half a year occurred.

When it began, I already began to feel my inner world collapsing. The image that always comes to mind is looking at the New York City skyline on the day after 9/11. Fundamental elements of my identity disappeared. My personality was trampled under the boots of depression.

Even then, my native language was still halachic. Even though crushed, I found myself thinking halachically, even while practically, halacha no longer had a significant place in my life.

Food served as an important distraction for me. I gained 90 pounds that year, and during bouts of bingeing, I would be engaged in halachic discussions in my head. One night after eating meat, I wanted to eat dairy, and I started debating the issue with myself. My custom was to wait 6 hours between meat and milk. Did I need to do hatarat nedarim to annul my custom? The Rama rules to wait only one hour, and I no longer have any 'scent of Torah' in me [as the Shach and Taz recommend waiting 6 hours for he who does]. In my situation, can I rely on the Rama, although this was not my custom?

During that period, I needed to be constantly distracted from my state, so I watched TV endlessly, just so that something would be on the screen, and make me forget myself. Shabbat arrives, and I find myself sitting on the computer watching a movie, and, again, I begin engaging in a halachic discourse in my head about electricity on Shabbat. While the Chazon Ish forbids it based on the prohibition of boneh, building on Shabbat, his position has been rejected, and my rabbis rule that his position does not carry weight. Others base it on the prohibition of makeh bepatish, placing the finishing touch on a work, and I think of the ruling of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach [in a footnote in the first edition of Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata] and on the implication of Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef that it is only an issue of uvdin dechol, activity which is appropriate for weekdays, debate my status as a sick person who is in danger or is not in danger, add the consideration that 'the heart knows its own bitterness', and ultimately I permit myself the forbidden, with the explanation that 'in my state'....At this stage, along with my own personal halachic struggles, Shabbat becomes the epicenter of my family's suffering. Shabbat is a time for family, and my absence is deeply felt. My wife takes our son, and they are hosted by other families for meals. Pastoral rabbinic support becomes critical at this state, not as much in its rabbinic aspect as in the communal aspect. My wife tries to be out of the house as much as possible on Shabbat. I try my hardest that others shouldn't see or know, not wanting to open up another painful topic in the chaos that the family has been plunged into- the personal and marital problems. It is quickly understood that this is what my Shabbat looks like. My wife sees this, it pains her, and she understands that this is what I need. On Shabbat, I go to sleep listening to music on my earphones, trying to sleep for hours.

Two weeks after my breakdown, I underwent a psychiatric evaluation, received medications and began psychotherapy. The diagnosis was clear- profound medical knowledge was not required to diagnose a state of suicidal depression. It was clear that, at certain points, those close to me needed to carry their phones on Shabbat, because they needed to be immediately available, in case I would feel that I needed them right away.

Before the crisis, I was supposed to start studies and work, and none of this happened. At different stages, there were changes. The medication began to work. My situation improved, and after approximately half a year I began to work and to meet people again, but this was all accompanied by ups and downs, and instability. The fear of another breakdown which could occur at any time was constantly present, and indeed, it would arrive, after a week or two. And then everything would start again: the depression, the suicidal ideations.

In one particularly traumatic episode, I wasn't far from a genuinely suicidal moment. My brother was alerted to come, and he brought the police with him. It was Friday, and the police brought me to the psychiatric emergency ward. I succeeded in convincing the psychiatrist that I had no intention to act on my suicidal thoughts, and he allowed me to return home on Shabbat. I found myself walking with my brother from Kfar Shaul to home, an hour's distance. In silence, it is a terribly long way, during which I am furious at Shabbat and the burden it places on me of this difficult, heavy walk. It was a traumatic day, for

me, and for my family.

Time passes, and people continue to try to find ways to help me, another medication, and then another, and finally something is found. The medication is effective, I begin to work, to live. At this time, my external life, of work and friends, begins to function 'normally', but my intimate world at home collapses. Outside, I battle hard to appear perfect, so that no one will even consider that there is something wrong. But weekends become days of suffering for us all. My wife dreads weekly Shabbat meals. Once she observed how wonderful Shabbat is for families in a good state, and what a nightmare it is for families that aren't. She is helped by relatives, community, and her close friends.

Fast forward a few years: A year and a half ago, the medication stopped helping, and I again found myself in a difficult, unbalanced, suicidal state. It was Friday evening, and my wife started calling all kinds of people in various circles of support. A relative [and community rabbi with experience in handling sensitive situations] who had been helping us for a number of years came and sat next to me all night to watch over me. A friend from up North also decided to drive, in the middle of Shabbat, to take care of my wife, and me as well.

What I learned from this is that the appropriate halachic response needs to include not only the individual who is sick, but also his circle of support, just as a doula is permitted to drive on Shabbat in order to help a woman giving birth, and to calm her, because her psychological situation is considered to be a case of possible pikuach nefesh. An halachic decision on this point has far-reaching impact. Knowing that my wife was supported significantly affected my own level of anxiety and depression during that painful episode.

A little over a year ago, I decided to begin to rebuild my towers which had collapsed, to rebuild my inner world, my spiritual, religious world. I started to learn again. To pray regularly. To learn with my children. Occasionally, when I was feeling good, Shabbat meals began taking place in our house again. As my psychological state stabilized, my religious world began to heal. A little over a year ago, I finished my final exam for rabbinical ordination.

One year ago, I decided that the cost of concealing my story, both internally and to the outside world, was too great. The need to prove myself, to be 'ok', was an unhealthy motivator. I 'came out of the closet'. I told the world about my situation.

I feel that the fact that I know halacha and speak its language in some ways saved my life. There were times when I couldn't have done without it. The fact that I understood the underlying principles of halacha, that my fundamental programming was the world of Torah, allowed me to feel that I still had a place. The feeling that I didn't reject this world, that even while my life was crumbling and collapsing, my basic religious world still stood, that I didn't need to reject it in order to survive, was enormously significant to me. This understanding still allows me to gradually, step by step, rebuild new levels of my spiritual edifice.

Currently, I am completing my Masters degree, and taking care of my children three times a week. I am working. Most of the time, I can function normally. My psychological state is still delicate, fragile and difficult. There are relapses, great and small. My medication is monitored continually, and it may need to be changed. I think that the understanding that this is not a passing injury, or a momentary danger, but rather a chronic situation, demands a profound, innovative halachic response, and I applaud Beit Hillel's response from the depth of my heart. Thank you.





THE MESHIVAT NEFESH PROJECT

/// **Rabbanit Yael Shimoni - Head of Meshivat Nefesh** ///

Meshivat Nefesh- Female Scholars Answering Halachic Questions, is an online platform for Rabbaniot to answer women's questions and dilemmas related to Torah and spirituality.

The goals we set for this Project included:

- * Offering a spiritual Torah response to questions posed by women.
- * Professional and responsible responses, which include psychological guidance from the responders.
- * Creating a platform for continued contact and connection between the responders and the women asking.
- * Exposure of a variety of young women in Israeli society to the Rabbaniot of Beit Hillel.
- * Changing and elevating the level of Torah discourse over the internet.

After a careful and calculated construction process, which included focus groups and consultation with professionals from various fields, B"H the Project went live at the beginning of March, with the opening of an option to send a question to **"Meshivat Nefesh"** on Kipa's online responsa site.

I spent the first several months recruiting other responders and building a training program for them. At the same time, I worked to develop an ethical-psychological code for the Project with Smadar Ben David, a psychologist recruited to the Project staff. Together with me, there is an acting advisory board which provides Halachic guidance as needed, reviews the answers and validates them. The Advisory Board is comprised of Rabbanim and Rabbaniot with a broad range of experience in educational and communal work. The Advisory Board includes Rabbi Meir Nehorai, chairman of Beit Hillel and Rav of Massuot Yitzchak, Rabbi Amit Kula, head of Beit Hillel's Beit Midrash of Halacha, and Rav of Kibbutz Alumim, Rabbanit Dr. Michal Tikuchinski, dean of students at Herzog College, Rabbanit Dr. Tamar Meir, member of the Beit Hillel board, and Rabbanit Tirza Kellman, the director of Nishmat's responsa site.

Before **Meshivat Nefesh** went live, we conducted a day of training for the responders, which included guidance in writing online responsa, treatment of the psychological aspect that is likely to arise in the questions and the limits of what professional psychological advice should be offered by the responders, and practical guidance regarding the way the Project will function. Most of the women recruited as responders participated in the training day.

Along with the Project going online, we created a survey to learn more about the needs of the target group to whom the Project is geared. The survey was launched a few days after the Project went live, first on Beit Hillel's Facebook page, and then shared over social media and email lists. Over 300 responses have already been submitted by women from across Israel, and we are still collecting responses. The objective is to obtain information from a wide variety of women of different ages, backgrounds and locations

Some of the questions posed in the survey:

- * Are you satisfied with the range of personalities available to respond to your questions about religion and spirituality in its various forms?

* Please detail some of the religious and spiritual dilemmas and questions which concern you.

* Do you feel that you currently receive appropriate or satisfactory attention to the religious and spiritual questions and dilemmas which concern you?

The data collected has not yet been fully analyzed, but from a first glance, it contains fascinating information. The answers we are receiving are striking and prove how Meshivat Nefesh is answering a real need and yearning for the unique approach to Halachic Questions and spiritual guidance by female Torah scholars.

The Rabbaniot who have responded to questions thus far are: Rabbanit Idit Bar-Tov, Rabbanit Tami Bitton , Rabbanit Chana Godinger (Dreyfuss), Rabbanit Tamar Meir, Rabbanit Bat Sheva Samet, Rabbanit Chani Frank , Rabbanit Yafit Kleimer, Rabbanit Soraleh Rosen, Rabbanit Jenny Rosenfeld, Rabbanit Rachel Reinfeld-Wachtfogel, Rabbanit Rachel Sprecher-Frankel. More Rabbaniot will be joining the writing team, constituting the full forum of our responders.

Meshivat Nefesh is a Project that is answering a real need in our community.

We invite you to partner with us in expanding and further developing this timely and significant Project. Your support will have a substantial impact and we thank you in advance. Please contact us for additional information, including dedication opportunities.





MESHIVAT NEFESH - BEIT HILLEL WOMEN'S RESPONSA ONLINE

/// Rabbanit Surale Rosen * ///

Meshivat Nefesh, Beit Hillel's Halachic responsa online, is an initiative created to answer the growing need of women for both spiritual and Halachic guidance given by women.

The past 30 years of intensive women's learning has created a world of Batei Midrash full of students with a zest for growing in Torah. A platform for dedicated talmidot chachamot who are **יְרֵאוֹת שְׁמַיִם** and well versed both in Gemarah and Halakha has been established. If women teaching and lecturing Torah has been a major change these past 30 years, things have developed further. Students in the Beit Midrash turn to their teachers for both spiritual guidance and questions in Halakha. Women in the community seek learned female figures for counseling and advice as well as an address for their Halachic questions regarding Taharat Hamishpacha, kashrut and much more. But not all choose to turn in person with a question. Many young women prefer the anonymity of asking a question online over a personal interview. Beit Hillel's Meshivat Nefesh established a forum of key figures from different women's Batei Midrash, Mechinot, and communities around the country who have both the educational and Halachic experience to address questions and problems sent online. A psychologist is an integral part of the forum so that when a question of personal advice comes in, nothing that may exist in between the lines is missed and overlooked.

Since the launch of Meshivat Nefesh in March, we have received questions from men and women, both Halachic and general advice seeking. Most answers are published online but, more importantly, some are sent to the sender solely since they contain personal and confidential advice with contact information for further discussion. These types of questions, followed by one on one consultation, are significant since they offer an environment where a woman feels free to discuss and bring up issues that she would have avoided had she consulted with a man.

Each question opens up an entire world, and the common denominator is that they are always surprising, taking one out of the comfortable world of the Beit Midrash to the "real" world and its challenges.

The discussions and the learning created by the encounter with questions from real dilemmas, and with the requirement for a written response within a relatively short time frame, challenges the muscles of the brain and the heart, and provokes thoughts about the people who are on the other side of the question.

This project is answering a real demand and is coming at the right time both for us Rabbaniot and for women throughout Israel. I am privileged to be a part of it!

* Rabbanit Surale Rosen a response of Meshivat Nefesh & Head of Metivta - The Advanced Talmud Programme of Matan Jerusalem

BEIT HILLEL, a spiritual leadership organization comprised of more than 140 male and female scholars, is the leading voice of Centrist Orthodox Religious Zionism in Israel. Founded in 2012, Beit Hillel aspires to guide the Religious Zionist community and Israeli society overall in a moderate, inclusive and religiously-tolerant direction. Our core values are commitment to Halacha and democracy; promoting unity among all segments of Israeli society; advocating for women's empowerment; and supporting broad and open-minded education

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