

Navigating Turmoil: A Guide to Managing Internal Stress in Challenging Times

by Rachie Karesh

Introduction:

The world as we knew it was irrevocably altered on October 7th when we confronted the shocking atrocities that unfolded. The pain of digesting such indescribable information about our brothers and sisters in Israel left us grappling with the question of how to navigate our emotions. In this article, we will explore key principles for managing internal stress during these challenging times.

Step 1: Holding the Dialectic

In therapeutic terms, 'Holding the Dialectic' involves acknowledging that seemingly opposing thoughts can coexist. This concept is illustrated by the duality of emotions experienced at a wedding – a celebration of unity juxtaposed with a moment of reflection on the absence of the Beis HaMikdash. Applying this to our current situation, we can simultaneously feel heartbroken about the atrocities that occurred and feel proud of the unity and strength displayed by the Jewish people (or any other positive emotion).

Step 2: Identifying and Normalizing

Recognizing stress as a natural response to abnormal circumstances is crucial. In our current scenario, processing is uniquely difficult because we are living through the challenge in real-time. Understanding that our reactions are adaptive and the willingness to seek help if it impairs daily functioning is key, especially for those with pre-existing mental health conditions.

Step 3: Practical Tools – Information Management

Mindfully managing our exposure to news and social media is paramount. Choosing credible sources, setting specific times for information consumption, and limiting exposure are effective strategies. Additionally, being cautious about sharing content to avoid triggering distress in others is essential.

Step 4: Practical Tools – Connect with Others

During challenging times, connecting with friends, family, and loved ones becomes crucial. Physical touch, often overlooked, can trigger the release of oxytocin, promoting relaxation and reducing stress. Recognizing the strength in seeking assistance and sharing one's thoughts and emotions fosters a sense of comfort and relief.

Step 5: Practical Tools – Self-Care, Maintain a Schedule, Take Action, Mindfulness, Emunah

Prioritizing self-care, maintaining regular schedules, and taking positive actions, such as volunteering or engaging in rituals, contribute to healthy stress management. Mindfulness

techniques, such as focused breathing, ground us in the present, offering relief from the constant barrage of distressing thoughts. Finally, embracing Emunah, a deep trust in God, provides strength and purpose when our world feels chaotic.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, we are living in catastrophic times. Each of us needs to find the best way for ourselves to manage our emotions. It is possible to navigate the internal stress brought about by challenging times by adopting some or all of the aforementioned key principles and practical tools. By implementing these strategies and continuing to move forward, we can collectively build a brighter future. Together, as the resilient "am hanetzach," we will outlive our present challenges and forge a path toward a more luminous Jewish future.