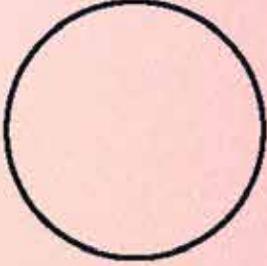


לעילוי נשמת  
שיינא גאלדא ע"ה  
בת יבלחט"א ר' מיכאל  
הלוי שיח' גוטלייזער  
גלב"ע כ"ח אלול ה'תשע"ו  
תנ"צ'בה

נדפס ע"י זקניה  
הרה"ת ר' יצחק מאיר וזוגתו  
מרת לאה ומשפחתם שיחיו  
שפאלטר

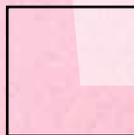
# *The Rebbe's Guidance for Emotional Wellness*

BASED ON THE FIRST CHAPTERS  
OF *LETTERS FOR LIFE*, BY  
**LEVI SHMOTKIN**



Some possible advice  
for your moods:  
Reflect on the fact that  
every person is a shliach  
of Hashem to do good  
and increase good in  
His world . . . through  
living daily life based on  
Shulchan Aruch; gradual  
self-education; and  
working to help those  
in your surroundings .  
. . . May Hashem grant  
you and your husband  
success in bringing the  
potential given to you to  
actuality, and to serve  
Hashem with joy.

— *Excerpt of a letter from the Rebbe to  
a woman experiencing dejection*



# Preventive Medicine

*There are two methods of healing. The first is to wait until a person becomes ill, G-d forbid, and then look for ways to cure them. This involves significant financial expenses and emotional pain for the patient, their family, and those who care for them, who are now struggling with an illness, G-d forbid.*

*But there is another way, as the Possuk states: “All the diseases I put on Egypt I will not put on you [to begin with], for I am Hashem your healer.”<sup>1</sup> He is a healer who ensures that from the outset, “I will put no [illness] on you...”*

*Chazal teach us that the “Torah brings healing to the world.”<sup>2</sup> And the way the Torah heals is that from the outset, “I will put no [illness] on you...” creating a world where there is no illness, only health.*

– 12 Tammuz 5733; Toras Menachem vol. 73, p. 38.

In light of the above *sicha*, two important introductory notes.

The Rebbe consistently emphasized the importance—and advantage—of preventive medicine. He critiqued approaches that focus exclusively on treating illness instead of pouring equal resources into fortifying stable health, preventing suffering to begin with. Therefore, an exploration of the Rebbe’s guidance for emotional wellness must begin not with problems, but with the mindsets and habits that keep us strong in the first place. These are the core concepts we will discuss.

However, this article *does not* address how to approach mental and emotional *illnesses*. For the treatment of physical illness, the Rebbe would usually invoke the Torah’s instruction *v’rapo yerapei*, explaining that the Torah empowers a doctor to heal. Similarly, in the realm of emotional health. In many letters the Rebbe would advise individuals struggling with a mental illness to get psychological or psychiatric care (often adding that it is vital for the professional to be a *Yarei Shamaim*<sup>3</sup>).

When a licensed psychologist asked the Rebbe “if a

therapist carries the status of a physician according to the Shulchan Aruch” the Rebbe responded (5747 English letter, Mindel Archive): “Anyone who is trained (and formally attested) to bring therapeutic relief to a human being has the status of a physician in that area of his training and expertise. Furthermore, since medical science has become so specialized, the area of therapy, and also dietetics, have in recent years been researched and systematized, etc., much in the same way as an eye doctor and an ear doctor have become specialists in their particular field...”

Thus, this article is focused on *preventive medicine*, the pillars of health that create a human being on whom “I will put no [illness to begin with], for I am Hashem your healer.”

“The Torah brings healing to the world.” Far from seeing a tension between Torah and mental health, the Rebbe taught that within the treasuries of *emuna* and Chassidus lie the strongest, most stable foundations for a healthy psyche. In various letters the Rebbe showed where the Torah teaches us these pillars of emotional stability, and how implementing its lessons in daily life make for a happy, healthy existence.

With this in mind, let’s begin.

**M**enachem Eini, a young Israeli fighter pilot, was taken captive in 5730 after his plane was downed by an Egyptian anti-aircraft missile. For three long years, he languished in Egypt in horrific conditions with nine other Israeli POWs. Finally, after the Yom Kippur War in 5734, a prisoner exchange was arranged, and he was able to return to his family in Eretz Yisroel.

Despite Eini's joy in reuniting with his wife and children, he found it increasingly difficult to return to normal life. He later recalled:

“Outwardly, I was productive and energetic. In fact, I was held up as a model of recovery and resilience. Inside, however, I was hiding a terrible inner fatigue. I would look around and see people at ease with themselves while I felt profoundly restless. Any noise would irritate me. Even music became an intolerable clamor. I could find no peace.” A friend of his recognized that he was suffering and advised him to seek a *yechidus* with the Rebbe.

In the Rebbe's room, for the first time since his release a few months earlier, Eini unburdened himself. “The memories

were very painful,” he recounted, “and I think people who've gone through a traumatic experience often prefer to suppress the trauma as much as possible. Yet here I was recounting these memories, without feeling a drop of pain or shame, if there was even anything to be ashamed of.”

As Eini shared his months and years of trauma—the loss of his co-pilot, his fear of imminent death, the never-ending interrogations, the years in captivity, the shock of freedom, the anxious anticipation, the surreal reunion, the visits with families of friends who didn't survive—the Rebbe gently encouraged him to share more.

At the end of the *yechidus*, the Rebbe advised Eini to write a memoir of his time in captivity. “Unfortunately,” the Rebbe explained, “you will probably not be Israel's last prisoner of war, and others who will be taken captive will benefit from reading about your experience.”

“He was absolutely and totally present,” Eini reflected, “sharing my burden with me. I was speaking to him, but also to myself; I was bringing things to the surface from deep inside me that I would otherwise never tell anyone, not even myself. His listening the way he did helped me heal from the experiences of captivity. I even had my first healthy laugh. I discovered that a person can be addressed fully through silence and listening alone. I needed this meeting like oxygen.



MENACHEM EINI (3RD FROM LEFT) IS GREETED UPON HIS RETURN TO ISRAEL AFTER THREE YEARS AS A PRISONER OF WAR

When I left, I felt more reflective, more connected to myself. I was able to revisit my time in captivity, and begin to relate to it without fear. I felt like a stone had rolled off my chest.”

Eini later recounted a special moment in this fateful *yechidus*: “I told the Rebbe that one of my challenges while in captivity was the pressure from the incessant togetherness. Even as I engaged in personal work, like drawing, writing poetry, or journaling, I knew I wasn’t alone, and others could always look at what I was doing. ‘It was always crowded in the room,’ I said, ‘being together all the time, without even

a minute to yourself...’

“After a moment of silence, the Rebbe remarked: ‘And yet, despite the togetherness, everyone was left with their own loneliness.’

“I looked at him for a moment and thought: How does he know that?! But I knew he was right. And I also realized that he had insight into how a person could overcome this universal loneliness. Today, many years later, I sometimes think that the Rebbe would want me to find this path, too...”<sup>4</sup>



CHAIM BARUCH HALBERSTAM VIA JEM10862 (11YAR 5749)

# Know You Are Not Alone

## Roots<sup>in</sup>Torah<sup>5</sup>

“Hashem is my shepherd; I shall lack nothing... Even when I walk in the valley of darkness, I will fear no evil for You are with me... Only goodness and kindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of Hashem for the length of days.”

*Tehillim Perek 23*

“*Dovid Hamelech*, finding himself in a dismal situation, said, ‘I will fear no evil—for You are with me,’ and because of this [attitude], Dovid triumphed over all adverse circumstances.

“This story was included in the Torah—the word ‘Torah’ coming from the word *horaah*—because it serves as a lesson for every Jew, wherever they may find themselves, that if only they hold steadfast onto the awareness that ‘You are with me,’ it will lead to the conclusion of the *pasuk* that ‘only goodness and kindness will follow me all the days of my life.’”

*Igros Kodesh vol. 10, p. 133*

“What is happening in our home now? I thought. This question overwhelmed me. Knowing thoroughly the character, nature, and behavior of each individual, I was able to imagine the general picture—

“The tears of my honorable mother. The pale, apprehensive face and deep inner anguish of my wife, and her silent cry. The broken hearts and terror of my bewildered daughters... And who knows what is happening with all of our friends, the Chassidim. How are they doing? This image swept over me, and a stream broke from my eyes. Hot tears rolled down my face. My whole body shivered...”

“Halt those ruminations! These words flashed in my mind and lit up my thoughts like a bolt of lightning—What about Hashem? True, I am a son, I am a husband,

I am a father, I am a father-in-law, I love, and I am loved; they are all dependent upon me, but I and they in turn are dependent upon G-d Who spoke and created the world... At this moment, I was liberated from the mire and dread of my situation. I ascended to the starry heavens with thoughts beyond the confines of finite, physical existence. I was bolstered by pure faith and absolute trust in the living G-d...

“These thoughts revitalized my spirit and strengthened me immensely. I forgot my present state, and sat in complete calm. My thoughts began to settle... I came to the firm resolve to be strong and courageous, without fear. To speak with a clear voice and disregard my surroundings. This determined resolution raised my spirits and self-respect. I sat like I was in a garden, or strolling in the breeze. The sunlight lit up the white wall across me...”

*The Frierdiker Rebbe in Reshimas Hamaasar (diary of his imprisonment), Sefer Hasichos 5687 p. 194*

“I want to respond to what you wrote that you are alone. We would often hear from my saintly father-in-law, of blessed memory (whose fiftieth anniversary of liberation we celebrated this week...), that a Jew is never alone; the Almighty G-d oversees each and every person individually, even over the smallest details of their life...

“In the journal he wrote about his imprisonment, my father-in-law describes how this idea—that the Creator and Conductor of the universe watches over everyone individually—gave him the strength and courage to rise above despair even while being in an awful prison, in a terrible situation... And this fortified him to endure all the interrogations and suffering with his head held high and with pride.

“His intention in committing these memories to writing, which he requested to be published, was that every individual [who reads] these records learn from them and act similarly in their own lives. And although who can compare themselves to his exalted persona... nevertheless, after he granted us a living example and paved the way for us, this is now accessible to every individual in their own personal situation. Especially since the difficulties we face in our lives do not compare to the type of adversity he overcame.”

*Igros Kodesh vol. 32 p. 257*

“Once, at some time in the years 5544-5547 (1784-1787), a group of early Chassidim farbrenging together spoke of how their Rebbe, the Alter Rebbe, had done away with loneliness. In previous eras, a Rebbe — a rosh yeshiva or a gaon — was alone, and his disciples were alone. The path of Chassidus blazed by the Alter Rebbe brought about an awesome G-dly innovation: the Rebbe is not alone and the Chassidim are not alone.”

*Hayom Yom 22 Iyar*

On an elementary level, when we think of loneliness, we think of the absence of human interaction, the craving we feel to be with others when we're alone. However, as Eini experienced, feeling lonely can mean something deeper than simply wanting to be with other humans. Even when surrounded by many friends, it is possible to feel alone on life's journey—to feel that no one is really with us, that there's no one who truly knows and pays attention to what's going on inside our hearts. Despite the best intentions of the people we spend time with, we might still feel like we carry the burden of life entirely on our own.

The Rebbe believed that filling this void was critical to being a healthy human being. As he wrote to a 17 year old bochur:

*To feel not alone in life (with only you on one side and the entire world on the other) is the most important thing of all. A person's entire sense of fulfillment and contentment is dependent on it...*

However, despite living in an age of round-the-clock connection, people feel increasingly isolated and alone. It appears that, ultimately, “despite the togetherness, everyone is left with their own loneliness.”

So what can help us fill this gnawing void?

The letter continues:

*For those who think deeply into their personal world, the only way to truly counter the sense of being alone in life [“with only you on one side and the entire world on the other”], is with an awareness of the Creator and Conductor of the world, who is ever-present in the world, even today—in the expression of Chazal, “within ten tefachim of the ground” [i.e., within our own lived reality].<sup>6</sup>*

*In a letter to a woman who struggled with loneliness (she was apparently a teacher in her twenties), the Rebbe explained:*

*Surely you know the saying that “Chasidut accomplished that a person not be lonely.” If this was said even regarding the relationship between a Chasid and his Rebbe, all the more so is this true regarding the relationship between one person and another. And certainly regarding the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people.*

*This is better understood in light of the foundational teaching of our Torah, the Torah of life, about Hashem's individual providence—which means, quite literally, that Hashem closely oversees every detail of a person's life with individual attention. And His providence and His blessings and His nurture are one and the same, because they are sourced in He Who is simple Oneness.*

*From these ideas emerge—and these ideas inform—a person's practical, emotional, and intellectual approach to life: Every individual finds themselves in a world (composed of human, animal, plant, and inanimate kingdoms, each consisting of multitudes of beings) that he or she influences, and is simultaneously influenced by them as well... Thus, every being is full of meaning, at least potentially, and it is up to the individual person to activate this meaning so that it moves from potential to actuality...*

*Especially in your case, where divine providence has put you in the field of educating Jewish children, Hashem's children. Every good step you take with your students creates an eternal closeness between you and them, a*



LEV/FREDIN VIA JEM165668 (5 CHESHVAN 5752)

*spiritual and sacred bond that is also tangibly positive and meaningful. When it comes to such a bond, the distance of space does not and cannot create a barrier, and no severance of this bond is possible (which is why it remains eternal).*

*In other words, when you sit in your room and find yourself overcome with loneliness, and at the very same time one of your students reviews a lesson they heard from you, or makes a bracha as you taught them, [physical distance notwithstanding.] this increases the vitality and light in your bond with each other; and it is impossible that your neshama not feel this increase, because it is part of your neshama's very essence; and the neshama, in turn, is the deepest, innermost part of a person...<sup>7</sup>*

Irving Block was a philosophy student at Harvard University in the mid-1950s when he was drawn to the Rebbe and came to learn in 770 for a period. Throughout Block's time in New York, the Rebbe would ask him about his mother, who had been widowed at a young age and lived in Nashville, Tennessee.

One day, Block's mother traveled to New York and told her son that she wanted to meet the Rebbe he had told her so much about. Block was able to arrange a *yechidus*, but she told him not to accompany her; she wanted to go in alone. After the *yechidus*, she told him what she had discussed with the Rebbe: that she had two sisters, both married, but she was very much alone. "On Friday nights when I light Shabbos candles, I'm all by myself, and I feel very lonely."

Block was embarrassed by his mother's words, feeling that it was inappropriate to approach the Rebbe that way, particularly at a first *yechidus*. But the Rebbe, it turned out, didn't feel that way at all. He simply told her, "You don't have to feel lonely. *Der Aibershter is alle mol mit dir*—Hashem is with you at all times."

Block recalls: "My mother came out and she was calm." After that day, whenever he asked his mother how she was feeling, she would answer, "Come on now, Hashem is always with me." Indeed, she told her son that from the time that the Rebbe told her those words, she was not lonely in the same way anymore.

# See Others

## Roots *in* Torah

“More than the giver does for the poor man, the poor man does for the giver.”

*Midrash Rabbah, Rus 5:9*

“When you do a favor for another person, whatever type of favor it may be, our Chachamim say about this that ‘More than the giver does for the poor man, the poor man does for the giver.’”

*Igros Kodesh vol. 9 p. 47*

“Hashem created the world in a way that every creation is both a receiver and a giver.”<sup>8</sup>

“A brief reflection will clearly reveal that the universe we live in is ordered in a system of give and take, and the personal universe of the individual (the microcosm) must likewise conform to this system of reciprocal relationship. Consequently, when one disrupts or distorts this system [by thinking only of their own needs], it must necessarily bring about a distortion in one’s immediate surroundings, and especially in one’s inner life.”

*English Letter 5721*

Recognizing that “*der Aibershter is alle mol mit dir*” helps us feel less alone on the winding journey of life. But that is not enough. We must see that other people are along for the ride as well.

The importance of turning one’s mind and heart toward others was a central theme in the Rebbe’s counseling. In addition to fulfilling the Torah’s foundational principle of “*V’ahavta l’reiacha kamocha*,”<sup>9</sup> he believed it could have a transformative effect on one’s personal well-being. A *maaneh* to a woman who had been through a lot in her life reads as follows:

*Many people whose life experiences are similar to yours (with regard to suffering, etc.) have found relief through regularly and consistently devoting their energy, time, and emotional attention to assisting others who find themselves in distress or in a state of confusion. This has helped them perceive and value their lives in an entirely new way (their joy of living increased, their self-confidence increased, they found new meaning in life, etc.).<sup>10</sup>*

One of the important ways helping others can improve our well-being is by freeing our minds. As the Rebbe writes in an English letter to a young man who wrote of his dark ruminations:

*You are much too wrapped up with yourself, with your own emotions and feelings and aspirations. . . . You must get away from yourself, and begin to think of others. It is time to begin an active participation in society; to give, and give generously. The opportunities are many, and the need is great.<sup>11</sup>*

Taibel Lipskier was born to a family of Chassidim in the tumultuous first years of Communist Russia. Her mother died at a young age, leaving her to care for her younger siblings. Eventually, she married, and after years of hardship, the couple and their children escaped the Soviet Union. After spending time in various displaced persons camps, they finally made it to the United States.

Life wasn’t easy for new immigrants. After a failed attempt at farming in New Jersey, they relocated to Brooklyn. Making a living sufficient to sustain a family was a constant challenge—by then there were ten children. Naturally, the upheavals of her life took their toll on Lipskier, and she suffered from anxiety and depression. She decided to consult the Rebbe for guidance on how to improve her psychological and emotional state.

The Rebbe gave her unexpected advice: “Go to as many weddings as possible and dance, and inspire other people

to dance too.”

As it happens, Lipskier was an exceptionally skilled dancer. She followed the Rebbe’s advice, and for decades she would go to every possible wedding and dance the night away.

“She lived in Brooklyn,” her grandson explained, “where at the time, there were many young women getting married who had little or no family in attendance. My grandmother would show up and dance, sometimes for hours, with the bride and her friends, bringing immense joy to the wedding.”

“It wasn’t like she was outgoing by nature,” her grandson observed. “It was actually quite contrary to her nature. But she constantly did it, and she did it with every fiber of her being. And ultimately, we saw how the joy she brought to

hundreds and thousands of people over long decades came back to her; we saw how it gave her so much joy and strength and fortitude and resilience.”

Thinking about it all these years later, he reflected: “Many of us are dealing with anxiety or unresolved wounds. We want to extricate all that darkness from our system, from our psyche, from our environment and home. But sometimes, the most effective solution is not to fight the darkness but to kindle a flame of joy—by dancing and inspiring other people to dance. In that dance, with the pure intent of bringing joy to others, a passion of fire and warmth is created in us and around us, causing the darkness to dissipate and be banished.”



18 CHESHVAN 5725

# Recognize Your Unique Role

## Roots in Torah

“I place Hashem before me always; this is a major principle in the Torah... For a person’s way of sitting, his movements, and his dealings while he is alone in his house are not like his way of sitting, his movements, and his dealings when he is before a great king... All the more so when one takes to heart that the Great King, the Holy One, Blessed Is He, Whose glory fills the earth, is standing over him and watching his actions... And one should not be ashamed because of people who mock him in his service of Hashem... And as soon as he wakes up, he will rise eagerly to the service of Hashem...”

*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 1:1*

“Needless to say, the *Shulchan Aruch*, being a codex of laws, does not engage in nice phrases and euphemisms for their own sake, but every word is chosen and significant and of practical importance. So too, in regard to the above quotation... It calls for a few moments of reflection when getting up in the morning, and from time to time during the day, that one is always in the

presence of G-d, and this is a very effective method of being able to control one's daily behavior in every good way.

“The above is also the answer to the matter of *atzvut* [‘dejection’], which you mention in your letter. Such a feeling is often the result of thinking oneself unimportant, and therefore it is of no consequence how one acts or behaves, leading one to become apathetic and discouraged. But realizing that one is in the presence and company of the King of kings, whom the King has honored and privileged with very important tasks, this emphasizes the importance of every individual.

“In your case, the emphasis is even greater, inasmuch as you have the ability and opportunity to influence many other persons directly as well as indirectly by showing a living example, which also gives you a special *zechut* [merit] if you will realize all your potentials in this way...”

*English letter dated 6 Teves, 5737*

The Rebbe taught that a critical pillar of a healthy psyche is the knowledge that we each have a unique *shlichus* and purpose on earth.<sup>12</sup>

In a letter to a couple working in the Israeli army, who wrote of their despondent moods and how their lives felt gray and insignificant, the Rebbe writes:

*Some possible advice for your [dejected] moods: Reflect on the fact that every person is a shliach of Hashem to do good and increase good in His world. This is typically not accomplished through revolutions or roaring self-sacrifice, but rather through living daily life based on Shulchan Aruch; gradual self-education; and activism*

*to help those in your surroundings, even if most of these activities are labeled by the world as “gray” and “insignificant.” All of this is possible on the “gray” days in the army as well. May Hashem grant you and your husband success in bringing the potential given to you to actuality, and to serve Hashem with joy.*<sup>13</sup>

Ruth Benjamin grew up in South Africa to Christian parents. In her twenties, she converted to Judaism and later developed a relationship with the Rebbe. A clinical psychologist by profession, she consulted with the Rebbe in person on how to counsel patients who questioned the value of their lives.

Benjamin recalled: “Regarding my Jewish patients, he said that I should tell them that following the Holocaust, with so many millions of our people murdered, those alive today have a double duty. They must live not only for themselves, but also for those who are not here. When they realize this, they will find that their own turmoil will be eased.

“Regarding my patients who aren’t Jewish, the Rebbe said I must explain to them that they have obligations in this world. All human beings are mandated by the Torah to fulfill the

Seven Laws of Noah.

“I cited a suicidal patient of mine (who wasn’t Jewish), whom I managed to get to the hospital in time, saving his life. Afterward, he came to me and said, ‘You are responsible for my being alive. Now give me something to live for.’ I had not known how to answer him, and I asked the Rebbe what I should say to a patient like this.

“‘Tell him that he is part of Hashem’s world,’ the Rebbe responded. ‘And that means he has to answer to Hashem.’”

# Build Healthy Habits

In order to fulfill our unique *shlichus* in life and “answer to Hashem,” we need to be functioning well on the most basic of levels.

Intuitively we might assume that toxic thoughts or feelings result from the emotional aspects of our lives. Family dynamics, childhood trauma, or social rejection are some of the factors we might consider, and for good reason. However, in our search for deeper insight, we may overlook the practical details of our daily lives.

A recurring theme in the Rebbe’s counseling is that every person has mundane needs upon which their mental health depends, and when deprived of these necessities, their psyche suffers. Therefore, disturbing thoughts and emotions, even when they take a seemingly alarming turn, can actually be symptoms of neglecting those simple needs that are the basis for stable mental health. Some of these needs are: physical self-care, an occupation, a schedule, and social engagement.

## The Need for Physical Care

### Roots in Torah

“A person does not have the authority to hurt their body...”

*Shulchan Aruch Harav Hilchot Nizkei Guf Venefesh, seif 4*

“It is certainly superfluous to elaborate on the necessity of listening to the directives of the doctor... The central idea here is, in the words of *Chazal*, that a person does not have the ownership to hurt their body, because the body belongs to Hashem—an amazing expression which, with even brief reflection, is absolutely mind-boggling. And may it be that this profound teaching of *Chazal* should have its desired effect on you to be more careful with your health...”

*Igros Kodesh vol. 14, p. 203*

“A small hole in the *guf* is a big hole in the *neschama*”

*Letter from the Maggid to Reb Avrohom HaMalach*

In a letter to a middle-aged man, the Rebbe writes the following:

*It appears that you are not properly taking care of your bodily health. Naturally, it is impossible that this won’t also affect your emotional health, as explained in the well-known teaching of the Maggid to his son, that “a*

*small hole in the body causes a big hole in the soul.” Therefore, if you will take my advice, you should watch your health in the most literal sense—eating, drinking, sleeping, and so on—and this will be good for you spiritually as well.<sup>14</sup>*

# The Need to Work

## Roots*in*Torah

“Man is born to toil.”

*Iyov 5:7*

“When the porters of *mechuza* wouldn’t work—they would become ill.”

*Bava Metzia 77a*

“The *possuk* in Iyov teaches us that ‘man is born to toil.’ For a person to remain mentally and emotionally healthy, he must labor and feel the sense of work and accomplishment. The Gemara tells us about the porters of Mechoza that when they were unable to do their work of carrying loads, they became ill. The same is true of all of us: Hashem created us in such a way that to be emotionally well, we must be engaged in productive activity.”

*Sichos Kodesh 5739 vol. 2, p. 316*

Productive activity—be it a job, learning Torah, or raising a family—should not be viewed as capitulation to the practical demands of life. It is not an obstacle to inner peace to discard as soon as circumstances allow, but rather a significant component of our mental health. Sometimes the solution to emotional problems might, in fact, lie in shoring up the occupational areas of life.

In a letter to a Californian father and businessman, the Rebbe writes:

*Following the pleasure of our meeting, I wish to add here in writing some thoughts which, for obvious reasons, I did not wish to express in the presence of others, namely, in regard to your son.... I believe that the best help that can be given your son, in general, is to get him to work. I should only add that in view of the fact that this would entail a change in your son’s way of life for a period of*

*time, it would be well if his job would, in the first stage at any rate. . . not impose on him too much responsibility, so that he will not be frightened or discouraged by it.*

*If it is the kind of work which he might consider beneath him, it might be explained to him that it is only a start, and temporary, and, indeed, the first step to advancement. It is well known that here in the U.S.A., people at the top often take pride in the fact that they worked their way up from the bottom of the ladder. After he adjusts himself to a part-time occupation of several hours a day, he could probably be induced to work half a day and in due course a full-time job. Needless to say, the above is in addition to what we spoke about—the importance of his feeling that his parents and friends have the fullest confidence in him.<sup>15</sup>*

# The Need for Structure

## Roots*in*Torah

“The *shoresh* of Yaakov is *Tikkun*, and the *shoresh* of Eisav is *Tohu*. The *oros* of *tohu* were very strong, and they were unable to be confined to *keilim*, and thus they left the *keilim*, and the *keilim* broke and fell down, which is why Eisav was a *Rasha*.”

*Torah Ohr, Vayishlach 24:1*



CHAIM BARUCH HALBERSTAM VIA JEM 101691 (2 AV 5737)

“Generally speaking, a person’s life needs to be specifically in an orderly fashion. And specifically such is the way of *kedusha*, in contrast to *sitra achra* which functions in a chaotic manner. And I mean order in all areas—waking up, studying Torah, eating and drinking, etc. and, certainly and importantly, with regards to your relationship at home, for ‘great is the peace between husband and wife for then Hashem’s presence rests amongst them.’”<sup>16</sup>

*Igros Kodesh* vol. 20, p. 315

“Internal harmony is dependent on living an ordered life externally too,” the Rebbe explains in a handwritten *maaneh*. If we improvise every day—waking up, working, studying, or socializing with no rhythm at all—our thoughts and emotions will be similarly disjointed.

In a *maaneh* to a man who bemoaned his confused state of mind, the Rebbe writes:

*Naturally (and this can’t be changed), for a person to be successful in what they do—and in general, to act*

*correctly, to know what they truly want, to make good decisions, etc.—one must have as much peace of mind and body as possible. This requires living a properly organized life in the literal sense of the word. For a Jew, this means living day to day as detailed in Shulchan Aruch, and having a proper schedule also for mundane activities (eating, drinking, learning, etc.).*<sup>17</sup>

Living with structure is also vital for inner satisfaction. When we create a schedule, we dedicate time to what’s really

important and commit ourselves to systematically pursuing it, no matter our frame of mind. Otherwise, it's hard to escape the hollow feeling that much of what we do is motivated by fleeting impulses. In the Rebbe's words:

*For a person to feel that they are truly doing objective good (and not only satisfying their momentary desire)—self-discipline and a structured lifestyle are a necessity.*

In a letter to a young woman, the Rebbe writes:

*As to your request for actionable advice, based on how you described [your present habits], you should begin organizing your life in a manner that accustoms you to having a structured daily routine. Doing so will make it easier for you to embark on a stable course, practice self-discipline, and have your mind govern your emotions effectively.*

*It appears that a primary contributor to your present*

*mental state is the disarray and instability in your life's external facets—which then mirror themselves internally, [unsettling] your inner self, your emotions, and so on. Since it is difficult to adjust to an orderly lifestyle after a long period of scatteredness, one strategy to ease this transition is to create an external motivator—by this I mean to take a job (or a similar commitment) where you know that you're accountable to others to accomplish consistent work during established hours.*

*Reading between the lines of your letter, it appears that you assume your state of mind is the symptom of serious subconscious issues. However, in my opinion, the primary causes are the above-mentioned two points—conduct in accordance with the Torah, and living a structured life. When you mend the above (little by little, at least), your disposition will significantly improve, perhaps even becoming completely restored.<sup>18</sup>*

## The Need for Social Engagement

### Roots*in*Torah

“It is not good for man to be alone.”

*Bereishis 2:18*

“Human beings are not isolationist by nature, and ‘it is not good for man to be alone.’ People naturally search for a social life in which, and through which, and with the help of which, they can actualize their own completion.”

*Igros Kodesh vol. 23, p. 264*

“Man is innately a social being. Unlike [some] other animals for whom banding together is not a necessity, it is human nature to seek out society.”

*Moreh Nevuchim 2:40*

“Rav Chiya bar Abba said in the name of Rav Yohanan: The Possuk says, ‘I will be sanctified [specifically] among the children of Israel.’ Every act of *Kedusha* should not be done with less than ten.”

*Megillah 23b*

In a 5719 letter to a young woman, the Rebbe writes:

*I have received your letter where you describe your [negative] state of mind, etc. I believe I have already written to you several times that in my opinion—which I have also seen borne out in reality—every person, without exception, is “innately a social being,” though of course not everyone to the same degree. When one tries to behave contrary to this nature, it understandably leads to [emotional] complications, etc.*

*For those who, for one reason or another, have a difficult time mixing with other people—ultimately, there is no way other than the process of metaphorically “learning how to swim.” It is impossible for a person to begin developing swimming skills before they enter the water. Even if they stand on the river's edge—it is insufficient. They must jump into the water, and then they'll naturally begin learning how to swim. And in the end, they'll*



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*finally master it. However, all the lengthy ruminations while still standing on the riverbank—about how they’ll learn, and what it will entail, and in which particular manner—are futile. For it’s impossible to learn how to swim anywhere else but in the water.*

*After requesting your apology, it is precisely the same in your situation. You articulate in your letters your arguments for and against taking on an occupation that would involve being in the presence and company of others. However, this entire thought process takes place while you’re sitting in your own room or in your own personal space. Of course, my intention is not to rebuke you; I am only trying again, with the hope that perhaps this time my words will finally have an effect, and you will “jump” into an endeavor that will force you (at least for the first few days) to be among other people outside your home.*

*I hope that within a short period of time, you will not need to force yourself, and you will see for yourself how much meaning and how much benefit there is to being in other people’s company, [not only for you, but] also for them—for it is not to no purpose that human beings were created with a social nature.*

*Indeed, how wondrous are the words of Chazal, which are also intended as a practical lesson in our daily lives, that everything sacred must be done in a communal setting. [Similarly,] there is a well-known Chasidic saying,*

*attributed to several of the great Chasidic Rebbes, that “it is worse to be alone in Gan Eden than in... [Gehinnom] together with others.”<sup>19</sup>*

Of course, this move toward healthy social engagement might sometimes need to be undertaken in gradual steps. As another letter explains to the teacher of a student going through an emotionally challenging period:

*It appears that an important component in his recovery is that he begin re-engaging with others... It is self-understood that my intent is not that he should change suddenly from one extreme to another and begin interacting with others for many hours a day. Rather, he should do this step by step, and with the people with whom he finds it easiest to connect.*

*However, he should do so with the intent and goal of progressing steadily until he is able to speak and mingle with others naturally and without strain. Together with the above, and this is of paramount importance, he should be strong in the knowledge (which is, in fact, true) that his current situation can be improved one hundred percent, though, as mentioned, it will require a step-by-step approach... Since you took care to communicate his predicament, certainly you will not neglect him [throughout this process], and, ultimately, he too will thank you for your efforts—even if he won’t appreciate them initially.<sup>20</sup>*

# Stay in Touch with Your Inner Self

## Roots *in* Torah

“Every Jew wants to be part of the Jewish people, and he wants to perform all the mitzvot and eschew all the transgressions; it is only his evil inclination that presses him”

*Mishneh Torah: Hilchot Gerushin 2:20.*

“And here comes the essential point of the Rambam’s explanation: Every Jew, regardless of his status and station, is essentially willing to do all that he is commanded to do by our Torah. However, sometimes the Yetzer (Hara) prevails over his better judgment and prevents him from doing what he has to do in accordance with the Torah. When, therefore, Beth Din compels a Jew to do something, it is not with a view to creating in him a new desire, but rather to release him from the compulsion which had paralyzed his desire, thus enabling him to express his true self. Under these circumstances, when he declares ‘I am willing,’ it is an authentic declaration.

“To put the above in contemporary terminology: The conscious state of a Jew can be affected by external factors to the extent of including states of mind and even behavior which are contrary to his subconscious, which is the Jew’s essential nature. When the external pressures are removed, it does not constitute a change or transformation of his essential nature, but, on the contrary, merely the reassertion of his innate and true character.

*English letter 21 Sivan 5725*

“Rabbi Alexandri says: Anyone who engages in the study of Torah for its own sake introduces peace into the heavenly entourage above and into the earthly entourage below.”

*Sanhedrin 99b*

“The meaning of making peace in the entourage below is that the ‘left side’ becomes included in the ‘right side’—that the *middos* of the *nefesh habehamis* become subservient (*bateil*) to the *middos* of the *Nefesh Haelokis*...”

*Likutei Torah Mattos 86d*

“True peace is like the Gemoro in Sanhedrin teaches, that ‘Torah makes peace in the world.’ And, as the Gemoro continues to explain, the Torah brings ‘peace into the heavenly entourage above and into the earthly entourage below.’

“The explanation of this Gemoro, according to Chasidus and Musar, is that every person has a *nefesh haelokis* and a *nefesh habehamis*, a *yetzer tov*, and a *yetzer hara*, and they are always in conflict... However, the *yetzer tov* can never concede to the *yetzer hara* because it is a *cheleek elokah mimaal mamash*... it is therefore understood that peace in the ‘lower entourage’ of a person’s inner world, between the *yetzer tov* and the *yetzer hara*, is only possible in one way—when the *yetzer tov* overcomes the *yetzer hara*.”

*Igros Kodesh vol. 3, p. 450*

Building healthy habits as described above creates the external framework for a happy, resilient life. But without a strong connection with your innermost self, the structure can easily collapse.

Beyond cultural affiliation and suffering discrimination, the Rebbe taught that Jewish identity is deeply rooted in the subconscious. Therefore, giving expression to this most essential part of you by practicing Judaism has profound

mental health benefits. Suppressing it, wittingly or unwittingly—leaving it hidden somewhere deep inside—leads to inner tension and undesirable outcomes.

One letter<sup>21</sup> draws a comparison to a person with an intellectual bent whose time is spent entirely in hands-on occupations (say, in the construction industry). He or she might find their daily routine to be stress-free and even enjoyable. However, it is likely that something would be nagging at them. An essential part of them—their intellectual capacity—finds no expression in their conscious existence.

Similarly, when a Jewish person gives no expression to their Jewishness, it creates internal strain. Conversely, when they cultivate it by actively practicing Judaism, it fosters a sense of harmony between their innermost self and their everyday lives. The following letter explains this to a Jewish man who wrote that he lacks inner peace:

*It has been explained in our Torah—and this has also been confirmed by modern science—that a surface layer may cover up an essential trait or quality, or, to use modern terminology, the subconscious may be overlaid by the conscious mind.*

*In such a case, conflicts are inevitable, for man's essence is linked to the deep internal layers and not the surface "cover," which itself is subject to change and under the influence of external forces.*

*For a Jew to eliminate conflict, it is necessary for him to bring to the fore his inner essence, which is his deep-rooted faith in Hashem. Failing this, he is bound to feel perturbed, even though the cause may be concealed from him. In other words, a Jew must live his daily life in accordance with the Torah and mitzvot—the Jewish way of life—for it is only in this way that he can attain true harmony and peace of mind.*

*It does, however, require an effort, oftentimes a strenuous effort, and much determination, including at times the sacrifice of certain conveniences, whatever they may be. But considering what is at stake—nothing less than the attainment of peace of mind and inner harmony, and even simple physical health (inasmuch as the physical and the spiritual are interrelated), every effort made in this direction is surely worthwhile and most rewarding. I would suggest that as a start you begin putting on tefillin every weekday morning and that in addition you say at least a short prayer.<sup>22</sup>*

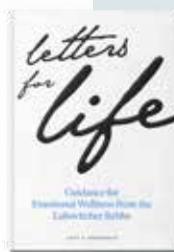
In a letter to the wife of an Israeli writer, the Rebbe writes:

*I was delighted to see that your husband has found inner peace through connecting—even deeper—to a worldview*

*that emanates from our Torah, the Torah of Truth and the Torah of Life; an inner peace that borders on and brings with it also an inner joy, a soulful joy.*

*It would be superfluous to explain how for a person's life to truly be called "life," inner peace and harmony are a necessity. This is especially true in our times, an era full of upheaval both in the communal life of the public, and the inner life of the private individual...*

*May you have good news to report about all the above.<sup>23</sup>*



This article was excerpted and abbreviated from the first section of *Letters for Life*, a new book that examines the Rebbe's *igros* and *yechidus'n* to glean lessons for our own mental and emotional health. The later sections of *Letters for Life* explore the Rebbe's approach to common emotional challenges, such as discontent, anxiety, self-criticism, mood swings, and so on. To learn more, visit [chabad.org/lettersforlife](http://chabad.org/lettersforlife).

1. Shemos 15:26.
2. See Eruvin 54a.
3. See, for example, *Igros Kodesh* vol. 22, p. 227; *Ibid.*, vol. 31, p. 338; English letter dated 24 Tammuz, 5726; Here's My Story (JEM) from 27 February 2014, "Do What Your Zeide Says To Do"; Here's My Story (JEM) from 14 March, 2018, "Health Psychiatry."
4. [he.chabad.org/395252](http://he.chabad.org/395252).
5. The "Roots in Torah" sections contain Torah sources the Rebbe cited as foundations for given emotional health ideas. The section generally includes a quotation of the Torah source as well as a letter from the Rebbe on the subject (unless there is already a letter quoted on the given topic).
6. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 19, p. 439.
7. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 23, p. 359.
8. See *Hisvaaduyos* 5746 vol. 2, p. 612, where the Rebbe articulates many Torah sources for this idea.
9. Vayikra, 19:18.
10. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 26, p. 497.
11. English letter, dated Elul 5721.
12. See, for example, *Igros Kodesh* vol. 14, p. 400.
13. *Heichal Menachem* vol. 3, p. 44.
14. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 7, p. 194.
15. English letter dated 12 Nissan, 5734.
16. Vayikra Rabbah 9:9, Sotah 17a.
17. *Petakim M'shulchan HaRebbe*, vol. 1, p. 123.
18. *Igros Kodesh*, Vol. 24, p. 179.
19. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 18, p. 534.
20. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 19, p. 371.
21. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 17, p. 32.
22. English letter from 5725, published in *Healthy in Body, Mind, and Spirit* (SIE), Vol. 3, chapter 3, accessible at [chabad.org/2308532](http://chabad.org/2308532).
23. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 26, p. 155.