Caring for Your Mental Health in Troubled Times
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I don't know about you, but I have been spending significantly more time these past few weeks watching the news, reading the news and scrolling through my social media. I have always been attached to social media, but I am now looking at posts and stories more than ever.

This is not necessarily a healthy way to live. We as a Jewish people have been going through collective trauma, and the news and posts do not always help our mental state. We might feel better for a moment because we are all caught up with the news, but I know for me it only makes me feel worse after reading and listening to negative post after post, video after video.

This week in our Torah portion, Abraham is told "*lech l'cha*"—not just "*lech*," "go," rather "*lech l'cha*." Rashi translates this as "go for yourself." This journey is not just for God, it is for Abraham's benefit.[1]

Right now, I see this through the lens of mental health. What can we do, where can we go for ourselves, for our benefit? We need to take the time and focus on ourselves just as much, if not more than we are currently focusing on others. If we are not at our best, we can't help those around us.

I follow a lot of Jewish blogs and Instagram accounts, including two that have been posting about our mental health in these times, *Kveller* and *HeyAlma*. *Kveller* is a Jewish parent blog that posts about things from Jewish culture to motherhood to news—and more. *HeyAlma* is a feminist Jewish culture site that brings in many different voices on topics from pop culture to politics to holidays—and more. I have found that both blogs create content that is relatable and easy to follow and understand.

Just a few days after the terrible attacks on Jewish lives, *HeyAlma* posted a blog titled "Taking Care of Yourself Is a Mitzvah." The writers created a list of 50 suggestions of things to do to take a break from the constant bad news.[2]

The author of the article writes, "At the same time that I know it is my responsibility as a Jew, as someone who believes in healing the world, to both bear witness to the tragedy of this war and politically organize around it, I know that it is equally important to find moments to rest. To log off. To seek comfort. To listen when my anxiety and sadness bubble to the surface. … I want you to know that you should be doing this, too. As Jews who believe in *pikuach nefesh*, protecting the sacredness of all life, we are required to take care of ourselves both physically and mentally."[3]

I agree, *pikuach nefesh* is one of the most important *mitzvot* in Judaism. Saving a life, saving *your* life, is something that we need to remember and focus on—even if we don't want to.

Just the other day, *Kveller* posted a similar article called "Being on Social Media Feels Awful Right Now. Here's What You Can Do Instead." The author came up with a list of activities to help someone try to get away from their phone screen, such as cooking, reading, watching a TV show, doing an art project or going outside.[4]

I know, for me, these are good reminders. As I scroll through *Times of Israel* or my Instagram feed, I need those reminders to take a step back and focus on my mental health.

Judaism also has practices that can help with one's mental health. *HeyAlma* asked its community what Jewish rituals its members have been practicing, and the list is extensive—from prayer to wearing Jewish jewelry, from being in the Jewish community to keeping kosher.[5] These rituals might not be part of one's regular Jewish practice, but at a time like this our Judaism is there for us to fall back on. Judaism is there to be the small light in a dark tunnel.

So, what does that mean for us?

I want to encourage you to take some time to focus on your mental health, take some time for self-care. What might be helpful to one person might not be helpful to another, so here are some examples of things you could do.

Jewish ritual: Like the *HeyAlma* community, you could add a new Jewish ritual into your daily routine. This could be saying the Shema daily, singing Jewish music, exploring Jewish texts or wearing a *kippah*. This could also be coming to temple and engaging in Jewish community. I know, for me, engaging with my Jewish community, with our community here, has given me comfort in these hard times.

Go outside/be active: Going outside and breathing in fresh air always helps calm me down. The weather has been amazing these last few days, and even going outside for five minutes and taking a walk around the block could be the small break you didn't realize you needed.

Cozy up with a good book or TV show: Sometimes books or TV shows can take you to a different world for a short period of time and give you a break from the negativity in the world we are in. I know this is what I have been doing. I decided, after a few days, that I could no longer watch the news. Ever since, when I wanted to watch the news, I turn on *The Big Bang Theory* and watch a sitcom that I know will make me laugh. Even if that is my only laugh of the day, it gives me a little bit of endorphins to help my mental health.

Listen to music: Music has the power to move people. Listening to your favorite song or artist can help you get into a better mood. In addition, listening to music that aligns with your mood can help you move through how you are feeling at that moment.

Talk to your family/friends: Sometimes, all you need is a conversation with those you love. Reach out to your family members and catch up, even if you haven't talked in a while. Reach out to those you talk to all the time just to say, "Hi." I know that, for me, talking to my family always puts me in a better mood when I hang up the phone.

As I said before, you don't need to do every one of these things, different things work for different people. I encourage you to think about what might work for you and take some time this next week to do that thing. It could be an activity from my list, on the blogs or something that you know helps with your mental health.

We need to make sure to take care of ourselves during these times, just as much as we are trying to take care of Jews around the world. We can't do our best work, if we are not at our best.

I know this is not easy work to do. I struggle with it just as much as you all do, but it is essential that we take the time and better our mental health.

[1] Rashi on *Genesis* 12:1
[2] https://www.heyalma.com/taking-care-of-yourself-is-a-mitzvah/?utm_medium=social&utm_source=Alma_Instagram&utm_campaign=linkinbio&utm_content=later-38451597
[3] ibid
[4] https://www.kveller.com/being-on-social-media-feels-awful-right-now-heres-what-you-can-do-instead/?utm_medium=social&utm_source=kveller_instagram&utm_campaign=linkinbio&utm_content=later-38771226
[5] https://www.heyalma.com/if-youre-turning-to-new-jewish-rituals-right-now-youre-not-alone/?utm_medium=social&utm_source=Alma_Instagram&utm_campaign=linkinbio&utm_content=later-38662650