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Subject: A Timely Message From David Mandel, CEO of OHEL

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A PANDEMIC PESACH

How much influence does the mainstream and social media have on our thinking and behavior? Is there a need for psychological warfare to wage war against the war on the Coronavirus?

The mind and the body are intertwined as one. The plethora of research on the mindful body and the happiness quotient confirm the value of positive thought. The non-stop end-to-end media coverage of the virus and connected barrage of data on deaths, illness, hospitalizations, shelter in place, unemployment, inability to live a normal life compels us to strategize and mobilize our inner capacity for more positive thought. Occasional or even frequent participation in live stream concerts, arts and crafts, exercise as well as catching up on our reading have been welcome distractions for us and our kids, but what more can we do?

Ask any child about their home schooling these last eight weeks and their response is one giant eye roll. They've had more than enough.

And parents as adjunct teachers for their home schoolers have had doubly enough.

As we prepare ourselves to reemerge into our previous life we need to instill an emotional edge within ourselves, a psychological resilience to overcome the physical withdrawal we have experienced. Add to this, the horror, shock and grief of losing loved ones, close friends, acquaintances, and the myriad of amazing people throughout the world, whom we didn't even know and yet felt their painful loss. We need to be especially strong to return.



marketing in business, economics, social sciences, politics directs people to focus on an issue in a positive light.

And crisis management which we have witnessed en masse during the virus deploys concepts to take a negative event and shine a light of positivity on it.

Is there anything more pressing at this time than to find positive light at the end of the coronavirus tunnel? We have to repel paroxysm and transition to an inner peace not engulfed by anxiety or fear of what may be next.

Tal Ben-Shahar author of *Being Happy* and one of the most popular lecturers at Harvard explains that in Western culture we view suffering as an unwelcome interruption of our pursuit of happiness. Ben-Shahar quotes Dostoyevsky "nature doesn't ask your advice, she isn't interested in your preferences or whether or not you approve of her laws. You must accept nature as she is with all the consequences that that implies".

What is nature but God?

Therefore, accepting God's Will brings us to an understanding that suffering may interrupt our happiness but we can and must focus on getting to a happy state within ourselves to overcome suffering.

This brings us to our interrupted but not lost Passover.

Passover is one of the few times a year in the Jewish calendar that compels families to celebrate together. Be it at the home of the patriarch/matriarch or in a reversal in later years, at their children's home, at a family gathering in a local hotel or a faraway island, a common thread is that Jewish families celebrate Passover together.

Not this year.

This past Pesach, the Coronavirus cast upon Jews the world over a dramatic change in plans and venue in the midst of frenetic Pesach preparations. Family gatherings and plans made weeks in advance turned into isolation.



Parents home without their married children and grandchildren, widows, widowers, divorcees, singles and especially the elderly, found themselves in complete isolation – the antithesis of the intergenerational Pesach.

For the children of Holocaust survivors, one of the hallmarks of Pesach is the once a year recounting by our parents of their ordeals in Auschwitz, Birkenau, Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, all the concentration camps and labor camps they suffered through. It was an important ritual, and for many the one time a year these survivors

opened up. For the far too few remaining survivors, being in isolation on Pesach must have been especially painful. For children and grandchildren wanting to, needing to hear their stories, it was a missed opportunity to hear personal memories of a lost Pesach in their hometown before the war, or in concentration camp. After all, it remains our responsibility to continue to recount these legacies to the next generation. We shall never forget, and at the same time we shall forge onward.

Yossi Klein Halevi in *Like Dreamers* speaks of the survival of Israel and the Jewish nation. 1948.

1967. 1973. These were wars Israel fought literally for their survival as a nation. "In celebrating military prowess, Israelis were celebrating existence".

We have lost six million brethren and thus became stronger as individuals and as a nation.

The pandemic of 2020 resulted in the tragic loss of husbands, wives, parents, grandparents, great Jewish leaders of Yeshivas, communities, and in every discipline in all continents. Thousands upon thousands of loved, revered, very special people in the Jewish community with more than 80,000 special souls lost throughout the United States and countless more the world over.

Our work at OHEL Children's Home and Family Services transitioned immediately to telehealth to serve thousands of home-bound people with a range and severity of mental health issues. OHEL's scores of zoom webinars helped many thousands more in communities throughout the United States. One of the most attended Zoom webinar we presented was on mourning and grief. The inability to be present at the bedside of a dying loved one, at the funeral, nor the ability to pay a shiva call and offer condolences to the bereaved, left so many people feeling confused, bereft and devoid of the ability to grieve properly.

For Holocaust survivors who spent Pesach alone, or even with family members, the Covid virus was a reminder of their experiences relived many times in their years in the 'camps'.

Every generation has their tests to withstand. No one wishes to compare their sorrow to others. It is deeply personal. Next year 2021, when God willing we get together for our family Passover seder, we will surely begin to recount the lost seder of the 2020 pandemic even before children and grandchildren ask the four questions and we recount our exit from Egypt. This new centerpiece story of the current and next generation will in its own way be reliving a memory of the Holocaust generation. Just as we recount our survival of the present, so too do we recount our survival of the past. This is an inherent resilience. This is the strength we now take with us to forge ahead to overcome the interruption of our happiness.

If the past is a predictor of the future, then the present helps us to remember the past. We are witnessing our own future while we pay homage to our parents and grandparents' past. Never to measure or compare pain, nevertheless, understanding what previous generations suffered may constitute a pathway to our own healing.

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