



**Rosh Chodesh Kislev 5774**

## **ACHIEVING RESILIENCE: A LEARNED SKILL**

When Jews gather in prayer, they take time to think of those who are ill and in need of healing. The Mishebeirach prayer allows for communal concern for these individuals and focuses on the role of God in healing -- complete healing, *refuah sh'leimah*, a healing of the body and a healing of the soul (nefesh) While this prayer does not talk about psychological healing, the need to repair more than the body is a well known process. Research on resilience or post-traumatic growth has shown that true healing requires an ability to overcome the traumatic event as well as the actual injury.

Over the past 40 years, the scientific world has learned a great deal about how individuals overcome emotional set-backs and disease, and repair their lives. Nonetheless, there continue to be popular myths. Resilience is not a trait which one person has naturally and another is missing. Resilience is one person's set of experiences and responses to them which can lead to an improved personal style for dealing with stress. Resilience is a learned trait, which needs to be fostered and practiced. There are specific activities in which individuals can engage, which will improve their abilities to overcome adversity.

Similarly, the concept that resilient people are independent and do not need support is not found in the literature. Nor is the idea that such people are immune to stress. All people face problems of some type and everyone experiences stress. Resilience comes from one's ability to meet these challenges and overcome them, rather than ignore or deny them.

Several psychologists have studied the importance of dealing with emotion during these stressful encounters – both positive and negative. Barbara Frederickson, PhD of the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, found that those who perceived their difficulties in a positive light did better overall. Accepting challenges and responding to them is essential to growth. Positive emotions were the fuel for building resilience.

At the same time, researchers Dr. Jack Bauer, of Northern Arizona State University, and Dr. George Bonanno, of Columbia University, discovered that individuals who had no negative emotions did not do as well as those who balanced positive and negative responses. Being more positive than negative was important, but the lack of negative emotions limited the healing process.

Recent traumatic events that effected large populations, such as 9/11, Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, and ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, have provided large samples of individuals for

research on the development of resilience. Studies have shown many active means of enhancing resilience. These include:

- developing close relationships with family and friends
- learning to manage strong feelings
- maintaining a good personal self-image
- enhancing one's problem solving skills
- taking extra care of one's personal health through nurturing and avoiding addictions
- seeking help and acquiring needed resources
- feeling in control
- perceiving oneself as a survivor rather than a victim
- helping others in need
- setting personal goals and making daily efforts toward achieving them
- seeing one's life as meaningful and trauma or challenge as a part of that overall mission

The stories about people who have responded to trauma and personal devastation and have overcome these challenges are heart-warming, and confirm the importance of finding the moments of light in this period of darkness. The message for all people is that resilience is achievable and desirable even when trauma is not avoidable.

The following are two different tests for resilience, at no cost. The first focuses on one's personal strengths and weaknesses; the second has a more community-based foundation for healing. Each may be instructive in learning more about your own resilience.

[www.resiliencescale.com/en/rstest/rstest\\_14\\_en.html](http://www.resiliencescale.com/en/rstest/rstest_14_en.html)

<http://psychology.about.com/library/quiz/bl-resilience-quiz.html>

As the song, "Mi Shebeirach" written by Debbie Friedman, says, "May the source of strength who blessed the ones before us, help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing..." The overall goal of developing resilience is moving ahead with one's life and being able to keep one's traumas and challenges in proper perspective.

Dr. Barbara Levin, Chair  
Wellness & Learning Network