

# Nefeshnews

B'H

The International Network of Orthodox Mental Health Professionals



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## Esther Solomon Memorial Award *by Alice Tusk*

The 12th Annual Conference of Nefesh International took place at the Young Israel of Staten Island on January 4th and 5th, 2009. The Conference provided an opportunity for attendees to strengthen their skills as mental health professionals, as well as collaborate and network with their peers; in addition, the Conference recognized members in our community for their dedication to the ideals and goals of Nefesh. Rabbi Dr. Avraham J. Twerski was

The theme of the conference was "Effective Treatment: A Community Collaboration." The sessions focused on various mental health issues and provided greater insight into the social problems facing the Orthodox Jewish community. The workshops presented an array of topics. Some of the highlights included: eating disorders, hypnosis, play therapy, boundaries and ethics, mindfulness, sexual abuse, neurological conditions, pharmacology updates,



honored with the Esther Solomon Memorial Award for his outstanding contributions to mental health in the Torah community. Dr. Nosson Solomon, our past president, was honored for his devotion and selfless efforts on behalf of Nefesh International.

and divorce. By every measure, the Conference was an outstanding success. It created a forum in which mental health professionals could become more aware of the various issues affecting our community, ultimately empowering us to find new paths and solutions to make Klal Yisrael stronger.

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Simcha Feuerman, LCSW-R

I left the Nefesh conference feeling energized and optimistic. It was delightful to meet old friends and colleagues, as well as the new generation of up and coming therapists. Nefesh has only scratched the surface of its potential to provide support, guidance, and leadership to the community of Orthodox Mental Health Professionals. My fellow board members and past presidents have shepherded this fine organization to the point where it is on the verge of exciting developments. I hope to share good news and opportunities with you in the future.

I welcome members to contact me via email with concerns, questions, or suggestions about Nefesh, or questions about their own career as a mental health professional.

## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Yeta Solomon, LCSW



With the enthusiasm and excitement of a successful conference and the installation of a new president behind us, we can look forward with renewed energy to planning events and programs that will inform, educate, and encourage us in our helping professions.

This newsletter has reports of two conferences, Nefesh International and Nefesh Israel. If you were unable to attend either of them, perhaps reading about them will motivate you to do so next year. Nefesh Chicago reports on its innovative and exciting programs, and tells us about this year's recipient of the Esther Sauber Memorial Award. Dr. Feinberg writes on the controversial topic of "cosmetic psychopharmacology," giving us much food for thought.

Since we haven't received any feedback about our new online format, we don't know how the membership feels about it. We can only hope that the majority of you are reading and enjoying. If not, please take a moment (after Pesach!) to let us know. To that end, we are initiating a "Letters to the Editor" column, which we hope will offer an opportunity for you to contact us with feedback - comments, concerns, ideas. Although many of you use the Listserve for a variety of communications, perhaps some of you will take the time to write a brief note and let us know how you feel about the newsletter - its content and format. Send all correspondence to [yetasolomon@gmail.com](mailto:yetasolomon@gmail.com).

Chag kasher v'sameach to all!

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Our strength has been to encourage dialogue about topics that have been taboo in our community for too long – because denial is disabling. Topics such as internet addiction, drug and alcohol addiction, and sexual abuse, are destroying too many families and can no longer be ignored. We cannot continue to avoid the issues causing emotional turmoil for our community and Nefesh has been at the forefront, trying to create awareness and encourage the creation of programs and interventions to address these issues that are facing the Jewish community. At Nefesh, we are proud that our membership, with many of the brightest minds and most committed hearts, are dedicated to the ideals of promoting mental health within the parameters of Torah and halacha.. Thanks to our conference chairperson, Chaim Sender, LCSW, Director of Interborough, and the devoted program committee, the broad spectrum of topics and presentations suggested creative clinical applications, which many of the professionals could incorporate into their practices. For example, one of the most well-attended sessions at the conference, presented by David Pelcovitz, M.D. Professor of Psychology and Education, Azrieli Graduate School, Yeshiva University, and Yitzchok Schechter, PsyD, Director, Division of Clinical Services, Partners in Health-Bikur Cholim, dealt with the prevention and treatment of trauma related to sexual abuse in the frum community.

The destructive ramifications of eating disorders have devastated many families in our community. Watching a child, grandchild, spouse or sibling waste away and see dreams and hopes for them waste away along with their bodies is catastrophic. This subject was addressed by dynamic speakers such as Victor Fornari M.D., Director of the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Long Island Jewish Medical Center; Martin Fisher M.D., Chief of Adolescent Medicine, Long Island Jewish Medical Center; Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, author and rabbinic advisor; and Ariella Rosenthal, LCSW, Jewish Board of Family and Children Services.

The increased statistics of divorce in the Orthodox Jewish community and subsequent opportunities for parental alienation were addressed by Elana Katz, LCSW, Faculty Coordinator of Clinical Services, Ackerman Institute for the Family; Abe Worenklein, Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist, and Norman Blumenthal, Ph.D., Director of Project C.H.A.I., who presented together on the topic of modalities and themes of parental alienation.

Daniel T. Williams, M.D., Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychiatry and Director of Pediatric Neuropsychiatry, Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center; and Marcia Phyllis Bergtraum, MD, Pediatric Neurology, Long Island Jewish Medical Center presented on Neuropsychology. Other presentations included one by Rona Novick, Ph.D, Assistant Professor, Yeshiva University, Azrieli School of Education, on skills development and cognitive behavioral approaches with children. Allan Gonsher, LMHP, CMSW, Founder and President of Kids-Inc. presented a full-day interactive workshop on play therapy.

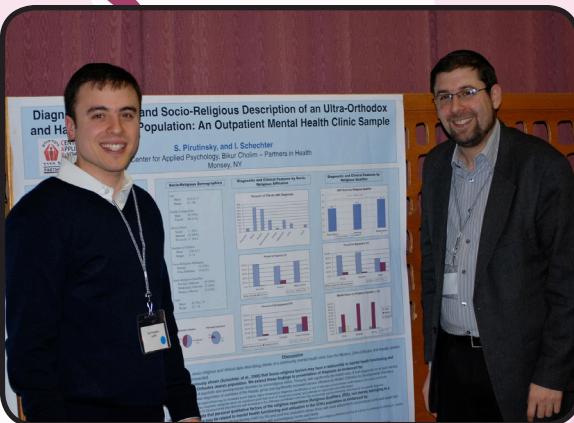
Acharon acharon chaviv, Nefesh would not have the same “nefesh” without the involvement of Harav Dovid Cohen, who answered halachic questions facing mental health professionals. As usual, the questions and answers stimulated a great deal of thought and discussion.

These are only a few of the speakers who provided vibrant and meaningful presentations on a wide variety of topics. The hope is that the mental health professionals who attended the workshops went away with more knowledge, some new and creative ideas, and the chuzik to continue their efforts in various settings, to provide services on many levels and focus more on preventive mental health care in frum communities everywhere.

Alice Tusk is Director of Operations for Nefesh International and a graduate student at Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University. Contact Information: [Alicetusk@nefesh.org](mailto:Alicetusk@nefesh.org)



# Poster Session



**Diagnostic, Clinical and Socio-Religious Description of an Ultra-Orthodox and Hasidic Jewish Population:  
An Outpatient Mental Health Clinic Sample**

Pirutinsky, S., Langner, E., Schechter, I. New student to Nefesh Research Center for Applied Psychology (CAPs)



**Sexual Addiction: A Cry for Help** Leedes, R.  
Expert in Sex Therapy



**Mental Health Presentation of Baalei Teshuva (Returnees to Traditional Observance) as Compared with their Adopted Socio-Religious Community**

Snow, D., Schechter, I., Pirutinsky, S., Langner, E., Zemon, V. Student Research Center for Applied Psychology (CAPs) and Ferkauf Grad School



**Parenting Styles and the Religious Commitment of Orthodox Jewish Adolescents** Brownstein, D, et al.  
New student to Nefesh Research Maywood University



Poster Session group photo.



**Initial Validation and Preliminary Findings of the Comprehensive Religiousness Scale for Orthodox Jews (CRS-O)**

Schechter, I., Schorr, F., Pirutinsky, S.  
Research Center for Applied Psychology and Ferkauf

# Nefesh Israel 9th Annual Conference

How can I describe the relief and gratitude that accompanied the opening of this year's 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Nefesh Israel Conference, which took place in Jerusalem in the middle of January? Winston Churchill is quoted as saying: "They also serve who sit and wait" and so whether we were in active service 'just living' at home, The Front was everywhere. The War in Gaza had just ended and our men and boys were returning home. For some, their fathers and sons would never walk through the door again; for others, long hospitalizations and rehabilitation awaited them. For the parents of Gilad Shalit, yet more days and nights of uncertainty; as I write this, he is in captivity 1000 days!

Rav Benny Lau was our Keynote and opening speaker. He spoke of gratitude to the Almighty and the power of the community to heal; in so doing, he honored Nefesh members by reinforcing how important our work as mental health professionals is, in times of peace and in times of war.

The three day event started with Tuesday's pre-conference workshops: the Neveh Har Nof Campus had a presentation on trauma, sexual abuse, and the naive slippery slope of our children's vulnerability to perverts via Internet use. The Conference continued at the Bait VeGan Guest Hostel on Wednesday and Thursday with five simultaneous sessions at four separate time slots. Each was chockablock with information and experiential 'adventures'. All were notable and well attended by the almost 300 attendees. Due to the War and the constant barrage of shelling, our members from the southern cities of Israel did not attend this year; our prayers for Peace-and-Quiet abounds.

A special mention should be made about our 'out-of-towners'. Members from Australia, South America, North America, and Europe co-mingled with Israelis from all over the country, to give this year's conference its global 'touch'. The Australian contingent joined with Nefesh International's Board member and pre-eminent speaker, Dr. David Pelcovitz, to 'unveil' a horrific multi-national case of a Rebbitzin who sexually abused her students for many years. Their presentation was punctuated by theoretic as well as clinical examples of dependence, denial, blaming the victims and attacking those helping professionals who 'dared' attempt to come to the aide of the 'whistle-blowers.' This was just one of over thirty presentations!!!

Leah Abramovitz, M.S.W., co-chair of Nefesh Israel, the fabulous Conference Committee, and the entire Nefesh Israel family thank Elana Walhaus, our Co-ordinator and CEO for another successful conference.

This year don't just say L'Shana HaBa B'Yerushalayim, plan to come to Nefesh Israel's Decade-of-Action, in 2010!

L'Hitraot B'Aretz  
Judith Guedalia, Ph.D.  
Co-chair Nefesh Israel



## Nefesh Chicago Assists in the Launching of Better Beginnings

Last year, Nefesh and Project Shalom Bayis [a division of Daughters of Israel], were approached by community activist, Sheila Segall, to start a series of marriage workshops to address the rising rate of divorce in the Orthodox community.

Sheila's goal was to provide continuing workshops that are self-contained sessions and free of charge. The Chicago Rabbinical Council, understanding the importance of rabbinic support of the project, joined in the collaborative planning and implementation of the workshop series. Nefesh Chicago's cadre of therapists generously offered their experience and expertise to the young audience of newly engaged couples and those married five

years, or less.

Better Beginnings, aptly named for its goal to provide young couples with information about and guidelines on marriage, promotes "making good marriages better." The mental health professionals address the following issues:

- Responsible and respectful communication
- Managing finances together
- Meeting one another's needs in healthy ways
- Keeping *shalom bayis* with extended family

Couples are offered the opportunity to discreetly email questions in advance of each session, so that within the presentations, their personal issues will be addressed.

The outstanding Nefesh mental health professionals who gave of their time and expertise to lead workshops included Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hirsch Weinreb, Dr. Vivian Skolnick, Rabbi Dr. David Montrose, Sharon Chambers, LCSW, Rabbi Dr. Yehuda Krohn, Dr. Mara Tesler Stein, and Dr. Eli Weinschneider. Financial planner, Dr. Irv Birnbaum, presented the workshop on finances for newlyweds.

Nefesh endorses Better Beginnings as a complementary addition to *chosson* and *kallah* classes.

# NEFESH CHICAGO

by Menucha Robeson

## NEWS FROM NEFESH-CHICAGO

Rachel Weinstein LCSW, recipient of Esther Samber Scholarship

Better Beginnings Program

Finding Mr. Right Program

Nefesh Chicago President Sheldon Schaffel steps down

### **Rachel Weinstein, LCSW, recipient of Esther Samber Scholarship**

Nefesh-Chicago was the recipient of a generous grant from Mrs. Ruth Hartman Gefen (Israel) and Mrs. Brenda Breuer (NY), sisters of past Nefesh-Chicago President, Esther Samber, a"h. With this grant, the Esther Samber Memorial Scholarship was created. This scholarship continues Esther's, a"h, personal and professional goals, alongside her dedication to the mission of Nefesh. Knowing the invaluable opportunities of the Nefesh Annual Conferences, Nefesh-Chicago chose to award one of its members with a complimentary attendance at the 12th Annual Conference in Staten Island, NY. Rachel Weinstein, LCSW, this year's choice, is the second recipient of the scholarship.

Rachel has a special vibrant up-beat nature, often put to great use as her field is hospice work. Having started her career in nursing homes, it was after an internship with Rainbow Hospice that Rachel discovered her love of this type of work. Her genuine feel for the all-embracing needs of her clientele earned Rachel a promotion to National Non-Funded Specialist, where she oversees Season Hospice's ten sites, supervising social workers and the non-funded process in each site.

Rachel is also a past board member of Nefesh-Chicago and is eager to rejoin the board, assisting in our program planning. The following is excerpted from Rachel's letter of appreciation to Mrs. Breuer and Mrs. Hartman Gefen:

"I attended several board meetings with Esther, A"H, and remember her as deeply invested in the organization [Nefesh] and all that it does for the community. As a working, married mother of four, it is not often that I get to attend local conferences, let alone ones out of state! Your gift allowed me to attend workshops on eating disorders, cognitive behavioral therapy, internet addictions, and other topics that proved interesting, educational, and truly enjoyable. Please know that I am honored to have been the recipient of this award and am grateful to you for keeping your sister's spirit and passion alive. May her memory be for a blessing."

Chicago Nefesh was gratified to have given Rachel the incredible chance to network with peers and colleagues and learn about the latest advances in treatment from internationally recognized experts at the Nefesh Conference.

# Better Living through Pharmaceuticals: Are We Ready?

by S. Shalom Feinberg, M.D.

Fifteen years ago, Peter Kramer argued in his well-known book, Listening to Prozac (1), that Prozac and similar antidepressant medicines, had the potential to help patients feel even better than before their depressive episode. While a variety of reasons have been offered for his findings, he gave voice to the view that for the first time there were non-addictive, safe medications that didn't just treat acute illness, but could enhance the quality of life for people without overt psychiatric disorders. This idea of enhancing the cognitive abilities, or emotional state of otherwise healthy individuals, became known in our field as cosmetic psychopharmacology.

We now fast forward to December 2008, and a commentary in the journal, Nature (2), by a group of prominent scientists, which they entitled, *Towards responsible use of cognitive enhancing drugs by the healthy*. It is worth noting that the authors of this paper have no pharmaceutical company relationships. They addressed a series of provocative questions. If there were safe medications available that could help otherwise healthy people feel or perform better in some way, should they be used? Should physicians, or for that matter any clinician, recommend them to enhance one's performance? Is it wrong for healthy people to use psychoactive medications to enhance their mental abilities? They concluded that the use of CED should not only be allowed, but also should be actively developed and made available to the public, (of course, supervised by professionals), and only after thorough research of their benefits and risks.

Let me offer examples of cosmetic psychopharmacology. Soldiers use psychostimulants, or a newer agent with less addictive potential, Modafinil (Provigil), to help enhance focus and energy. The anti-dementia drug, Donepezil (Aricept), has been shown to improve pilots' reaction and concentration in clinical trials, and similarly improve memory in non-demented

research subjects. Silicon Valley overachievers often take Modafinil, so that they can work longer hours and stay sharp. And perhaps the most notable example, is the increasing numbers of college students who do not suffer from attention-deficit/hyper-activity disorder, who are taking stimulants to help them study longer and improve memory. On some campuses, it is reported that up to 25% of the students have used prescription stimulants to help in this way! Interestingly, an informal survey by the same journal, Nature, earlier this year, found that 20% of its 1,400 readers, who are predominantly scientists, admitted to taking mind-enhancement medications such as Methylphenidate, Modafinil, or beta-blockers for non-medical reasons (3). (If you're curious what non-medical reason Beta blockers are used for, the answer is that low doses of medicines like the beta-blocker, Propanolol (Inderal), can reduce the tremor associated with performance or speaking anxiety.)

There are many interesting issues raised in this commentary. For instance, is it cheating, is it "unnatural," or is it simply drug abuse to use CED? They respond that it is cheating only if it is against the rules, such as professional athletes using performance-enhancing agents. But the authors argue that if, for example, one bans CED in an academic setting, one would need to distinguish between CEDs and other means of performance enhancement, such as private tutors or a double espresso (i.e., high doses of caffeine).

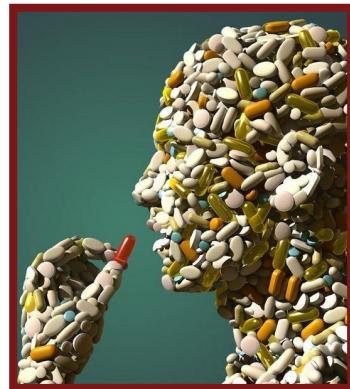
## Why draw the line here?

As for the issue that using CED is in some way "unnatural," they reply that, "the lives of almost all living humans are deeply unnatural; our homes, our clothes and our food - to say nothing of the medical care we enjoy - bear little relation to our species' 'natural' state. Given the many cognitive-enhancing tools we accept already, from writing to laptop computers, why draw the line here and say,

thus far but no further?" They note that cognitive enhancing agents are biologically little different from non-medicinal cognitive enhancing techniques (such as exercise, instruction, or reading), in that brain imaging studies have demonstrated that both generate changes in the brain. I add that "unnatural" medical interventions intended to reverse the effects of aging and improve the quality of life, such as drugs for treating erectile dysfunction and cosmetic procedures, have been accepted by society.

The danger of drug abuse is not minimized by the authors. Their conclusions are only premised on the assumption that it can be demonstrated that these drugs have a favorable risk /benefit ratio. As with all available medicines, one has to ask whether the benefits of a given drug outweigh its potential dangers. And like other medication related decisions, it is appropriate

to have a licensed professional involved in such discussions.

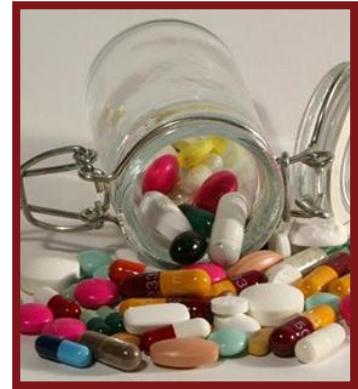


Other thought provoking points are discussed in this commentary. If everyone else is using cognitive enhancing drugs, one might be at a disadvantage not using

them; for example, on school tests, which are often graded on a curve. In a somewhat parallel example, I recall that while taking chemistry in college in 1973, the department of chemistry had just begun permitting the use of calculators during exams. They were new and expensive and I spent a great deal of money for an item that now costs a few dollars at most. Clearly those of us with calculators, a cognitive enhancement of sorts, had an advantage over the others. Was that fair? And is it fair if some can afford CED and others cannot? The authors retort by noting that the reality is that we live in a society where all do not have access to the same level of medical care. Is that less fair? Why should use of these agents be any different?

Furthermore, if it was demonstrated that CED clearly help cognitive functioning, wouldn't you want your surgeon using them so he/she would be at his/her

best when your life is on the line? On the other hand, is there a danger that employers will insist that their employees use them to maximize their work output? Will parents feel compelled to give medications to their children in order to "keep up" with other children's school performance? While not a concern of this commentary, is there a parallel between cosmetic psychopharmacology and cosmetic surgery? Using the latter involves serious *halachic* issues, does CED ?



While these scientists offer their thoughts and conclusions, the issues are far from black and white.

There is much research to be done and many questions still to be answered, but the authors point out that the number of people using these mind-enhancing drugs for non-medical purposes will inevitably continue to grow. We, as health care professionals, need to be prepared for this and arrive at our own positions on this emerging subject.

If you would like to weigh in on this subject, feel free to submit a letter to the editor of NEFESH News by sending it to: [secretary@nefesh.org](mailto:secretary@nefesh.org)

## REFERENCES

- Kramer P. Listening to Prozac. Viking Press, 1993.
- Greely H, Sahakian B, Harris, et al. Towards responsible use of cognitive enhancing drugs by the healthy. Nature, 456:702-705, December 11, 2008.
- Yan J. Where Is Line Between Therapy, Enhancement? Psychiatry News, 44:4-5, January 16, 2009.

# Mazel Tov & Condolences

Mazal Tov to Nossen and Yeta Solomon on the engagement of Moshe Chaim to Yael Jablin of Monsey, NY.

Mazal Tov to Shalom and Karen Feinberg on the marriage of their daughter Adina to Jeremy Rosenfeld.

Condolences to Moshe and Chani Kahn on the passing of Moshe's dear mother, Mildred Kahn, A'H.

Condolences to Rabbi Simcha and Chaya Feurerman on the passing of Chaya's dear father, Rabbi Michael Miller, A'H.

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