

# Nefesh News



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ORTHODOX MENTAL HEALTH  
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## DIVREI TORAH: RABBI DR ABRAHAM J. TWERSKI

These few weeks the Torah readings are all about the enslavement in Egypt and Hashem's deliverance. While the Exodus is indeed a high point in Jewish history, our preoccupation with it seems a bit much.

We are required to remember the Exodus every day of our lives (Devarim 16:3). We commemorate the Exodus with Pesach, a whole week of avoiding *chametz*, preceded by a surgical sterilization of the kitchen. Every Friday night at *Kiddush* we mention the Exodus, as we do on all festivals. *Tefillin*, *tzitzis* and many other mitzvos are in commemoration of the Exodus. Isn't that an overkill for an Independence Day celebration?

The answer was brought to me by a recovered drug addict who attended his father's *seder*. When the father began reciting the Haggadah, "We were

slaves to Pharaoh," the son interrupted him. "Abba," he said, "can you ever say that you, personally, were ever a slave? I know what it means to be a slave. All my years of addiction, I was a slave to drugs. I did things I never thought I could do, but I had no choice. Drugs were my taskmaster and I had to obey. Today I am free."

One can be a slave to Pharaoh, but one can also be a slave to alcohol, drugs, gambling, cigarettes, food, and sex. One can also be a slave to anger, to pride, to making

money. Whenever you lose the ability to control yourself, you are a slave.

This is why the Torah requires us to constantly think of the Exodus, not only because of our liberation from the enslavement by Pharaoh, but to remind us that we can be slaves to drives within ourselves, and we must learn to be master over our drives, not their slaves. The only servitude we should have is to *Hashem*.

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**MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT  
RABBI SIMCHA FEUERMAN, LCSW-R  
“SNOW BIG DEAL”**



While the second day of the conference had to be re-scheduled due to the blizzard, and the first day was a challenge, Nefesh members showed their true colors. More than 200 people showed up on Sunday and amazingly, the workshops were full even at 5pm during the height of the snowstorm.

Many, many people did superla-

tive acts of kindness such as hosting, giving rides, shoveling out cars etc. and I am not mentioning names so as not to miss anyone.

In addition, I apologize for the initial confusion and distress we caused during the early hours of the storm regarding cancellation and refund policies. Please forgive us; many of the board members were working late at night and early morning on the conference, making it a difficult and pressured situation.

Given the turnout despite the

enormous obstacles, it is clear that Nefesh members are a committed bunch. We look forward to more sharing and learning opportunities in the future.

Thanks for being a member!

Sincerely,

Rabbi Simcha Feuerman, LCSW-R  
President

**MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR  
YETA SOLOMON, LCSW**



I am pleased to announce that I am now the proud owner of a brand new state of the art computer! Since I am not computer savvy, I will now be making my technical errors so much faster than ever before! I am sure that there are many out there who know exactly what I mean and can empathize. That being said, I think it's important to keep in mind and focus on all the positive ways we use technology in our daily lives. Even this Newsletter uses computer technology to reach the Nefesh membership with news and information

about the organization.

We would like the Newsletter to better and more effectively meet the needs of the membership; to that end, we plan to send out a brief survey. When you receive it, please take a few minutes to answer the questions; the responses will be used to assess member needs and help us give YOU what you would like to see/read in the Newsletter. We anticipate hearing from all of you.

We also look forward to seeing all of you at Conference XIV, Part 2. (We truly regret that those who came from far away for Part 1, will be unable to return.) Part 1 was a success on many levels, and we look forward to

March 6, with anticipation and enthusiasm, confident that it will be every bit as informative and stimulating, both professionally and socially.

I would like to add my thanks and appreciation to those who came forward during the Blizzard of 2010, which effectively brought the Conference to a screeching halt, and gave of themselves and their time to ensure that problems were resolved and those who needed assistance in getting to their destinations were helped.

Yeta Solomon, LCSW  
Editor

## NEFESH BOARD ELECTIONS

The Board of Nefesh International held its annual elections on February 20, 2011, and the current Board was unanimously re-elected. We wish the members of the Board continued *hatzlocho* in their many efforts on behalf of the organization and we thank them for the many hours they volunteer their time to plan and execute professional programs that are stimulating, thought provoking, and educational.

## NEFESH MEMBERS IN THE NEWS

As reported in Hamodia Community News, Rabbi Dr. David Fox was honored by the Young Israel of Hancock Park, Los Angeles, on *Motzei Shabbos*, February 5, 2011, on the occasion of his being *mesayem Talmud Bavli*, as well as, *Talmud Yerushalmi*. Rabbi Yaakov Krause, *mora d'asra* of the shul, spoke of the tremendous *simcha* of Rabbi Fox's achievement. Rabbi Krause also thanked Rabbi Fox for the many *shiurim* he gives and the time he devotes to his fellow *mispal-lelim*. Rabbi Krause cited Rabbi Fox's involvement in *dayanus* as another accomplishment; Rabbi Fox earned a *ksav hishtalmut* following years of *shimush* in *dayanus* with the *Bais Din* of the *Rabbanut Yerushalayim*. The *siyum* was followed by a *melave malka*.

Mishpacha Weekly Magazine recently spotlighted the work of Dr. David Hillel Rosmarin, a clinical fellow at Harvard Medical School/McLean Hospital, department of psychiatry. Using empirical research, Dr. Rosmarin found that religion, including religious beliefs and practice, can be effective sources of coping during times of anxiety and stress; indeed, religion may be the best psychotherapy. We, at Nefesh, have no trouble believing Dr. Rosmarin, but he had to climb a steep and slippery slope to gain acceptance for his research in the secular world of mental health. Dr. Rosmarin's work in demonstrating the implications of faith based treatment for mental health can be found on his research website: [www.jpsych.com](http://www.jpsych.com).

## PSYCHOPHARM CONSULTANT

### A New Mind –Body *and* Environment Connection: Is Good Hygiene Bad for Depression?

by Shalom Feinberg, MD

Regardless of one's theoretical orientation, epidemiological data speaks to a rising incidence of depression in society. The question one must ask is "Why?"

A recent article in the prestigious *Archives of General Psychiatry* by Raison, et al (1), has raised some intriguing speculations about one way in which depression may arise, and similar to a diverse variety of immune system related medical illnesses, why there is an increasing frequency of both in modern society. He also raises for exploration some potentially novel avenues for the treatment and prevention of depression not usually thought about by mental health professionals.

When one thinks about the term inflammation, what usually comes to mind are medical illnesses. Inflammation is, after all, an adaptive response by the body's immune system to deal with a wide variety of external or internal threats such as a problematic virus or a traumatic injury. The inflammatory response involves a wide variety of processes across multiple organ systems, including activation of bodily substances crucial in body regulation such as cytokines and glucocorticoids.

But when the immune system malfunctions, that is, it is inappropriately or overly responsive, it may lead to potentially significant pathology in which, in essence, the body is attacking itself. These include a varied group of medical illnesses (e.g. asthma, allergies, type one diabetes mellitus, inflammatory bowel disease), as well as many other auto-immune diseases. It was believed that the brain was somewhat protected from auto-immune processes, but unfortunately research shows that this is certainly not the case. In fact, multiple lines of research are describing a relationship among stress, depression, anxiety and inflammation. In addition, it is becoming clearer that one sees the same indicators of inflammation and excessive activation of the immune system, when one is in the midst of a depression, just as when one suffers

from common medical illnesses. And importantly, these inflammatory processes have been shown to *precede* depression and anxiety.

And what may cause inflammation? While, as I have already pointed out, inflammation has many origins, the one cause that we care about in our field is significant psychological stress. There is both experimental and clinical evidence now that a rise in the concentration of inflammatory substances such as cytokines and glucocorticoids, as occurs in chronically stressful situations, may contribute to significant anxiety and depression(2,3). Thus, it would seem that helping our patients diminish and cope with stressors in their lives, will decrease the body and brain's inflammatory response and thus, the potential risk of depression. Another interesting aspect of this line of research, is that medications with anti-inflammatory properties, perhaps a compound as commonly used as aspirin (4), may have a role in treating psychiatric illness.

A more thorough review of this complex subject is beyond the scope of this column, and the reader is encouraged to examine the references (1-3). Also, this issue is not really Dr. Raison's primary focus.

Dr. Raison's issue is that while one's risk for immune system related medical illnesses and significant depression are clearly related to one's genetic, biological predisposition, that risk *alone* cannot simply explain the increasing incidence of all of these disorders over the last 50 years. Rather, environmental factors, such as stresses of many sorts in our modern complex lives, may somehow play a role in the rising incidence of these illnesses in vulnerable or predisposed individuals. But beyond the question of *what* are these environmental factors, he asks *how* do these factors physiologically change, and interact with the body? Here is his point. Since the beginning of time, the human body, and notably the gastrointestinal tract, has contained numerous harmless microorganisms, known colloquially in the scientific world as "*Old Friends*."(5) The function of some of these *Old Friends* (e.g. specific species of bacteria and parasitic worms) is to

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provide essential functions for our immune systems, which they themselves are incapable of performing. But, as Raison notes, the same improved hygienic practices that have decreased illness and infection over the last century in modern society, have also deprived us of contact with these microorganisms, mostly derived from mud, animals and feces, whose task it is to modulate essential human immune regulatory systems.

Exposure to these microbes trained the body to tolerate a wide array of non-threatening stimuli. Without exposure to these microorganisms, vulnerable individuals are at significantly increased risk of mounting inappropriate, overly aggressive inflammatory responses to otherwise harmless environmental challenges. Examples of the latter include typically benign foods, entities floating in the air, or one's own proteins. The results of these exaggerated responses are illnesses such as asthma, inflammatory bowel disease, food allergies and a host of other autoimmune illnesses. But, perhaps more relevant to us, (and the editors of the Archives of General Psychiatry who selected this paper), is that without prior exposure to these *Old Friends*, vulnerable individuals in industrialized societies will mount excessive, that is, adverse responses to psychosocial adversity, which *may* in turn serve as a mechanism by which chronic stress promotes the development and/or maintenance of depression.

There is research and preclinical data from a variety of sources to support these hypotheses, though, Dr. Raison readily acknowledges that this area of investigation is in its infancy. I have only outlined and simplified a rather complex topic; having said that, the author of the article leaves the reader with some tantalizing research questions.

Given that a variety of substances related to, or composed of these missing microbes are now being tested to treat medical illnesses involving immune dysregulation, can they be useful in treating depression and anxiety as well? For instance, one of the

bacteria under study, *Mycobacterium vaccae*, which is usually found in soil, stimulates the production of serotonin and norepinephrine in the brain, which as many readers know are important neurotransmitters associated with treatment of depression(1). Personally, as antibiotic use may alter the bacterial composition of the gastrointestinal tract I now wonder whether our easy and often excessive use of antibiotics in the United States is doing a disservice to both patients' physical and mental health. Finally, does this hypothesis offer another pathway through which one might prevent depression and anxiety? That is, can exposure to controlled doses of these microbes in some safe fashion help our patients handle life's adversities better? Stay tuned.

But for now, in answer to this column's title, yes, our mind and body *and* environment are in delicate balance. Playing with this balance can have unexpected consequences. But personally, for now, I'll keep washing my hands.

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# CHICAGO NEWS

By Menucha Robeson

Nefesh Chicago is pleased to announce its new Facebook page, which contains information about programs.

Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Weinreb is scheduled to speak on Sunday, March 27, 2011, 10am-1pm. His presentation will be on "Morality and Mental Health", at the WiFi Building in Skokie and will include:

- What is mental health...a moral perspective?
- Can psychotherapy be a context within which to examine moral and ethical behavior?
- The ethics of the psychotherapist and the effect on the patient.
- Unethical behavior in the Orthodox community.
- Ethical and moral conflicts in psychotherapy.
- The power of group therapy to foster moral growth.

For more information on this program, including time, location, and CEU's, please check our Facebook page, Nefesh Chicago, and become a fan.

## *Noteworthy and Newsworthy*

*Mazel Tov to Shifra Newerstein on her marriage to Sruly Schnair.*

*Mazel Tov to Dr. and Mrs. Rosenshein on the marriage of their granddaughter, Rivka Kornbluth to Yaakov Gifter of Cleveland, son of Zulman Gifter and grandson of Rav Mordechai Gifter, A"H.*

*Mazel Tov to Dr. and Mrs. Rosenshein on birth of two great-grandsons, a son to Aharon and Sora Gila Margulis; grandparents are Yehuda and Rachel Rosenshein and Mr. and Mrs. Margulis, both of Flatbush, and a son to Tzvi Mordechai and Shifra Lieberman; grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. Kornbluth of Monsey and Mrs. Lieberman of Flatbush.*

*Mazel Tov to Phyllis and Ben Mayer on celebrating the Bar Mitzvah of their grandson Avraham Yosef, in Eretz Yisroel in April. They also take great pride in participating in the "Chumash Party" of their granddaughter, Yakira Devora, in the New York area. "May we all share beautiful payros from our children and grandchildren."*

*Mazel Tov to Yeta and Nosson Solomon on the birth of a grandson, Avraham Yehuda, son of Tova and Mitch Rich of Ramat Beit Shemesh.*

*Mazel Tov to Rabbi Richard Louis Price, M.D., Medical Director of the Bihur Cholim of Rockland County, Department of Clinical Services, on receiving certification in Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation for treatment of depression.*

