

# HADRACHA CHOVERET

**BNEI  
AKIVA**  
UNITED KINGDOM



BNEI AKIVA'S WEEKLY EDUCATIONAL HANDBOOK FOR MADRICHIM

## Va'era· Mental Health Awareness Shabbat



### Concrete Concepts·

1. A depressed outlook can skew your entire perception of reality
2. The Jews' slavery in Egypt was a mental slavery as well as physical
3. Judaism supports developing your own mental wellbeing

## Bnei Akiva Svivot 5782· Madrichim Pack

Dear Madrichim.

*This week is Mental Health Awareness Shabbat. In addition to this, I've been told (not looking at anyone in particular...) that my chovrot are written in 'Ben-language'. So I'm changing up the style a little bit, to be more like the revamped chomer for machane. Let me know your thoughts! This is also a bit different because JAMI already had great content on some of this, so I didn't alter what they've already written.*

Remember we're here to support you in whatever way we can! Rafi can be contacted at [svivot@bauk.org](mailto:svivot@bauk.org) or 0208 209 1319 ext. 4, and I can be contacted at [chinuch@bauk.org](mailto:chinuch@bauk.org) or 0208 209 1319 ext. 5.

BVCLTVA,  
Ben

### Week 10· Mental Health in the Parasha

#### Why couldn't the Jews hear Moshe?

Shemot 6:9

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה בֶּן אֶלְבִּינִי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה  
מִקְצֶר רוּחַ וּמִעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה:

And Moshe spoke [that God would rescue the Jewish people from slavery] to the children of Israel, but they did not listen to Moshe, because of shortness of spirit and difficult work.

**Discussion Point 1: What do you think it means that they did not listen because of 'shortness of breath and difficult work'?**

Ramban ibid.

מקוצר רוח ומעבודה קשה לא בעבור שלא יאמינו בה' ובנביאו, רק שלא הטו אוזן לדבריו מקוצר רוח, כאדם שתקצר נפשו בעמלו, ולא ירצה לחיות רגע בצער, מדעתו שירוח לו אחרי כן

'Because of shortness of spirit and difficult work.' Not because they didn't believe in Hashem or in his prophet [Moshe]; just that they didn't pay attention to his words because of 'shortness of spirit' – like a person whose mind becomes sick of their difficulty, and doesn't want to live a moment longer in this pain, even if they know that it'll get better after this.

**Discussion Point 2: How would you go about Moshe's task of liberating the Jews from their depressed mindset? Do you think Moshe is effective at this?**

Perhaps a better translation of the pasuk we started with:

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה בֶּן אֶלְבָּנִי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה מִקְצֶר רוּחַ וּמְעַבְדָּה קָשָׁה:

And Moshe spoke [that God would rescue the Jewish people from slavery] to the children of Israel, but they **couldn't hear** Moshe, because of shortness of spirit and difficult work.

Rabbi Dweck:

The Israelites' mental health had been compromised and weakened as a result of relentless and meaningless labour, persecution and trauma. It was not that they did not care. It was that they did not at the time have the ability to take in the music. Their oppression and suffering were not only physical, but also mental and Moses had to liberate them from both.

**JAMI Resources**

Basically, I was going to continue my regular stream of consciousness style choveret over here, but I literally realised that JAMI have everything covered

that you could possibly need. They have a list of conversation starters that you should use in your meetings to discuss these issues, and a 'choveret' on Mental Wellbeing and Judaism. So without further ado, I hand over to the excellent folk at JAMI!

**Conversation starters**

Is mental health an important issue in your community? How does the community support our mental health or influence the way we think about it?

How does society view mental and physical health differently? Do you think the two should be addressed in the same manner? Why or why not?

What steps can be taken within your community to break down any stigma surrounding mental health?

In what ways do you engage with hobbies and interests that connect you with your community?

**Mental wellbeing and Judaism**

The sources below can be used as a starting point to discuss how mental wellbeing fits into religion and culture. How does Judaism recognise the importance of looking after ourselves? What ideas from Judaism can we use to boost our wellbeing?

You may want to think about other textual sources or ideas in Judaism which support wellbeing e.g. trying to use technology less or not at all over Shabbat can boost our mental wellbeing by giving us a break from screen-time. This gives us time to maximise face-to-face communication or focus our time on other hobbies and activities we enjoy.

### ***A Valuable Lesson***

"It is long past time for us all to break the silence and speak openly about mental illness. It is time for this last stigma to fall and fall quickly in the recognition that we are all created b'tzelem Elokim (in the image of God)" – Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot, 2001

A key part of education is leading from the front. Just by educating about mental health we are raising awareness that we all have mental health and we need to look after our wellbeing to maintain it. We are role modelling the importance of looking after ourselves and teaching a valuable lesson.

### ***Do we have the concept of mental illness in Judaism?***

Prayer for the Sick:

Refuat hanefesh, urefuat haguf / Healing the soul and healing the body

Judaism shows us a connection of healing the soul and healing the body; there is no division between mental and physical illness. There is only illness. Likewise, everyone has both physical and mental health which changes over time and needs looking after.

### ***Does Judaism help?***

"The support individuals derive from the members, leaders and clergy of religious congregations is widely considered one of the key mediators between spirituality and mental health. Spiritual or religious support can be a valuable source of self-esteem, information, companionship and practical help that enables people to cope with stress and negative life events" – Mental Health Foundation, The Impact of Spirituality on Mental Health.

Religion and culture can provide us with a sense of community and belonging. Within these communities we know that there are people we can turn to and trust when we need them.

### ***How does Judaism help?***

Pirkei Avot 1:6

Aseh Lecha Rav, V'Kneh Lecha Haver

Make for yourself a Rabbi (teacher) and acquire for yourself a friend.

We all need someone to talk to sometimes, whether we turn to a Rabbi or Rebbetzin for guidance or a friend for support. Most of us will have a community, family and friends who we can turn to.

Parshat Va'etchanan 5:12

Shamor et Yom HaShabbat

## Keep (Guard) Shabbat

However we choose to mark Shabbat, Judaism recognises the need to “switch off” from our busy lives and reconnect with those around us. Whether we find comfort in or feel connected to familiar routines and rituals or choose not to use technology for a while, these are great ways to boost our mental wellbeing.

### Peulot.

<https://jamiuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Youth-materials2.pdf>

## Random Games Corner

*Over here each you'll find random games that we've compiled from the days of old. The titles are a bit weird and they're mostly just for fun but you never know when they might connect to an educational message!*

**Donut** - Suspend a doughnut from a string and watch as they try to eat with no hands.

**Dreidel** - Spinning Sevivons/Dizzy Dreidels – Two competitors spin on the starting line for 30 seconds before racing each other to the opposite wall

**Adman** - Adman (a classic, with local variants and customs all over) – Sitting in a circle each position has a name, customarily along the lines of Adman, Superman, Spiderman, Batman, 1, 2, 3, etc. The final position is Shmerel. Each person must call someone who is not next to them and who did not just call them (Adman calling Spiderman, Spiderman calling 2, etc.) If someone is out, they become the Shmerel (everyone chants Shmerel! Shmerel!) and everyone moves up a seat. They take the name of the seat they are moving into. The aim is to be Adman. (Tenuous link to heroes and the Maccabees, maybe make Maccabee the first position.)

### SLAP HAND TAG

**TYPE: Active** Play in a large room The group is divided into two teams. Each team stands in a line facing the other team. The first player from team A runs across to team B, and slaps the hands of three players. The third player he slaps must chase him back to team A's line. If he gets tagged, he becomes team B's prisoner and stands behind the player who tagged him. If he doesn't get tagged, the player from team B becomes team A's prisoner and stands behind the player he was chasing. Play continues with the first player from team B, then the second player from team A, etc. If a player who becomes a prisoner has his own prisoners, his prisoners are freed and return to their own team. The game ends when one team loses all of their players. Variation: Stop the game after a certain time limit; the team with the most prisoners wins

### QUESTION BASEBALL

**TYPE: Moderate** The players are divided into two teams. Four chairs are arranged in the formation of a baseball diamond (see diagram). A chair is placed in the pitcher's position and the leader sits in that chair. The leader "pitches" questions to the first player (who is seated at home plate). If the player answers correctly, he advances one base. If he answers incorrectly, he is "out." The next player does the same. If he answers correctly both he and the player on base advance one base. If he answers incorrectly, he is "out" and the player on base stays where he is. When a team has scored three outs, the next team is "up at bat." One point is scored for each player who advances to "home plate." At the end of five "innings" the team with the most points, wins.

### NASI--NASI #1

**TYPE: Quiet** Play in a circle One player is chosen to be the "Nasi" and the player to his left becomes the "Chamor." The object is to become the Nasi. Players begin by: 1) Slapping their hands on their knees 2) Clapping their hands 3) Snapping their right hand 4) Snapping their

left hand On the right snap, the Nasi says his name (the Nasi and the Chamor substitute "Nasi" and "Chamor" for their real names, everyone else uses their real names). On the left snap, he says another player's name and so on. Anyone who does not keep up the beat or fails to respond to his turn moves to the Chamor's seat and everyone shifts over to take up his now vacant seat. Variation: Instead of calling a person always by his own name, the seat in which he sat in during the beginning of the game assumes his name. Therefore, when players shift position they also change their names to that of the person who first sat in that seat. Slap--Clap--Snap, Nasi--Snap: Joe Slap--Clap--Snap: Joe--Snap: Rivka Slap--Clap--Snap: Rivka--Snap: Chamor, etc.

### **SHOE FETCH**

**TYPE: Relay** Five players from each team take off their shoes. The leader then takes the shoes and puts them in another room. At the signal, the players run to the other room, put on their shoes, and run back. The first team whose players return, wins

### **TWENTY QUESTIONS**

**TYPE: Shtick** The group must guess some object that the leader has picked by asking "yes" or "no" questions. But there is one catch; actually, the leader has not picked anything. He answers "yes" or "no" depending on how the last word in the question ends: consonant = "yes"; vowel = "no," or vice versa. See how long it takes the group to catch on. Variation: Send one player out of the room. While he is out tell the group the trick. When he returns tell him he has twenty questions to guess an object that the group has picked. See how long it will take him to catch on.