

CJL SHABBAT WELLNESS INITIATIVE

Source Sheet and readings

JOSEPH AND THE PIT STORY AS A METAPHOR FOR MENTAL HEALTH

LET'S RECAP THE STORY OF JOSEPH AND THE PIT:

Breishit 37:24-25

וַיִּקְחֵהוּ וַיְשַׁלְכֵהוּ אֵתוֹ הַבְּרָה וְהַבְּרָה רֵק אֵין בָּהּ מַיִם:

and took him and cast him into the pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לֶאֱכֹל־לֶחֶם וַיֵּשְׂאוּ עֵינֵיהֶם וַיֵּרְאוּ וְהִנֵּה אֲרֻחַת
 יִשְׁמַעְאֵלִים בָּאָה מִגִּלְעָד וּגְמָלֵיהֶם נִשְׂאִים נִכְאֵת וְצִרֵי
 זֶלֶט הוֹלְכִים לְהוֹרִיד מִצְרָיִמָּה:

Then they sat down to a meal. Looking up, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, their camels bearing gum, balm, and ladanum to be taken to Egypt.

So Joseph is thrown into a pit by his brothers, then his brothers sit down to eat. What is Joseph's reaction to being thrown into the pit? How is he feeling? Do we know? We don't know. According to the pshat of the text, Joseph is silent. And how do the brothers react to throwing Joseph in the pit? They eat.

THIS MIDRASH FROM SEFER HAYASHAR TELLS A DIFFERENT STORY ABOUT HOW JOSEPH REACTED AND GIVES US A FEW MORE DETAILS ABOUT THE BROTHERS' REACTION (FEEL FREE TO SKIM JUST THE BOLDED PARTS) SEFER HAYASHAR (MIDRASH), BOOK OF GENESIS, VAYESHEV 4

And when Joseph came amongst his brothers he sat down before them; and they took hold upon him and threw him to the ground and stripped off the coat of many colors which was upon him. And they took him and cast him into a pit, and in the pit was no water, but it was full of serpents and scorpions. And Joseph was greatly afraid of the serpents and scorpions, and **he cried out with a loud voice**, and the Lord hid the serpents and scorpions in the walls of the pit, so that they could do Joseph no harm. And **Joseph cried out from the pit unto his brothers, saying:** What have I done unto you and what is my sin, and why do you not fear the Lord concerning me? Am I not your bone and flesh and is not Jacob, your father, my father also? Why are ye doing this thing unto me this day, and how will you ever be able to look unto Jacob our father? **And he was crying and calling unto his brothers from the midst of the pit, and he said:** Oh Judah, and Simeon and Levi, my brothers, raise me from this darksome place where into ye have put me, and come and have mercy upon me this day, ye children of the Lord and sons of my father Jacob ' And supposing that I have sinned against you, are you not the sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who when they saw an orphan they had pity with him, and when they found one hungry they gave him bread to eat, and if he was thirsty they gave him water to drink, and if he was naked they covered him with garments. And how can ye withdraw your compassion from your own brother, of your own flesh and bone, and even if I have sinned against you, surely you ought to do it for the sake of my father. **And Joseph spoke all these words from the midst of the pit but his brothers hearkened not nor did they incline their ears to Joseph's supplication and he was still crying and weeping in the pit.** And Joseph said: Oh that my father knew the thing that my brothers have done unto me and what they said unto me this day. **And Joseph's brothers heard the weeping and lamentation of their brother, and they moved away in order not to hear his crying in the pit.** And they seated themselves at a distance of about a bow-shot, and **they sat down there to eat.**

So what's going on here? Joseph is crying out, his brothers choose not to hear him, even go so far as to move away from him just so they don't have to listen to him. As young Jews, one of the first things we learn is Shma and V'ahavta - literally to listen and to love. We are taught to listen for the cries of others, not just hear them, which is passive, but to actively listen, and then the next step is to love with all your heart, all your soul, and all your might. To actively listen, to pay attention, in Hebrew is Lasim Lev, which translates to "to put out your heart". So when you are listening and paying attention to what someone is telling you, you're putting out your heart to them, showing love and empathy to support them.

In the Brene Brown clip, she says "empathy is feeling with people" - you have to be able to put your heart out, make yourself vulnerable, connect their story with a piece of yourself, and join the person in their experience, to really be able to listen to them. But you have to be mindful about how you do that, about how you connect with them and join them where they are. I heard a story recently from a hospital chaplain outside of Chicago. He said that when someone is telling you about their experience, you have to be a story catcher, you have to receive their story with empathy, rather than be a story amplifier or story stealer who takes the other person's story and turns it into their own. You have to be able to hear their story, take it in, and just be there with them. You don't have to say anything, sometimes it's better if you don't, but you have to be there, listening.

So some questions to think about/reflect on:

- What are some barriers that stop us from being able to hear the cries of others?
- When do we intentionally turn away from the cries of others?
- What are ways in which we can hear people who may not be crying because they don't know how (to ask for help)?

SO NOW THAT WE'VE TALKED ABOUT THE BROTHERS, WHO IGNORED JOSEPH'S CRIES AND LEFT HIM IN THE PIT, LET'S MOVE ON TO THE PEOPLE WHO ACTUALLY TOOK JOSEPH OUT OF THE PIT.

Breishit 37:28

When Midianite traders passed by, they pulled Joseph up out of the pit. They sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver to the Ishmaelites, who brought Joseph to Egypt.

וַיַּעֲבְרוּ אַנְשֵׁי מִדְיָנִים סְחָרִים וַיִּמְשְׁכוּ וַיַּעֲלוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף
מִן־הַבּוֹר וַיִּמְכְּרוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף לִישְׁמַעֲאֵלִים בְּעֶשְׂרִים כֶּסֶף
וַיְבִיאוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִצְרָיִם׃

The Midianites were the ones who pulled Joseph out of the pit, and the next thing they do is sell him to the Ishmaelites.

Why do you think the Midianites pulled Joseph out? Did they hear him crying out and want to help him? Did they see the Ishmaelites coming and knew they could get some money for him?

THE FOLLOWING TWO SOURCES, FOUR AND FIVE, OFFER TWO POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS FOR WHY THEY PULLED JOSEPH OUT OF THE PIT.

4. Chizkuni, Genesis 37:28:1

"in the meantime Midianite merchants had passed by the pit that Joseph had been thrown into and **they heard his cries.**"

ויעברו אנשים מדינים סוחרים

וימשכו ויעלו

5. Daat Zkenim on Genesis 37:28:1

"they pulled and raised;" **first they struck a deal** to sell him for twenty pieces of silver. Then **in order to deliver him to the purchaser they had to haul him out of the pit.**

First, Chizkuni says that the Midianites heard his cries. So it's possible that here they heard his cries and took him out to help him. However the Daat Zkenim suggests that first they made the deal with the Ishmaelites, then they pulled him out of the pit in order to hold up their end of the deal, and there is no mention of hearing his cries.

It's also possible that the two fit together - the midianites heard his cries, so they knew he was in there, then they made the deal with the Ishmaelites, and then pulled him out from the pit to complete the deal.

Do the Midianites show empathy for Joseph? They pulled him out of the pit, so they must have some amount of empathy right?

I don't think so. According to these commentaries, they seem to pull him up for their own benefit, like story stealers. (Perhaps according to Chizkuni they pulled him up first out of empathy and then made the deal, but the important part is that they pull him up and in the same pasuk sell him). They have no understanding of what Joseph experienced, they have no empathy for him, although they pulled him out of the pit.

I wanted to bring in these commentaries to show that pulling someone out of a pit is not necessarily the best way to help or support them, it's not always the best response to someone crying out from inside a pit. It may be like the deer in the clip who keeps saying "at least" to make the fox feel better - at least you're not dead, at least you may have a better life with the Ishmaelites, at least you're not stuck down there anymore. You can imagine that the deer pulled the fox out from the pit and drew the silver lining around the cloud above her head, but that doesn't make the cloud go away.

The big orange bear has a different reaction. He climbs down into the pit with the little fox after the fox cries out and tells her "I know what it's like down here, and you're not alone". And what's so interesting about this clip is that it doesn't end with the bear and the fox leaving the pit. It ends with the two of them hugging and a heart above their heads - the bear was able to *lasim lev*, to show empathy, to pay attention to the fox down in the pit, and by the end the fox is smiling. The bear didn't try to pull her out, he went down and met her where she was. **So what I think we should take away from this is that trying to pull someone out of the pit, out of their sadness or suffering or whatever they're feeling, is not always the best way to go. Sometimes it's better to go down into the pit, to join them in their suffering or whatever their experience is, and just be there with them, listening, paying attention, giving your heart.**

SOME SOURCES ON CRYING

Eicha Raba 24

At the time the Holy Blessed One cried and said, "Woe is me, what have I done? I have brought my spirit down for the sake of Israel, now they have sinned and I have returned to my original place, heaven forbid, I should be laughing stock to the nations and a joke among my creatures." At that moment, Metratron came and fell upon his face and said before God, "Master of the World, I will cry and you will not cry." God said to him, "If you don't let me cry now, then I will go to a place where you do not have the ability to enter and I will cry, as it's said (Jeremiah 13:17), 'For if you do not give heed, my inmost self will weep, because of your arrogance.'"

בְּאוֹתָהּ שָׁעָה הָיָה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בּוֹכֶה וְאוֹמֵר אוֹי לִי מָה עָשִׂיתִי, הַשְּׂרִיתִי שְׂכִינְתִּילְמָטָה בְּשִׁבְלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְעָכְשׁוּ שְׁחָטָאוֹ חֲזָרְתִּילְמָקוֹמִי הָרָאשׁוֹן, חֵס וְשָׁלוֹם שְׁהִיִּיתִי שְׁחוֹקִלְגוּיִם וְלַעֲג לְבָרִיּוֹת, בְּאוֹתָהּ שָׁעָה בְּאִמְטָטְרוֹן וְנִפְל עַל פָּנָיו וְאָמַר לְפָנָיו, רְבוּנוֹ שְׁלַעוֹלָם אֲנִי אֲבָכָה וְאַתָּה לֹא תִבְכֶּה, אָמַר לוֹ אֱמַיִן אַתָּה מְנִיחַ לִי לְבָכּוֹת עָכְשׁוֹ, אֲכַנֵּס לְמָקוֹם שְׂאִין לָךְ רְשׁוֹת לְכַנֵּס וְאַבְכֶּה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (ירמיהו יג, יז): וְאִם לֹא יִתְשַׁמְעוּהָ בְּמִסְתָּרִים תִּבְכֶּה נַפְשִׁי מִפְּנֵי גְּוָה וְגו'.

What do you think about the image of God crying? How does seeing God cry change your view of the action?

For context here, God is crying over the destruction of the Temple.

Why does Metratron (an angel) not want God to cry?

Notice that God says that God will still go and cry, even if Metratron won't let God do it now.

Sometimes you can't stop the power of tears from taking over.

We tend to choose to cry in private because it is not acceptable to cry in public. Where is your favorite place to cry? Why is it not acceptable to cry in public? What are steps you can take to make it more acceptable?

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Masechet Chagigah 5b

But is there crying before the Holy One? Didn't Rav Pappa say: There is no sadness before the Holy One, as it is stated: "Honor and majesty are before God; strength and gladness are in God's place" (I Chronicles 16:27)?

וּמִי אֵיכָא בְכִיָּה קָמִיָּה הַקָּב " ה וְהָאֵמַר רַב פַּפָּא אֵינְעִיבּוֹת לְפָנֵי הַקָּב " ה שְׁנֵאֵמַר (דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים א טז, כז) הוּד וְהָדָר לְפָנָיו עוֹז וְחִדּוּהָ בְּמָקוֹמוֹ

What do you think about crying in front of God? Should you only be happy in front of God? What about tears of joy?

This pasuk lends itself to toxic positivity, where we are expected to always be happy and do not allow ourselves to be sad. We would like to advocate the opposite: let yourself be sad if you are feeling sad

SECULAR, SCIENTIFIC, LITERATURE, ETC. SOURCES:

Brene Brown empathy clip (connected to Joseph and the pit source. Reading through the cartoon here is sufficient, but if you can, I recommend watching this YouTube clip as well for the full effect - called Brené Brown on Empathy):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw&feature=youtu.be>

Transcript: So what is empathy and why is it VERY different than sympathy? Empathy fuels connection. Sympathy drives disconnection.



It's very interesting. Theresa Wiseman is a nursing scholar who studied very diverse professions where empathy is relevant and came up with four qualities of empathy:

1. Perspective taking: ability to take the perspective of another person or recognize their perspective as their truth



2. Staying out of judgement - not easy when you enjoy it as much as most of us do



3. Recognizing emotion in other people, then communicating that. Empathy is feeling WITH people



And to me, I always think of empathy as this kind of sacred space. Where someone's in a deep hole and they shout from the bottom "I'm stuck. It's dark. I'm overwhelmed"



And we look and we say "Hey!" And climb down I know what it's like down here. And you're not alone.



Sympathy is “Ooh! It’s bad, uh-huh? Uh.. no. You want a sandwich?” [the deer at the top is talking]



Empathy is a choice, and it’s a vulnerable choice because in order to connect with you, I have to connect with something in myself that knows that feeling.



Rarely, if ever, does an empathic response begin with, “At least...” And we do it all the time because, you know what? Someone shared something with us that’s incredible painful and we’re trying to “silver lining” it. I don’t think that’s a verb but I’m using it as one.



We're trying to put a silver lining around it. So [the fox says] "I had a miscarriage". [The deer responds] "At least you know you can get pregnant"



Fox: "I think my marriage is falling apart" Deer: "At least you have a marriage" Fox: "John's getting kicked out of school" Deer: "At least Sarah is an A-student" One of the things we do sometimes in the face of very difficult conversations is we try to make things better. If I share something with you that's very difficult, I'd rather you say "I don't even know what to say. I'm just so glad you told me."



Because the truth is, rarely can a response make something better. What makes something better is connection.



TOXIC POSITIVITY

Excerpts from <https://thepsychologygroup.com/toxic-positivity/>:

We define toxic positivity as the excessive and ineffective overgeneralization of a happy, optimistic state across all situations. The process of toxic positivity results in the denial, minimization, and invalidation of the authentic human emotional experience. Just like anything done in excess, when positivity is used to cover up or silence the human experience, it becomes toxic. By disallowing the existence of certain feelings, we fall into a state of denial and repressed emotions. The truth is, humans are flawed. We get jealous, angry, resentful, and greedy. Sometimes life can just flat out suck. By pretending that we are “positive vibes all day,” we deny the validity of a genuine human experience.

SIGNS OF TOXIC POSITIVITY

Below are some common expressions and experiences of toxic positivity to help you recognize how it shows up in everyday life.

1. Hiding/Masking your true feelings
2. Trying to “just get on with it” by stuffing/dismissing an emotion(s)
3. Feeling guilty for feeling what you feel
4. Minimizing other people’s experiences with “feel good” quotes or statements
5. Trying to give someone perspective (e.g., “it could be worse”) instead of validating their emotional experience
6. Shaming or chastising others for expressing frustration or anything other than positivity
7. Brushing off things that are bothering you with a “It is what it is”

“I’d rather be whole than good” -Carl Jung

To force a positive outlook on pain is to encourage a person to keep silent about their struggles. Several psychological studies show us that hiding or denying feelings leads to more stress on the body and/or increased difficulty avoiding the distressing thoughts and feelings. These types of studies show us that expressing a broad range of emotions (even the “not-so-positive” ones), having words to describe how we feel, and facial expressions to emote (yup that can mean crying) help us regulate our stress response.

Have you ever been around a sweet, sugary, “just think happy thoughts” pollyanna kind of person? How comfortable are you with spilling your guts about the deep emotions you’re feeling? Even though that person might have the best intentions in the world, the message they are mindlessly sending is, “only good feelings are allowed in my presence.” Therefore, it makes it really difficult to express anything but “good vibes” around them. Consequently, you end up complying with the implied rules of, “I can only be a certain kind of person around you, I can’t be myself.”

The relationship with yourself, is often reflected in the relationship you have with others. If you can’t be honest about your own feelings, how will you ever be able to hold space for someone else expressing real feelings in your presence? By curating a fake emotional world, we attract more fakeness resulting in counterfeit intimacy and superficial friendships.

EXAMPLES OF NON-TOXIC & ACCEPTING STATEMENTS

Toxic Positivity	Non-Toxic Acceptance & Validation
"Don't think about it, stay positive!"	"Describe what you're feeling, I'm listening."
"Don't worry, be happy!"	"I see that you're really stressed, anything I can do?"
"Failure is not an option."	"Failure is a part of growth and success."
"Everything will work out in the end."	"This is really hard, I'm thinking of you."
"Positive vibes only!"	"I'm here for you both good and bad."
"If I can do it, so can you!"	"Everyone's story, abilities, limitations are different, and that's okay"
"Delete Negativity"	"Suffering is a part of life, you are not alone."
"Look for the silver lining."	"I see you. I'm here for you."
"Everything happens for a reason."	"Sometimes we can draw the short straw in life. How can I support you during this hard time?"
"It could be worse."	"That sucks. I'm so sorry you're going through this."

Being a healthy human being involves being conscious of ourselves and how we show up in the world. If you recognize yourself as a transmitter of toxic positivity, it's time to cut it out. You're hurting yourself and the people you care about most by insisting on this monochromatic mindset. Instead of practicing toxic positivity, aim for balance and the acceptance of both good and bad emotions rather than all-or-nothing thinking. If you're being influenced by toxic positivity, we encourage you to set healthy boundaries with anyone who passes judgment on your authentic experience and speak your truth. We get one chance at this beautiful, painful, imperfect life... embrace it entirely and you'll reap the rewards of bountiful aliveness.

CJL SHABBAT WELLNESS INITIATIVE

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES

- Start your “Lost and Found” list.

A “Lost and Found” list is pretty much as it sounds: you write a list of things you’ve “lost” during COVID and things you’ve “found”.

Some examples: Lost: being on campus with friends, original summer plans, in-person classes, human connection in-person

Found: more time with pets (or family, if you like hanging out with them), more time to devote to hobbies, increased contact with home friends

- Put your phone on Do Not Disturb for an hour and place it out of sight to give yourself a break from the constant notifications.
- Think about/write out a movie or short film you would write if you made a film based on your experience with emotional wellness and/or mental health. How would it begin? What would the story be? How would it end? What’s your goal? To share your story or someone else’s? To present a reality? To bring hope? To bring strategies? Something entirely different?

GROUP/PAIR ACTIVITIES

- If you feel comfortable, share some bullets from your Lost and Found list with a friend (and have your friend share back with you). You likely have items in common or one of you might mention something that the other didn’t think of but can relate to also.
- Rant to a friend about a problem that has been bothering you lately. If they rant back to you, be a good listener and hear their struggle. Try to focus on meeting them where they are, and try not to say “at least...” (related to Joseph and the pit source sheet, along with Brene Brown Empathy video)
- Discuss your movie ideas from the individual activities with a friend. How are your ideas similar? How are they different? What reactions do you have to your friend’s idea? How does it feel to share your idea? What do you still wish you could share? What do you still wish you could know?

SHABBAT FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES

- Start brainstorming your “Lost and Found” list
- Organize your desk or one part of your closet - you’d be surprised how good it feels to be a little more cleaned up, even as someone who can generally live in a messy room
- For an hour (or less or more), sit, move, or lie down, while allowing yourself to just feel what you feel and think what you think
- Think about how other categories of wellness, both the ones we’ve discussed so far (social, spiritual, occupational, environmental) and the ones we will discuss soon (physical, intellectual) relate to and contribute to emotional wellness? How might you use them to understand and improve your emotional wellness? Do you think they relate to your mental health and emotional wellness equally? What do you think the relationship between emotional wellness and mental health is? Feel free to discuss with someone else now or later.

Emotional Wellness Self-Assessment

Emotional Wellness: understanding your own feelings and expressing emotions in a constructive way, and having the ability to deal with stress and cope with life's challenges

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually
1. I find it easy to express my emotions in positive, constructive ways	1	2	3	4
2. I recognize when I am stressed and take steps to manage my stress (e.g., exercise, quiet time, meditation)	1	2	3	4
3. I am resilient and can bounce back after a disappointment or problem	1	2	3	4
4. I am able to maintain a balance of work, family, friends and other obligations	1	2	3	4
5. I am flexible and adapt or adjust to change in a positive way	1	2	3	4
6. I am able to make decisions with minimal stress or worry	1	2	3	4
7. When I am angry, I try to let others know in non-confrontational or non-hurtful ways	1	2	3	4

Scores of 20-28: Outstanding! Your answers demonstrate that you're already taking positive steps in this dimension of wellness. You're improving your own well-being and also setting a good example for those around you. Although you achieved a high overall score in this domain, you may want to check for low scores on individual items to see if there are specific areas you might want to address. You might also choose to focus on another area where your scores weren't so high.

Scores of 15-19: Your behaviors in this area are good, but there is room for improvement. Take a look at the items on which you scored lower. What changes might you make to improve your score? Even a small change in behavior can help you achieve better health and well-being.

Scores of 14 and below: Your answers indicate some potential health and well-being risks. Review those areas where you scored lower and review resources provided in today's Wellness Resources handout to help you develop and set achievable goals.

HOW TO FOSTER EMOTIONAL WELLNESS:

- Learn [relaxation and stress management techniques](#)(link is external).
- Cultivate an awareness of your thoughts and feelings through [mind-body tools and programs](#).
- [Develop confidence](#) in your abilities.
- [Practice expressing both negative and positive feelings constructively, with assertive communication.](#)
- Take responsibility for and [learn from your decisions](#), without self-critical thoughts.

Definition of Emotional wellness (Princeton UMatter):

Emotional wellness is understanding your own feelings and expressing emotions in a constructive way. It is also the ability to manage stress and cope with life's challenges.

ON-CAMPUS RESOURCES

These resources are available to help you learn how to manage your stress or difficult emotions, and minimize your concerns about finances, relationships, and other challenging areas:

[Center for Jewish Life](#)

[UMatter Princeton](#)

[Counseling and Psychological Services](#)

[Carl Fields Center](#)

[LGBT Center](#)

[Sexual Harassment/Assault Advising, Resources and Education \(SHARE\) Office](#)

[Princeton Mind-Body Programs](#)

[Princeton Perspective Project](#)