

**Yehi Ratzon milfanecha- May it be your will that all those who suffer find comfort.**

Comfort can be one of the simplest of human interactions. The presence of another person who acknowledges and cares that you are suffering can be enough to soften the edge of the pain and help it dissipate.

The ritual of a parent kissing a child's scraped knee captures the essence of comfort. The kiss does not heal the broken skin but makes it insignificant. The pain is eclipsed by connection and care.

But sometimes comfort is not simple.

For about a decade, I experienced intense and unremitting depression.

When I am depressed, I become isolated within myself and it's very hard for me to be comforted. Projecting my own feelings about myself onto others, I cannot believe that anyone can feel positively about me. I read any negative emotion, the slightest trace of frustration, impatience or anxiety, as rejection and I pull deeper inside. The dissonance of feeling so alone but not being alone is confusing and amplifies my pain. I feel angry and betrayed. Why can't I feel the connection I crave? I feel helpless. The negative cycle takes another turn downward. It's my fault that I cannot get comfort. Something is fundamentally wrong with me.

This distorted thought process plagued me during my long depression. It took years of skilled and patient work for me to be able to feel comforted by the presence of the therapist I saw at the time. As you can imagine, my state of mind, my isolation and my distrust, took a tremendous toll on my relationships. Lisa and I had to work through many misunderstandings. She understandably felt confused and abandoned when my mental health crisis changed who I was with her. And since I was primed to feel judged, her hurt felt to me like rejection. I am grateful to her and my all my friends who remained with me even when I was remote and distrustful.

I do not know if everyone who struggles with mental health issues has the same difficulty I have being comforted. But I suspect that isolation is a common experience. Thinking, feeling, and behaving in ways that are not typical is scary and can be alienating. It stresses our relationships with others. And the social stigma against mental illness compounds this. We feel alone and sometimes are alone.

My prayer is that everyone experiences the most fundamental blessing of human connection and through that, the miracle of comfort.

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