

The Schmooze Stories with a Yiddish Twist

JEWS AND DEPRESSION: “Nit Gedacht”-It shouldn’t happen

by

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Syosset, New York

Some terms:

“more-shkhoyre” means “depression or sadness”

“dershlogn” means “mentally depressed”

“Melancholy” is the ancient term for depression. People have been dealing with depression for thousands of years.

“depressive personality”: People who are chronically unhappy and just do not feel that the world is a nice place to live

(definition by Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski)

“chasid shoteh” - a pious fool who refuses to take medication like antibiotics for pneumonia and the proper medication for diabetes. Depression is no different.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski)

Q. What do these celebrities have in common?

Art Buchwald

Mike Wallace

Sarah Silverman

Gwyneth Paltrow

Catherine Zeta-Jones

David Arquette

Princess Diana

Tipper Gore

Brooke Shields

A. They all have suffered from depression!

The late Art Buchwald, the “professional funnyman,” was once a foster child, a lonely class clown, a Marine misfit, a depression sufferer and a manic depressive. He was hospitalized for depression in 1963 and for manic depression in 1987. He admits that he thought of killing himself. He said, “But I never did--probably because I was afraid I wouldn’t make it into The York Times obituaries.”

Winston Churchill called his depression, “the black dog that follows me everywhere.”

Gwyneth Paltrow suffered postpartum depression in 2006 after giving birth to her second child, Moses. Psychologist, Dr. Karen Binder-Brynes, said that one in eight women suffer from mood disturbances after their delivery.

Andre Waters, former NFL player, said his depression was related to concussions sustained during football games.

Sarah Silverman, the comedian star, revealed that she began battling depression at the age of 13. It is controlled with a small dose of Zoloft, combined with therapy.” Note: In 2008, she did the “Great Schlep” video, urging Jews with grandparents in Florida to withhold visits to “bubbie” and “zadie” unless they agreed to vote for Barack Obama. “Nisht geshtoigen, nisht gefloigen.” (You’re not making sense.)

1990 Dr. Mindy McCarthy, a psychologist in Philadelphia, wrote that “in cultures where there is a strong ideal of female thinness, eating disorders are more common among young women and women in general are TWICE as likely to become depressed. But in cultures where the ideal for female beauty is in keeping with most women’s ACTUAL BODY TYPE, eating disorders are rare and women are no more likely than men to become depressed.”

1995: An article from the Los Angeles Times reports that Jewish men show sharply higher rates of depression than non-Jewish men do, and it may be because they are less likely to drown their sorrows in alcohol.

Surveys in LA and New Haven, CT, found that within a one-year period, 13% of Jewish men suffered from major depression, compared with 5.4% of non-Jewish men. Jewish women did not show unusually high rates.

2010 According to an AP article, “a majority of Israel’s Holocaust survivors suffer from depression or other emotional distress.”

2016: The Washington Post (4/25/16) reported that the U. S. suicide rate has increased sharply since the turn of the century, led by an even greater rise among middle-aged white people, particularly WOMEN.

Researchers speculate that in cultures that do not use drinking as an outlet for release of tension, sadness and distress, those things may show up as depression. (Study done by Dr. Robert Kohn, Dr. Itzak Levav of Brown University.)

“Last decade’s severe recession, more drug addiction, ‘gray divorce,’ increased social isolation, and even the rise of the Internet and social media may have contributed to the growth in suicide,” according to a variety of people who study the issue.”

FYI: A “grey divorce” is a term referring to the demographic trend of an increasing divorce rate for older (“grey-haired”) couples in long-lasting marriages. Ex. Tipper and Al Gore’s decision to separate after 40 years of marriage is an example of this trend.

In “The Best of Dear Abby” by Abigail Van Buren, a letter, signed “Depressed” stirred up some rather depressing memories:

Dear Abby:

About a month ago we had a flash flood, and I lost nearly all the treasures I had saved for forty-five years. Albums filled with pictures and snapshots, letters, clippings--none of which can be replaced. I had them stored in plastic containers, and when I opened them, all I found was mud and water!

It seems that a part of my life is gone, and I am heartsick over it. I am sixty and have had a very happy life. Our children are married and gone, and there are just the two of us.

I’ve tried to keep busy and not dwell on my loss, but it is on my mind constantly. I wish I could forget this terrible nightmare.

On a more humorous vein, someone wrote, “My first memory of being depressed? I was about 8 days old and we had a party. There was some

drinking. We had a big platter of corned beef and potato salad. And out of nowhere this guy comes at me with a knife. I remember thinking: What did I do?" (Source: Mike Royko, "Male, Jewish, Depressed: Woody Allen Got it Right", 6/2/95)

And Rabbi David Klatzker, when he was the Rabbi at the Commack Jewish Center, Commack, New York, wrote a High Holiday sermon about depression. With his permission, I am quoting portions of the 2014 sermon titled, "My Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Summer":

When the Rabbi was asked about his summer vacation, he replied that it was great, He was hiding his true feelings. That summer he had "a bad case of the blues." What caused the blues?

- . The Commack Jewish Center was likely to close its doors in a year's time.
- . He fell down some stairs and injured his foot. He was stuck in a wheel chair for 5 long weeks.
- . He was forced to cancel his plans to go to California to see his children who resided there.
- . Next came the bloody war in Israel and Gaza. He worried about the tunnels and rockets and was horrified by the pictures of death and destruction.
- . His wife lost her job.
- . And, finally, one of his cars was nearly totaled.

The Rabbi says that we need to share these things with one another. Tzuris (trouble) should not be kept private.

Rabbi Klatzker shares a medieval Jewish story that goes like this:

A King was wooing a woman he wanted to become his Queen. They sat together on the couch and he told her about himself. He boasted, "I rule over a huge country and I am in charge of an army that numbers tens of thousands. She listened and started to move away from him. He continued: "I am consulted by kings and princes from all over the world." She moved further away from him on the

couch. And then he said, “Sometimes I’m lonely. Sometimes I’m scared and don’t know if I’m doing right with my life.” And when he said that, she moved closer to him and took his hand.

Rabbi Klatzker asks, “Why do we insist on being such shtarkers--To use the Yiddish word--Why do we pretend to be so strong? A woman once said to me that she wanted to protect her children from the pain that she felt about a personal loss of hers. I told her she was wrong. Our children ought to see us suffering so they will be aware of our pain. How else are they going to learn to take care of us? Rather than shelter them, we should share at least a small part of our suffering with them. That’s what family is all about.”

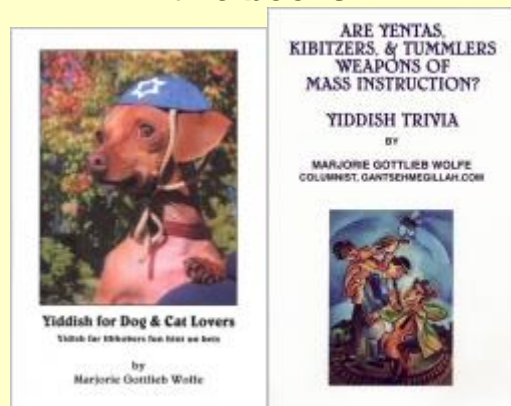
(Note: Rabbi Klatzker is now at Temple Emanuel of the Pascack Valley in Woodcliff Lake, New Jersey.)

In 1970 Marjorie Wolfe’s home in Massapequa Park, New York, was completely destroyed by a gas explosion. She could have suffered a severe depression...but, thank God, she, her husband, Howard, and their 3 children escaped uninjured. One year later, when she was asked, “What’s new?” she replied, “EVERYTHING.”

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**Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe is the author of
two books:**



**"Yiddish for Dog & Cat Lovers" and
"Are Yentas, Kibitzers, & Tumblers Weapons of Mass Instruction?
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