

Distress Tolerance Through Comparisons

I feel so alone.

No one has ever gone through this before.

What would others say if they knew how messed up I am?

I'm so embarrassed.

When we suffer, our minds often lead us to the silliest conclusions. We may believe that we alone suffer, that no one has ever survived this pain, and that no one else can help alleviate the agony. Even worse, we may become ashamed of our failings and imperfections. We feel unlovable and unhelpable.

And that's not a pretty place to be.

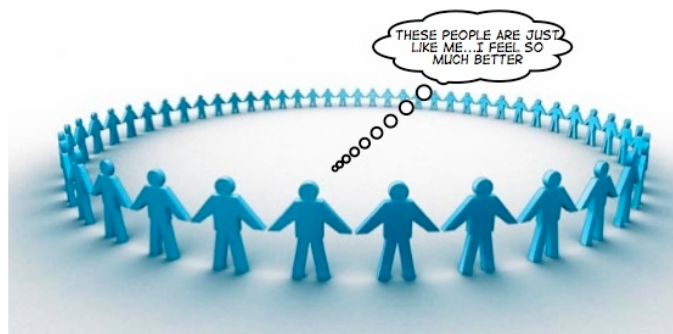
It is vital therefore that we respond to this tendency by looking around ourselves to see how others deal with their pain. Seeing how others manage is not an invalidation of our own suffering. Rather it is an opportunity to learn from others. We are all after all cut from the same cloth. By looking into the resourcefulness, determination, and strength of others, we are given permission to reach into our own "bag of tricks" for our own salvation.

Positive comparisons are especially relevant when it comes to shame. Shame is what we feel when we are rejected by others who we believe to be important to us. In fact, shame is the worst and most powerful of human emotions. Consider the fact that shame is the first feeling mentioned in the Torah. Shame is the emotional equivalent of strangulation. Just as a human being cannot survive without air, so too a human being cannot survive without the positive regard of others. This is why Halacha describes someone who humiliates another as a murderer.

The way back to life is to find a community of others who in fact respect us. Support, respect, and understanding are vital. More importantly, by comparing ourselves to those who struggle with similar challenges, we are invited to follow their example. Such people offer a standard for comparison of our own behavior and abilities. And that is a wonderful way to regain the pride that is justly ours.



BEFORE



AFTER