

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

As I was thinking about what to write for my October message, Ira Lilien shared with me a short article by Rebecca Heiss, which appeared in the Wall Street Journal on August 28th. The article reminds us of something many of us discovered at Hillcrest Jewish Center: helping others, reaching out to the lonely, and lending a hand to those in need, not only help you gain points with the Almighty (which we can always use), but can mitigate the effects of stress and bring meaning to your life.

I will let the article, and the inspiring story it shares, speak by itself. Let me remind you, however, that you don't have to travel far to make a difference. In the words of the Torah (Deuteronomy 30:14): "...the thing is very close to you..." Congregational life provides you with endless opportunities to help people, in big and small ways. In this regard, Hillcrest Jewish Center is a laboratory for kindness and compassion, a place where you can become the best version of yourself.

So, enjoy the article. Thank you, Ira, and May HaShem bless all of you with a year of meaning and spiritual growth.

Rabbi Manes Kogan

I Study Stress. This Cure Surprised – and Helped- Me. By Rebecca Heiss. WSJ

I was pacing the lobby of a Big Island hotel in flip-flops, panic rising in my chest like mercury in a thermometer. My luggage had vanished somewhere between the continental U.S. and Hawaii, and in less than 24 hours I was supposed to deliver a keynote speech to a room full of suits. The irony was not lost on me: Here I was, a stress physiologist who studies how humans handle pressure, completely undone by a missing suitcase.

That's when the hotelier noticed my distress. Without hesitation, he had a car take me to the shops. After three stores with nothing but Hawaiian shirts, I was ready to find a place to quietly weep. Then in the last shop something extraordinary happened.

The woman behind the counter listened to my predicament and chuckled, "Oh sweetie you aren't going to find what you need here." She handed me the keys to her brand-new BMW convertible and gave me directions to shops that sold business attire 40 minutes away.

"Just bring it back when you're done," she said with a smile. I was flabbergasted. I don't even know your name, I protested. "I'll tell you when you bring my car back," she twinkled.

As I drove across the island, top down and doubts swirling (was I an unwitting drug mule?), I couldn't comprehend why a stranger would trust me with what was likely her most valuable possession.

I returned hours later, outfit secured and overcome with gratitude. Through tears, I asked the woman—her name, it turned out, was Tani—why she had done this. "That's how we take care of people here in Hawaii," she answered.

Then she revealed something deeper. "I've been stressed lately," she admitted. She was worried about her daughter, who had just moved back to the continental U.S.: "My hope is that somebody might do something similar for her if she was in the same circumstance."

When I returned to the hotel, the hotelier was eager to hear how my trip had gone. As I recounted Tani's extraordinary kindness, tears welled up in his eyes. Minutes later, an elaborate display of chocolates arrived at my room, accompanied by a two-page note. He explained that he'd been anxious about moving his family to Hawaii, but my story had quieted his stress. Shouldn't it only be One word story?

In the self-help field, we tend to promote the usual stress-management arsenal: meditation apps, massage therapy, breathing exercises, yoga classes. These aren't wrong, but they rely on the individual to solve their own stress. In reality, these tools can sometimes exacerbate the problem, as people see their failure to self-regulate as proof there is something broken or wrong with them.

A study of workplace interventions to reduce stress, published in *Industrial Relations Journal* in 2024, revealed a startling truth. Of the 90 different stress-reduction strategies tested in corporate settings, which included meditation, massage and breathing exercises, only one consistently mitigated the negative effects of stress: serving others.

My Hawaiian crisis had become an impromptu case study. People experiencing their own stress had all instinctively relieved this pressure by helping someone else—in this case, me. They weren't following any wellness program or stress-management protocol. They were simply, and perhaps unconsciously, responding to their own anxiety by extending kindness to another person.

This helped me see how we've been approaching stress relief backward. Instead of turning inward with bespoke wellness practices, we do best when we turn outward—toward the needs of others. This doesn't mean meditation and self-care are useless, just that they are incomplete solutions.

My luggage crisis taught me that stress isn't necessarily the enemy we've made it out to be. When channeled properly, it can point us toward opportunities to serve.

We're all carrying invisible stressors. We're also all potential sources of relief for one another. In a world obsessed with self-optimization and individual wellness solutions, the most radical act might be the simplest one: noticing when someone else needs help and then providing it.