**The Levels Program: Outline and Goals**

**Introduction**

In her article “Identity, community, and capabilities: Three circles that build resilience,” Miriam Shapira defined emotional resilience as: “a set of abilities and components that predict and develop resistance to disruptions, as well as the ability to recover and grow from them.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Resilience builds mental and emotional flexibility, and is reflected in the ability to accommodate changes and develop a new picture of reality in the face of crises and fundamental changes. Various studies have reported that a stronger sense of resilience is found among populations that have a distinct identity, a supportive community, and a sense of capability.

Our core beliefs are founded on ideas, experiences, insights, and values, which shape our personal and collective identities. If these are damaged, the result is traumatic, and a monumental loss. Any loss on the physical, personal, moral, or national level can shatter the sense of meaning that gives us a sense of order and inner logic. Reflecting on the existential, cognitive, and ideological changes that one experiences in such a situation necessitates a new language, with the words to express the new reality.

In the Hebrew language, the word for ‘crisis’ is also the word for a birthing stool. From out of the rupture, a new life emerges. The enormous rupture we are currently experiencing is inviting us to create a renewed meaning. Indeed, the events of October 2023 caused a personal, ideological, and ethical rift among us. Many of us feel the need to create a new image of reality and a new story, as part of individual and group educational processes.

**The Levels Program**

The rupture we are experiencing is personal, psychological, existential, and ideological. This also raises questions about the larger narrative of the Jewish people. Therefore, an intervention is needed that will bridge the worlds of therapy and education. This type of intervention, which does not yet exist, will impact the circles of personal, communal, and Jewish belonging.

The purpose of the proposed program is to give people working in education – in Israel and in Jewish communities around the world – the tools and pedagogy to create a new narrative. This narrative will begin with the rupture; its middle involves building resilience; and it will end with a new, courageous, and profound story about our part in the Israeli and Jewish story.

The Levels Program will prepare people working in education to lead processes to create a renewed meaning for their story, in the wake of the events of October 2023. The learning and work that will take place during this program will be based on personal experiences and the process of building a personal narrative. The framework for this process will be seminar days and a series of small group meetings. Program participants will gain experience in using tools that can be applied in educational, social, and community settings. They will receive support for implementing this pedagogy in the educational fields in which they work.

The climax of the program will be a trip to meet with Jewish educators working in Jewish communities in the United States, or a visit to Israel by Jewish educators from the US. The American educators will participate in a parallel process, with the aim of leveraging the crisis we are all experiencing into a defining moment for Jewish communities.

Since October 2023, American Jewry has undergone one of its most serious identity crises of the past 70 years. Proliferating expressions of antisemitism, and a sense of betrayal by liberal institutions and organizations, have created feelings of rejection, anxiety, and uncertainty. For this reason, there is also a need to conduct the Levels Program among people working in Jewish education in the US. The Israeli and American groups will undergo parallel processes leading up to the encounter, during which they will explore their similarities and differences. This will improve their ability to move beyond their limited vision as individuals and create a more cohesive story that strengthens the sense of collective values, emotional resilience, and identity among the Jewish people.

**The Challenge and the Opportunity**

As Professor Rivka Tuval-Mashiach said, “Trauma destroys the story that a person has about himself, about who he is and how he reacts to the things that happen to him. A traumatic event at the national level is a break in society’s narrative, and what it tells itself about itself.”[[2]](#footnote-2) The events of October 2023 were a collective trauma. Out of this trauma, the need for a dialogue that will produce a renewed personal, Israeli, and Jewish story has emerged. The educational world must take part in rebuilding societal values and ideology and play a significant role in the process of healing our collective trauma.

**Moving from Crisis to Growth**

**My Story**: We have all undergone a major upheaval in our beliefs and values. Educators have experienced a double upheaval; their own, and that of their students, who turn to them in their search for answers to existential questions. Many of us feel confused and a sense of incomprehensibility, on personal and professional levels. The Levels Program will offer a safe space to ask questions, brainstorm thoughts, and find new meaning.

**A Renewed Story**: If there is no language to describe a world, a challenge, or a disruption, then it is impossible to create meaning and understand the new reality. The current crisis is an opportunity for growth and for building a renewed values-based worldview. This opportunity will help us understand what we are educating towards, and how each of own stories is connected with the stories of others in the community.

**A Jewish Story**: Times of crisis can disrupt social and national identities. Beliefs we have held for years are undermined, and we are forced to reframe them. The events of October 2023 also caused an upheaval in the Jewish world outside of Israel. The ability to move beyond our narrow, personal vision, and to see a broader picture, strengthens our sense of collective values, identity, and emotional resilience. Understanding that my personal story and those of my community are all part of the Jewish stories from many different times and places around the world gives deep a strong meaning to our stories.

**Metrics of Success**

* Graduates of the Levels Program will have a grasp of a complete and complex story about themselves, following the events of October 2023.
* Graduates of the Levels Program will see themselves as being part of a larger Jewish story.
* Graduates of the Levels Program will know how to apply the pedagogy they acquired and will pass this knowledge on to the communities in which they work.

These processes will increase the educators’ resilience and enable them to leverage the crisis for development.

**Program Structure**

The Levels Program will draw on theories and tools from the fields of education, therapy, and the art of storytelling. It will use personal and collective narratives, and the study of Israeli and Jewish sources. Additionally, participants will become familiar with the experiences of American Jews regarding the events of October 2023.

The program will include:

* **A group-building day.** This will include getting to know each other, developing group norms, and telling “my personal story.” The process will be based on tools and models from the fields of positive psychology and values-based education. Six hours in total.
* **Three sessions of four hours each.** In these sessions, group members will deepen their acquaintance with each other, using tools from fields such as the art of storytelling, active listening, creative writing, Jewish peoplehood, and narrative psychology. Twelve hours in total.
* **Preparation for the encounter**. There will be a day-long preparation for the encounter with the parallel group, during which participants will study Kolb’s Learning Cycle, Jewish peoplehood, and values-based education. Six hours in total.
* **Travel and the encounter.** The three-day encounter will include introductions, group building, and sessions on Jewish peoplehood, narrative psychology, and the art of storytelling. Three to five days.

**Central Themes**

1. **What story did I tell myself on October 6, 2023?** Through work based on narratives, values, and personal beliefs, participating educators will try to map the primary values in the worldviews and ideologies that they held *before* October 7. This process will give them the space to mourn the values and ideological worlds that have been lost.
2. **Different voices about the same event**. Through work pertaining to the various narratives that exist and normalizing the different experiences in Israel and the Diaspora in relation to the crisis of October 7, this process will emphasize the connection and mutual responsibility among the Jewish people.
3. **What new story will I tell myself?** This involves writing, building a renewed perception of a post-October 7 reality, and hearing the stories of other educators. This process will address the creation of new ideologies and reassembling values.
1. <https://www.betipulnet.co.il/particles/Identity_Community_Capability_3_resilience_circles> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rivka Tuval-Mashiach quoted in “The Black Shabbat Trauma,” *Calcalist* October 12, 2023. <https://newmedia.calcalist.co.il/magazine-12-10-23/m01.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)