



# Endless Fatigue. Give Yourself a Break.

By Dr. Betsy Stone

Depending on how you count, we're now in month 8 of this endless trauma. I've been describing it as a bitter Napoleon – you know those pastries that are layers of filo and cream? Instead of layers that are yummy, our layers are loss on trauma on grief. Cases are rising, the temperature is dropping and our homes seem to be getting smaller. Our children are always there, we have become their teachers as well as their parents. Zoom fatigue is real. Racial injustice continues; the election and its wrangling are ongoing. We vacillate between exhaustion and exhaustion.

I've been teaching groups of teachers and educators lately and I keep hearing the same two things: their responsibilities keep growing and they are always supposed to be happy. And they have neither time nor space to recover.

The way our brains and bodies are supposed to work in crisis is simple. Quick reaction and then slow recovery. Get frightened, act, and then calm. There's a surge reaction and then a reset. That reset can happen in sleep, awake, alone, with others – but that reset is essential.

At the beginning of this crisis, we were in surge mode. I spoke with educators all over the country who were working non-stop, trying to move from live to on-line learning. They did it. I facilitate a Rabbis group that scrambled to create meaningful services and community connections – and they succeeded. Camps did amazing pivots, creating online spaces for campers and counselors, maintaining their magic. We surged.

Did we reset? Many of us did not. The impact of this lack of recovery is something we call surge fatigue – a decreasing ability to act swiftly and decisively. Teachers tell me of administration requests that would have been easy a year ago that are simply impossible now. Call another parent? I CANNOT. Learn another program? BEYOND ME. Attend another meeting? ARE YOU KIDDING?

Coupled with surge fatigue is pressure to be cheerful and optimistic. Look, I know there are places and times for optimism. But teachers and clergy are talking about toxic

positivity – the endless cheeriness and happy support which leaves no room for MY exhaustion, MY sense of being overwhelmed, MY grief. A group of teachers I met with recently talked about how their administration keeps saying, “You've got this,” making it nearly impossible to say, “No, I don't.”

There should be no shame in our exhaustion, our grief. We need to know that we cannot do as much in month 8 as we could in month 1. We need to set the bar lower and accept that we cannot do what we did pre-COVID. We need to be allowed – and allow ourselves – to do less, to feel like it's harder. We need to support each other when we're down, not demand happy faces.

Zoom fatigue, surge fatigue, decision fatigue, election fatigue, COVID fatigue, racial injustice fatigue, loneliness fatigue, family fatigue. Give yourself – and those around you – a break. Do less and be satisfied with what you can achieve. Say no. Don't ask so much – of you or anyone else. It's ok to be imperfect. It's always been ok to be imperfect. This reset could take a while, but we need it to be able to move forward.

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