



Women
Speak
by F. Adams

FILLING THE VOID

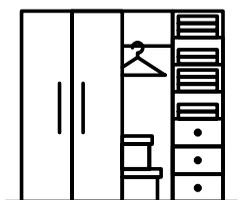
Mrs. Sylky Resnicoff is the founder of the Trauma Awareness Program (TAP), a program based on the groundbreaking model of Pia Mellody. Sylky's journey of discovery in her own life was the catalyst to her founding this organization that has brought hope and relief to so many in our community. Here, she shares glimpses of that journey and the work that ultimately helped her get in touch with herself and what she needed to do to be whole. She also opens our eyes to the realities of trauma, and why so many of us may not even realize that we are being held back in some way by the traumas we carry from childhood. As you read along, you will surely find yourself relating on at least some level to this journey.

Can you tell us a bit about your background?

My entire life has been about seeking to fill a void. Growing up in Lakewood, I was different than my family members and peers. I was an out of the box, free spirited kid, a questioner and thinker. I did not give my teachers an easy time, let's put it that way.

Deep down I was yearning for more truth and seeking to fill a void I couldn't quite define.

I always had this desire to become a teacher so that I could motivate my students as I wished I had been motivated and to understand them as I wished I had been understood.



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How were you able to fulfill that dream?

When I went to Seminary, I turned around suddenly and became very serious and interested in learning. My friends joked that I learned to read Rashi when I had to start teaching.

I wanted to teach and I had what it took, but I didn't have enough academic background, because I hadn't been learning much throughout high school. When I got a job in a kiruv school, it was the perfect opportunity. My father is a big kiruv personality who runs seminars in Russia; he's a tremendous *askan* whose life is dedicated to helping people with amazing *hatzlachab*. In the summers, I used to run seminars for girls in Russia, so I had my experience in kiruv. My mother has been in *chinuch* for many years and is a well-known teacher in Lakewood.

I felt very comfortable with kiruv and with people in general. I had been involved in *chesed*, with kids at risk, visiting hospitals, and I found that I was a natural while working in a kiruv environment. I got very involved with my girls, making *Shabbatons*, inviting them for Shabbos, and keeping in touch with them, some until today.

My dream was to teach high school girls so I could give them what I always felt I was lacking.

And I did get there eventually, taking steps from kiruv to Bais Yaakov elementary and then high school.

I ran GO and the school plays as well,, and I always invested myself heavily, with the constant focus of, "How could I bring out my girls' potential?"

And for all intents and purposes, I was doing great. I had a great time with my students, taking them on trips and giving them fun and excitement while maintaining control of the class and giving over *hashkafah* and ideals. Still, there was something missing; I just didn't know what it was because I was still seeking it myself.

I was always addicted to doing, to taking on more, to accomplishing and achieving, because I was trying to fill this void.

I would go straight from one school to the next, from a Bais Yaakov high school to a Hebrew School. I had varied experiences during my summers, always seeking to do something different, something new.

It was during my sixth year of teaching, when I was 24 years old, that I got engaged.

I moved with my husband to the small community where he was learning, which people warned me would be like social suicide for someone like me. I was so idealistic though, and would do anything for his learning. They were right. There was very little for me to do there, and as a perpetual doer, it proved to be very hard. Although I did get involved in many things, doing everything outside myself in order to keep busy, I still felt that void. Those years were the foundation of so many amazing things and the people I met were incredible, but it wasn't a place I could live long term or raise my children.

After three years, when I was expecting my second child, we moved back to Lakewood.

What got you into life coaching?

I was living here, and I had taken on an exciting but high pressured job, when my life suddenly turned around.

I began experiencing, for the very first time in my life, debilitating panic attacks. I had no idea what was happening to me and at first thought I was having a heart attack right in the middle of work. I couldn't figure out what had happened to my old reliable confidence that always came through for me in the end. No matter what I did or what I was going through, I always got away with it because my facade of confidence got me through it.

But as real life hit, and several major hurdles in my life presented themselves at once, that facade crumbled and I knew I couldn't go on like this any longer.

An opportunity came up to take a life coaching course and I decided that this was what I needed. I wanted to understand more about people and why something like this would happen to me; why someone who never experienced anything like this would suddenly get panic attacks that would halt her life in its tracks.

Taking that course helped me discover many deeper layers of myself. It was filling me at the same time as it created an intense thirst that only made me want to learn more and more. Again, I was seeking to fill that void. I was sitting there in a class full of people and I was hearing things I had never known all my life, some concepts that I see today are actually basic but at the time, I was like the *baalas teshuvah* in the room, who just couldn't get enough of all this new information that everyone else seemed to know.

continued on page 90



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FILLING THE VOID

continued from page 89

I realized that with all I had done and accomplished, I was always outside of myself, channeling my outer potential but never discovering what made me unhappy and discontented as a child.

My philosophy became all about embracing the gift of you. I produced a professional video for high school girls that is still being watched today and it focuses on finding yourself and discovering who you are.

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It was a refreshing breakthrough for me, as I broke out of the box in my mind where I had created a certain image for myself. Little did I realize, though, that my journey was only starting there.

I had become a life coach and put out a powerful video, but I was still searching. I was digging and digging and had a breakthrough, but I still hadn't reached the core. My whole life was about searching and I was narrowing down this search more and more.

I wanted to help the world and change the world and bring my message to the world,

but I didn't yet realize that it wasn't enough. It had to come from inside me.

I had to be my first client.

What had to happen in order for you to find what you were looking for?

I hit rock bottom. At first, I was learning more and more beyond the coaching course. I went through certain struggles and had to look deeper inside myself. I discovered more about the subconscious and learned some incredible tools for opening the cellar door to release some of my demons.

But then, certain factors in my life came to a head and I hit rock bottom. You're only as strong as your foundation is deep, and there was something in my foundation that rattled me to the core. I had never experienced so much pain and so much hopelessness in my entire life.

It just didn't make sense to me. I had learned so much already and done so much inner work on myself. I took years off to build myself and had tried every method, every tool out there. That's what made the pain so very deep: the hopelessness. I am a go getter by nature, and as long as there is hope, as long as there is something else to try, I will pursue it.

But I had done everything and look where I was now. What

else could I do?

Where did you find the answer to these difficult questions?

I had my own life coach whom I had worked with when I was learning coaching, and she was the one introduced me to the concept of trauma.

At the time, I wasn't ready to relate it to myself; trauma is what veterans or terror or abuse victims experience. I had a regular background; what kind of trauma was she talking about?

But eventually the hopelessness I was feeling led my husband's *Rov* to tell me that it was *pikuach nefesh* and I had to do something. I went to a trauma therapist, still not believing it had anything to do with me. I had been misunderstood as a teen; that was it! I wasn't a battle scarred veteran home from Iraq and I hadn't watched a bus blown up in front of my eyes.

But this therapist introduced me to the work of Pia Mellody and to the true definition of trauma, and I was completely blown away. I had finally found what I had been seeking all along and I was finally able to fill that void.

What exactly is trauma then?

Trauma in a child is basically anything less than complete nurturing and fulfillment of their needs. That which we don't heal in childhood, we relive as adults. Things that we think aren't that bad, like having one's reality denied, certain roles that children assume in the family, silent treatment, parental rage, can stick with a child and affect

continued on page 92



FILLING THE VOID

continued from page 90

him in adulthood. Basically, trauma is not at all what we think it is, with horrific and brutal experiences causing the trauma and the need for treatment. It's not always true that a child can recover on his own from those little bumps in our childhood that tend to be thought of as par for the course. Pia gives a whole new meaning to trauma and advises that there are a vast amount of childhood experiences that can hold someone back in adulthood. The fact that these experiences are impacting them as adults define them as real traumas.

Can you elaborate more on Pia's model?

According to Pia's methods, so many things that we treat in adults have trauma at the core. When therapists, for example, treat a couple in marriage therapy, they need to first get to the core of why the two parties are treating each other the way that they are, and what they've been through in their formative years that is preventing them from relating to each other in a healthy manner.

No permanent healing can happen without first figuring out what the client was missing in childhood and repairing that void before moving on. People can be stuck inside themselves their whole lives because they are trying to fix all the symptoms, chasing after the illusory happiness and wondering why they aren't happy and fulfilled, when they need to address the cause and thus heal the symptoms.

Pia calls codependency, which is so rampant nowadays, developmental immaturity. A child needs to grow emotionally and does so when her needs are fully met and she is properly nurtured. If all of her needs weren't met, her emotional growth will be stunted and she will be stuck in that place throughout her adulthood. The solution would be to go back and reparent that inner child, figure out what needs are still lacking and heal that trauma.

The first step is getting your history clear once and for all and figure out what happened to you. Not many people are clear about this because the trauma is covert, as opposed to overt trauma.

Overt abuse is like a fire; we can all see the fire raging and call the fire department, whereas covert abuse is like carbon monoxide. It's invisible, but it's just as deadly.

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Sometimes we need to shed a light by going backward in order to move forward and succeed.

Pia also talks a lot about generational trauma, carried emotions from one generation to the next, which pertains so much to our community, where so many of our grandparents went through the Holocaust. Even if it's not talked about we pick up trauma and feelings by osmosis so that it is hardwired into our DNA. That alone is a huge topic for our community to deal with and heal from.

What led you to found TAP?

Attending Pia's course at the Meadows was groundbreaking for me. I needed to rely on faith because I was so used to understanding things with my head.

Once I learned these methods and used them in my coaching, I saw incredible transformation in myself and in others.

Knowing what Pia's model did for me, I realized I had to bring it to the frum community. There are so many people in our community who are going through what I was and are so frustrated because they don't have the resources to turn to and they have found mental health to be so clinical. They want to get at the core; not treat the symptoms. Instead of switching seats on the Titanic, they are seeking to find that lifeboat to get them off the

sinking ship.

Trauma is not at all what we think it is, with horrific and brutal experiences causing the trauma and the need for treatment.

Going through the program is so validating, because when people are suffering and they can't figure out why, it eats away at them. They don't know what is wrong with them or how to verbalize what they are feeling, and that can turn them into their own worst enemy. They undermine what they have been through and they see no way out of it because they haven't acknowledged their childhood experiences as something that needs to be addressed. The hopelessness then can become pervasive and turn into depression, addiction and worse.

Discovering that these experiences set them up for what they are enduring now is so incredibly validating, and addressing these issues can help them get unstuck and bring their life up to where they want it to be.

I had finally gotten to the bottom of my quest and now had the tools to fill the void, bringing my newfound healing into all of my relationships and every aspect of my life.

What is TAP?

TAP originally started three years ago as a grassroots organization to bring awareness of Pia's model to therapists, and we ran courses for therapists to introduce them to the concept of trauma work, getting to the inner child, etc.

It evolved into an organization that brought Pia's work to the people themselves, helping our community access this groundbreaking and life altering resource.

We have run eleven Family of Origin intensive workshops over the past year and a half, and our other services include newsletters, webinars, guest lecturers, awareness programs, a library, consultations, etc.

Our services and therapists who have trained with us are all dedicated to helping people nurture their inner child and confront and uproot their trauma in order to lead fulfilling and forward moving lives as adults. We host a variety of methodologies, including sandtray, twelve step groups, mind body workshops and more.

Our organization is here for anyone who can benefit from nurturing their inner child, and you might be surprised at the variety of people who have come through our doors seeking a more fulfilling and productive life.

How have you seen TAP helping and having an effect on its participants?

Many people who have gone through the intensives or even webinars have called them life changing. Relationships improve; emotional health increases dramatically, and they are finally finding relief from the pervasive hopelessness they have been feeling.

It works because it's all about getting to the underpinnings; treating the source instead of the symptoms. For example, we had a client who was working to overcome his addiction. Once he was sober, though, he found that he had an intense amount of rage, which was taken out on his children. He hated himself for raging at them so much and knew it was damaging but couldn't figure out how to get himself out of that cycle.

Once he did Pia's work and connected with his inner child, he realized what he had been through in his childhood - his own father's rage had been what led to his addiction. Treating the addiction didn't cure the source of his pain, which then manifested himself in that same damaging rage. After intense inner work, he found that he never raged again.

As Yidden we know that we can't run away from our calling and our *tafkid*. We need to face ourselves at the end of the day. While doing this work and finding what is missing inside of us in order to heal can be so incredibly painful, there really is no other way around it but through it.

Not confronting our traumas and not seeking the very source of the pain is the cause of so much intense suffering in our community.

The *rabbanim* and *askanim* whom we consulted when founding TAP were very encouraging that this could be a big *yeshuah*. Several months ago, I told Rav Brudny that I was considering giving it up as it takes a tremendous amount of time, energy and financial resources to run TAP. He told me that I couldn't do that; it was a matter of *pikuach nefesh*.

What about parenting our own children?

When you learn this model and get in touch with your own pain, figuring out what works for you, you will know what to do with your own children. You will eventually be able to stop the chain of trauma and start a beautiful new legacy.

Pia Mellody says that the first step is to parent yourself, and your kids will get it from the overflow.

This isn't trying to accuse parents *ch"v*; most parents are wonderful people and so many clients who do trauma work hail from amazing parents as well. But even a child with the most devoted and amazing parents can find that not all of their needs were met and that they need to do additional work as adults to fill their needs.

Any final words for our readers?

People always ask me, "How do you understand me so well, Sylky?" And I tell them that I get it because this is my story! I don't always wear my story on my sleeve, but I am my authentic self.

We can't properly serve Hashem if it isn't coming from our true selves and our whole selves. So much of what we grapple with today and so many of our crises are rooted in the same cause of untreated trauma.

So many times, it's not a *shalom bayis* issue, but a trauma issue; it's not an addiction issue, but a trauma issue, etc. We just don't recognize the trauma because we don't think we've been through anything traumatic enough to have that kind of effect.

We put so much effort into battling *lashon hara* and *machlokes*, especially during this time when we are commemorating the *churban*. Ultimately, it's the trauma that divides us from others and doesn't allow us to form proper relationships. Once I worked on myself, so many relationships worked out in my life because I was coming into them with the maturity of an adult instead of the place in my childhood where I had been stuck.

Trauma separates us from ourselves, from Hashem and from others. The work that we need to do is deep within us and it's painful and intense, but it needs to be done if we want to be true to ourselves and live the life we are meant to live.

This is what my journey has been and this is the mission that TAP is trying to spread.

If you or someone you know has a story to share, please contact fradl@lakewoodshopper.com.

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