



**NEW!**

**RESET  
RESET**

## Introduction

**Yael Walfish, LCSW**

"Rosh Hashanah is stepping into Hashem's Greatness.

Yom Kippur is a reset for all of us."

*(Rebbetzin Tzipora Harris)*

**R**eaders, I would like to invite you along on a journey. A journey of my own self-exploration, of learning a new approach, of trying it out in my sessions and in my own life, and of meeting children and parents who changed and inspired me.

I'm a social worker, and I'm also a parent. I've seen all sorts of challenging *chinuch* situations in my own life and my practice, and like you, I often struggled to see success. Sometimes, we don't know how to handle issues, and they escalate. Then escalation leads to more emotion and negative behavior, and then families just get stuck!

The vast majority of the parents I meet are wonderful, loving people. Most will drop everything and run to do anything they can for their children. But when they hit a bump, they sometimes need help and the right tools to get back on track.

I took many workshops and parenting classes to up my game at home and at work. I heard many ideas, yet some of the ideas didn't feel right, at least not for me. In one class

I learned, "If a child touches the fire and it's hot, they won't touch it again," meaning that if a punishment is "hot" and hurts, the child won't do that behavior again. But in my own experience, I met many children who couldn't resist touching the fire again and again and again! (Does this sound familiar?) For many intense children, touching fire seems like a fun, exciting activity.

I didn't think all these workshops were helping, especially with those challenging kids who love fires. Most of the time the trainings just left me more confused.

### **Resetting Myself**

In July 2017, my husband, Naftoli, who is also a social worker, signed us up for a workshop. It was called the Nurtured Heart Approach. I had already taken so many workshops and parenting classes. I had notebooks full of advice: "Give 10 minutes a day to each child," "Maintain a 4:1 ratio of positive to negative comments," "Consequences," and so on. I didn't want to go to this new training, even

though Naftoli was pushing me to go with him. I said, “You go. I’m tired of these workshops.”

But then I felt guilty, thinking about the many mental health assessments I’ve done, and all the times I’ve seen young people over and over again in detention facilities and youth psychiatric hospitals. These kids had seen so many therapists, and gone through so many interventions, yet their progress was painfully miniscule. They could often show me the coping skills they’d been taught (“Count to ten,” “Take a deep breath”), but overall, something fundamental was lacking. The addictions and mental health challenges had not abated.

*Why aren’t we reaching these children?* I thought. Aren’t there better tools out there? I started to reconsider going to this new workshop. Maybe this Nurtured Heart Approach could offer something useful.

After all my internal back and forth, I finally roused myself to go with my husband. But when we got in our car, it wouldn’t start!

Okay, that was a manageable setback. We switched cars. We finally got to the workshop, only to discover that the only seats remaining were in the very front of the room. I sat down and looked around, seeing images of hearts and nice words. I took a picture for a friend, thinking, “This is her thing, not mine.”

The facilitator walked in. He launched into the presentation by stating, “I appreciate that most of you are not on your phones and not taking pictures. You are fully present, and that shows your interest and focus.” Oops — here I’d just been taking pictures! I immediately stashed my phone in my purse, thinking, “Well, that intervention just worked on me!”

To my surprise, from there, things just got better and better. Everything the presenter said about the Nurtured Heart Approach made absolute sense to me. Here was a way forward for all the intense, difficult kids who are so hard for their parents and educators to manage. Here was a path to reset negativity and flip the script!

That evening, I decided to do everything I could to learn this approach and share it with others. I spent many months learning and implementing these methods, and my success propelled me onward.

## Sharing the Wealth

At this point, many years later, I have trained schools internationally in NHA and met with children and parents from all walks of life, from rich to poor, from black and Hispanic to Chinese, *l’havdil*, from Chassidic to yeshivah communities. I have hundreds of stories! I’m passionate

about working with children in crisis and helping reset their home environments. I’m also passionate about working preventatively and simplifying complex mental health ideas to help children, parents and educators transform and thrive.

I had always been terrified of public speaking, but my passion for the efficacy of the Nurtured Heart Approach gave me the courage to lead workshops and train teachers and principals. I’ve done online trainings, public school trainings funded by a grant, and Torah Umesorah workshops for the Jewish world. I even published several children’s books that employ NHA principles to teach children to handle their emotions. I also incorporate other therapeutic modalities in my work where applicable.

Each one of us has a spark or a *tafkid* in this life. When we connect to it, we thrive. And when we don’t, we may act out or become withdrawn or depressed. Challenging children are blocked from connecting with their spark. We can help them! First, we have to believe in them. Then we need to use the right tools to help them, and we need to be relentless in our quest to help them find their best selves.

It’s not simple being in the trenches of emotional challenges. But together we can become prepared, effective first responders. We can all make a difference in our relationships!

In the coming weeks I will introduce you to Laya, who has difficulty regulating her emotions and uses food to calm down. Chaim walks around with a temper like a storm cloud and interrupts at school. Chani’s parents are ready to send her away, and Mushki refuses to go to school. There are many others. I hope you begin to see that a new approach *can* work, and that our children’s intensity is a gift. We just need to learn how to channel it!

From the people I have been privileged to meet, I see that the possibilities for change are astounding. I look forward to introducing you to some of the heroes I’ve met who turned around the lives of children. I have met these incredible people through the course of my work, and I hope you will be inspired to see that when we change the way we look at our children, our children change in turn. It’s not simple to flip the script, but I do see miracles! Now that we’re in Elul, it’s a perfect time to start thinking about resetting ourselves and our relationships and getting them on the right track.

Looking forward to having you join me for the ride! ●

*Yael Walfish, LCSW, is a therapist based in Passaic, New Jersey. She works with parents of children who are explosive, oppositional and anxious. She and her husband also train and support educators in an approach called NHA that transforms intense behavior and helps children thrive.*