



Harriet Rossetto

Founder Beit T'Shuvah, Author, Therapist and Educator

"My greatest reward is the continuing privilege of witnessing and participating in the miracle of transformation." -Harriet Rossetto

Harriet Rossetto

Founder and Executive Vice President of Beit T'Shuvah

Harriet Rossetto is the founder and executive vice president of Beit T'Shuvah, a non-profit residential treatment center and educational institution in West Los Angeles. Her belief that addiction is a malady of the soul inspired her to create a community that supports the process of recovery through spiritual healing. Beit T'Shuvah, meaning House of Return in Hebrew, became the first residential program in the United States to integrate Judaism, 12 steps and psychotherapy.

30 years ago Ms. Rossetto used a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to buy an old house in a bad neighborhood. Since then it's grown from the original halfway house model to a nationally recognized faith-based recovery community on a large campus with 145 residents and 100 employees (80 percent of whom are former residents).

Her work has earned her national recognition as a pioneer in spiritual healing. This summer Obama administration honored Ms. Rossetto as an Advocate for Action, and called on her to advise on national drug control policy. The Bush administration recognized her work with recovering Jewish addicts as an example of why the government should support faith based efforts. Harriet also received the Alan Kassin award for professional achievement from the Jewish Communal Professionals, the Vision Philanthropy Award, and the Isaiah Award from the Jewish Federation for filling an unmet community need.

Social Worker & Educator

After earning her Masters in Social Work from the University of Minnesota, Rossetto offered her expertise as a trainer for the National Association of Social Workers by teaching classes about the "disease" of addiction. She now speaks regularly at synagogues, community centers and educational seminars about spiritual healing.

Rossetto has also authored her own spiritual memoir, "Sacred Housekeeping," in which she shares the story of how the journey to save others became her own journey of self-actualization. The book published in 2012 has received wide praise as a "delightful revelation of the human condition" and "honest, gritty and inspired."

She continues to reach out beyond the doors of Beit T'Shuvah the local community with a variety of programs and seminars to guide individuals and families towards a path of living well. In the past few years Beit T'Shuvah has expanded to include an educational institution not only hosting community events, but offering counselors to local schools for preventative work with students and families.

Community Hero & Wife

Many of those transformed by working with Harriet Rossetto and Beit T'Shuvah call her a community hero. Some refer to her as a spiritual mother. She describes herself as a rebel and Rebbetzin, Rabbi's wife. Her husband, Rabbi Mark Borovitz, converted not only from convict to Rabbi with her guidance, but is now the CEO of Beit T'Shuvah. He describes her as a "lamed vovnick", one of the 36 Righteous people who, in Jewish tradition, are believed to sustain the world.

"By lending her time, talents, and energy Harriet demonstrates the very best of the American spirit." -President George W. Bush

"The power of what Harriet offers is undeniable." -Actor Leonard Nimoy

"By promoting evidence-based prevention, treatment and recovery efforts, Ms. Rossetto is reducing drug use across the country."



An honest autobiography of a courageous woman and social worker, who took an interest in the unpopular cause of helping incarcerated Jewish men re-enter society and made it her life's passion.

“Candid ... profoundly inspiring”

“Sacred Housekeeping is remarkable. It is candid, benevolent and humorous. It is profoundly inspiring. -- what a journey you have been on. I'm grateful to have read it, and grateful to you for doing what you do and being who you are.”
DAVID SHEFF, NEW YORK TIMES BEST SELLING AUTHOR; BEAUTIFUL BOY

“Soul baring and soul searching”

“The honesty, soul baring and soul searching, is beyond beautiful. The writing, like Harriet is unpretentious and yet revelatory. That's the gift of it...that it will be everyone's story who reads it.” JACK BENDER, AWARD WINNING DIRECTOR

“vivid truths”

“I couldn't put it down. [Sacred Housekeeping] is full of riches, guides to a spiritual life and frank and vivid truths[...]the power of what [Harriet offers] is undeniable. I was moved to tears and laughter several times.” -LEONARD NIMOY, WORLD RENOWNED FILM & TELEVISION ACTOR

“a tour de force of courage”

“Sacred Housekeeping is a tour de force of courage, determination, and the kind of potent, tenacious goodness that surely changes the world. It's about recovering from addiction but it's also about recovering our souls.”- DR. JUDITH ORLOFF MD AUTHOR, EMOTIONAL FREEDOM

Trauma of Privilege

Op-Ed Published May 21, 2015

I have been in the center of the swirl of awareness about the unintended consequences of affluence and privilege on our children. I meet these youngsters and their families when crisis penetrates the denial system and they arrive at Beit T'Shuvah, the recovery community I founded 30 years ago. I have listened to their baffled, bewildered parents who "gave them everything" only to have it thrown in their faces. I coined the family dynamic: "I hate you; send money." At Beit T'Shuvah, we have been essentially "re-parenting" these children of all ages, allowing them to experience "all the disadvantages of success," in the words of Larry Ellison.

A recent study by Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences finds a direct correlation between parents who overvalue their children and children who are narcissistic. Researchers found that while parental warmth was associated with high self-esteem in kids, that parental over-evaluation was not. Or as Madeline Levine put it: "Praise is not warmth pumped in; self-esteem is not self-efficacy." I have heard from many recovering addicts that when they feel undeserving, praise exacerbates their self-loathing and sense of fraudulence.

I have read most of the developing literature on the effects of over-parenting, helicoptering, indulging our offspring, resulting in entitled, depressed, addicted and, most recently, narcissistic kids. Their despair manifests in a wide range of self-destructive behaviors: drugs; alcohol; food (stuffing or starving); self-mutilation (cutting, piercing); Internet addictions to gaming, chatting and pornography. The more passive expressions of hopelessness and lack of purpose are the "failures to launch" — those who never leave or return to the "nest," sleeping away the days, refusing to grow up.

These are not just symptoms of narcissism. After more than 30 years of observation, I argue that these children have been traumatized. They suffer from what I call "the trauma of privilege."

The benefit of viewing this condition through the trauma lens rather than the personality disorder lens is that the latter is static, the former infinitely repairable. The label narcissistic personality brands you for life; trauma views adaptive behavior as a learned way of being that can be unlearned. The wounded, fractured self can be repaired in a community that offers emotional, physical and spiritual healing through exposure to multiple emotionally corrective experiences for privileged families trapped in the cycle of Either/Or-ness, fear of inadequacy and the never-ending pursuit of perfection.

Seen through the trauma lens, these narcissistic characteristics are the result of primary attachment disorder and parental mis-attunement. The parents need to produce a "perfect" child, wherein the child's successes are a reflection of the parents' worth. This creates in the child a sense of being a commodity — "valuable but not valued." They alternate between grandiosity and self-loathing or depression, unable to integrate self and self image. They live in a paradigm of Either/Or: I am either No. 1 or a total loser. Their "self" is fragmented, divided, at war. They keep asking themselves the wrong question: Which is the real me?

Healing the fractured self begins with the answer: "They are both the real me." This leap from Either/Or to Both/And begins to repair the trauma of Either/Or parenting. Through this lens, parents over-value and/or overpraise their children because they, too, are fractured. Their fears, anxieties and insecurities about themselves render them incapable of reflecting wholeness back to their child. Parents who have zero tolerance for their child's imperfections; who can't tolerate their child's sadness, rage, fears, unhappiness; who can't be present and nonjudgmental with their child's inconsistent and contradictory states of being; who can mirror only the praiseworthy aspects of the child, create narcissism — the quintessential split.

This is why we treat this condition as a trauma, which can be repaired. We teach them how to fail forward, to accept their defects and imperfections, to live within limits, accept the discomfort of not getting what they want, to tolerate rejection and disappointment, and to take the right action no matter what they feel. We help them to "recover their passion and discover their purpose."

Their challenge is learning how to integrate their opposing and contradictory selves, a necessary prelude to the development of integrity. After a considerable amount of time and attention, many of them come to life. They launch. These traumatized young men and women begin to take responsibility for their successes and failures. Their parents learn how to say no and stop defining themselves by their children's successes or failures.

It is not only children of privilege who are failing, it is their parents. Those fighting so hard to keep them from harm are causing the most damage. Parenting needs a wake-up call, and children must be allowed to fail before they forget how to value true success and become victims of the trauma of privilege.

FAQS Trauma of Privilege

What lead you to make the connection between parenting and addiction in privileged families?

About 15 years ago Beit T'Shuvah began getting more and more patients from affluent families. These young adults appeared to have it all, but they were secretly struggling. Some ended up in jail. Some even attempted suicide. .

They had a lot in common, starting with their stunned and confused parents. They would say, "We gave him/her everything".."he/she is our best and brightest"..."he/she could have been anything he/she wanted to be."

I recognized a pattern of parenting that lead to these adult children feeling lost. The parents had gone above and beyond to give them everything, to save them from failing, and to fix their problems. While it may have created a picture of perfection, the result was a young adult with a lack of drive and purpose.

What is the biggest mistake parents are making?

Their biggest mistake is basing their happiness on their child's happiness and success. Helicopter parenting eliminates the challenges that shape life. These Parents spend too much time micromanaging and over-scheduling their children's life.

Privileged parents often use their influence to better position their child as athletes, for the best grades, and to get into the best colleges. Ultimately, they end up pushing their child out of the game of life.

Can parents undo the damage?

No. The only way they can help their children is to back off and allow their child to repair hi/her own life. These traumatized children need to relearn how to live and discover their passions, even if that means failing. They need to fall to learn how to get up.

FAQS Trauma of Privilege

How do their children express what it is like to grow up in that environment?

These adult children felt they could never measure up to their parents expectations. They are convinced their parents only cared about image, and not who they really are. "Perfect kids" feel they're not allowed to have doubts or problems, so they hide them. As long as they did well and looked good on the outside, no one asked questions.

They had done everything they were supposed to do but still felt empty. Perform without passion. Strive without purpose.

Other than experience, has Beit T'Shuvah done research to back this up?

Yes, in 2013 we conducted a study that found the rates of depression and anxiety among affluent teens and young adults correspond to the rates of depression and anxiety suffered by incarcerated juveniles.

These kids have had all their decisions made for them, and when they get to college they're lost. They're in pain and they seek to anesthetize that with drugs or other harmful activities like alcohol, gambling, or mutilation.

Why do you characterize these adult children who have failed to launch as traumatized?

The benefit of viewing this condition through the trauma lens rather than the personality disorder lens is that the latter is static, the former infinitely reparable. The label narcissistic personality brands you for life; trauma views adaptive behavior as a learned way of being that can be unlearned.

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