

CAPTAIN IL

MISSION HOPE

Mental Recovery Guide: Returning to Balance and Life After War

"To fight is courage.

To feel is bravery.

To choose to live – that is victory."

A Personal-Communal Guide for Mental Recovery After War
As Part of Mission HOPE

November 25, 2024
#CAPTAIN.IL | BY LEV 19:18

■ Introduction – The Captain's Message

With the joy of returning hostages and the end of another phase of the war, many still carry the battle within their hearts and souls. Warriors, reservists, those who returned, those still in uniform, and those beyond the border – all carry the same internal struggle.

This is not just an external war of tanks and borders, but also an internal battle for returning to breathing, trust, and routine. The difficult part sometimes comes precisely afterward – when the quiet outside reveals the noise inside. The moments when the body is already home, but the mind is still there; the nights, the memories, the lack of words, and the feeling that no one fully understands.

This is the place to remember:

This journey is not weakness – it is a process of healing and growth.

We are here to learn to rehabilitate ourselves, to return the soul to its place, and to find peace, meaning, and hope anew. This guide was written with great love for reserve soldiers and warriors, but it is relevant to every Israeli – to all who carry the stress, burden, and pain from recent times, and seek a way back to balance and fuller lives.

The heart fights, the body returns home – but the soul is still on the way.

■ Table of Contents

- **Chapter 1** – What Happens to the Soul During War

- **Chapter 2** – Reactions and Symptoms of "Returning to Routine"

- **Chapter 3** – How to Begin Mental Recovery

- **Chapter 4** – Daily Coping Tools

- **Chapter 5** – Sources of Support, Community, and Help

- **Chapter 6** – Advice for Family and Friends

- **Summary** – The Journey of Hope with Captain IL: Turning Pain into Power

■ Normal Reactions in an Abnormal Period

When exposed to danger, death, uncertainty, or extreme experiences – the body and soul enter emergency mode. This is a natural, primal response designed for survival. The physical and mental systems release adrenaline and cortisol, increase alertness, and reduce pain sensation – to enable us to function under pressure.

Common Reactions Include:

- Muscle tension, rapid pulse, sweating, constant alertness
- Difficulty falling asleep, light sleep, or recurring nightmares
- Heart palpitations, trembling, headaches, or constant fatigue
- Irritability, anger, sudden crying, or feelings of confusion

- Emotional disconnection, feelings of distance, or loss of time sense

- Strong need for control or conversely – difficulty making decisions

■ *All of these are completely normal reactions to an abnormal situation. They are evidence that the soul and body are mobilizing their forces to protect themselves – even if it feels "strange."*

■ How the Survival Mechanism Works

During danger, the brain activates the "Fight – Flight – Freeze" system. It takes over the body in a split second, before thought can process what's happening. This response saves lives — but it also exacts an emotional and physical toll when prolonged.

When the threat passes, the system is supposed to relax and return to equilibrium. But after long periods of stress – the brain struggles to understand that the danger has ended, and the body continues to operate as if the battle is still ongoing: tense, stressed, exhausted.

The reactions you're experiencing now are not weakness – they are evidence of a body and soul that experienced an extreme situation and did everything to survive. Understanding this – that's already the beginning of healing.

"The soul doesn't need orders to heal – it just needs a safe space to breathe."

When the War Outside Ends – But Inside It Continues

After the dust settles and life is supposed to "return to track," a new period begins. From the outside, everything looks normal – but inside, something has changed. The body may be home, but the soul is still in survival mode.

This is a period when many experience confusion, fatigue, emptiness, or difficulty understanding what exactly "isn't working." These are not signs of weakness – but evidence of a natural deep process of readjusting to life after extreme effort.

■ Normal Post-War Reactions

These are natural and common reactions in the weeks and months after war. In most cases, they weaken over time when the soul and body receive rest, security, and support:

Emotional:

- Sadness, sudden crying, hypersensitivity, or impatience
- Feelings of guilt ("Why me and not them?"), confusion, or temporary loss of interest
- Difficulty feeling "real joy" or connection to things that once moved you
- Recurring thoughts about what happened, or desire to distance completely from the topic

Physical:

- Increased fatigue, weakness, or difficulty sleeping deeply
- Heart palpitations, sweating, muscle tension, or chest pressure
- Changed appetite, stomach aches, or persistent headaches

Behavioral and Social:

- Need for quiet, temporary withdrawal, or social distancing
- Aversion to crowded places or loud noises
- Desire for increased activity ("staying busy") to avoid stopping and feeling

■ *These reactions are considered normal. The soul is learning anew how to live in peace after a period of noise.*

■ Signs of Distress – When Reactions Persist or Worsen

If some of these feelings persist for more than two months, or begin to worsen – it's a sign that the soul needs professional help or more significant support.

Behavioral:

- Prolonged withdrawal, disconnection from close people
- Persistent loss of interest in work, studies, or hobbies
- Excessive use of alcohol, medications, or calming substances
- Daily dysfunction – difficulty getting up, eating, or maintaining basic routine

Emotional:

- Deep sadness, feelings of despair or persistent emptiness
- Constant fears, unrelenting tension, continuous sense of danger
- Heavy feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or thoughts of "there's no point"

Thoughts and Expressions:

- Statements like "I don't see a future," "I'm tired of everything," "better I wasn't here"
- Recurring thoughts about death or about friends who are gone
- Severe confusion, difficulty making decisions, or inability to concentrate

The battle may be over – but healing is just beginning.

The road back to yourself begins with listening to what you feel.

From the Moment the Body Returns – Until the Soul Begins to Breathe

Sometimes the quiet after the storm is louder than everything. The body may have already returned to routine, but inside there's still an echo. This is the stage where the recovery process begins – gentle, personal, sometimes slow, but always possible.

■ *The body is the first home of the soul. When it feels safe – the soul also begins to relax.*

■ First Stage – Returning to the Body

To heal the soul, you must start with the body. It is the living memory of everything we've been through, and it's also the gateway to healing.

What Helps at This Stage:

■ Sleep:

Return to regular sleep hours – even if gradually.

Nutrition:

Eat real, simple, life-giving food.

Breathing Practice:

4 seconds inhale, 6 hold, 8 seconds exhale – repeat 10 times

Movement:

Any gentle movement brings life back to the body – walking, yoga, swimming, dancing.

Touch:

Hug, massage, or even gentle self-touch – calms the nervous system.

Being in Nature:

Walking barefoot in sand or grass, sitting by a tree, watching a sunset. Nature heals without words – reminds us of the slow rhythm, beauty, and life that continues.

■ Grounding:

Stop and notice what you feel now – feet touching the ground, breath entering and exiting, sound of a bird or wind. Conscious connection to body and present moment reminds the system: "We're here. Now. Safe."

■ Second Stage – Returning to the Soul

After the body calms, it's time to meet the emotion. This isn't a process of "forgetting," but of giving space to what was – so as not to get stuck in it.

What Helps Here:

- **Conversation and Writing:** Talk, write, share. Don't hold it inside.
- **Creative Expression:** Drawing, poetry, music, photography – any way that brings out what has no words.
- **Support:** Turn to professional help – psychologist, counselor, support group.

- **Connection with Those Who Experienced Something Similar:** Understand you're not alone.

- **Meeting with Emotions:** Don't fear the crying, the anger, the longing. Every emotion is a message. When you feel it and don't run – it calms down.

■ *The soul doesn't need "fixing" – it needs space and when given room to breathe, it finds the way to heal itself.*

■ Third Stage – Returning to Meaning

When the pain begins to calm, a new question awakens: "So what now?" This stage deals with rebuilding – of identity, values, hope, and sense of mission. It's not about returning to what was, but growing from what happened.

What Helps Here:

- **Action with Heart:** Volunteering, helping others, contributing to community – returns sense of value and meaning.
- **Personal Vision:** Set a new goal, even small – learn, travel, establish something, start a new chapter.

- **Connection to Values:** Faith, people, family, nature – whatever provides a sense of roots and stability.
- **Creation from Pain:** Turn personal experience into story, art, or inspiration for others.
- **Return to Naturalness:** Not to what was "before," but to who I am now – with everything I discovered along the way.

■ *Pain is not weakness – it's a sign of a brave heart that lived fully. True healing is the courage to continue – in light, in love, and in faith.*

Small Steps of Healing – Every Day Anew

Healing is built from small, simple, consistent steps – actions that remind the brain and heart: I am alive. I am here. Everything is okay. There's no one right way to calm down – there are small acts of self-love, done day after day.

■ The Captain's Toolkit - For Returning to Balance, Breathing, and Hope

■■■■ First – Calm the Body

- ■ **4-7-8 Breathing** – 4 second inhale, 7 hold, 8 slow exhale
- ■ **"5 Senses" Grounding** – Identify what I see, touch, hear, smell, and taste
- ■ **Walk in Nature/Outside** – A few minutes of air, sky, sun, and wind
- ■ **Hug and Calming Touch** – 20 second hug or hand on heart and deep breath

- ■ **Drinking, Food, and Sleep** – Take care of the body: drink water, eat something nutritious, and rest

- ■ **Dance and Movement** – Release from the body through rhythm, breathing, and free movement

- ■ **Fitness** – Moderate physical activity that returns sense of strength, presence, and body control

- ■ **Small Smile** – Even one smile changes your energy and those around you

■ Give Space to Heart and Emotions

- 🖋️ **Liberating Writing** – Write what you feel, without judgment

- ■ **Counting Successes** – 3 small things I succeeded in today

- ■ **Moment of Gratitude** – Choose 3 things to be grateful for

- ■ **Conversation with Safe Person** – Share with someone who feels safe and truly listens

- ■ **Creation and Art** – Draw, sing, dance, or create – give free expression to emotion

- ■ **Healing Music** – Hear a song that evokes hope, to relax or sing aloud

■ Strengthen the Mind and Meaning

- ■ **Testing Thought** – Ask: "Is this really true?" and see if there's another perspective
- ■■■■ **Mindfulness / Short Meditation** – A few minutes of quiet and conscious breathing
- ■ **Good Boundaries** – Know when to say "not now," to protect yourself
- ■ **Small Good Deed** – Good word, smile, help – good to others heals us too
- ■ **Setting Small Goals** – Choose realistic target and celebrate every step
- ■ **Empowerment and Development Workshops** – Join meetings, learn, strengthen, and fill up
- ■ **Reading Inspiring Books** – Connect to stories that remind you of hope and light

■ Remember – Not Alone on the Journey

- ■ **Support Groups** – Join circles, groups, or community that understands you
- ■ **Captain IL Reservists Community** – Space for sharing, inspiration, and connection

- ■■■■■■ **Time with Loved Ones** – Meet, hug, laugh, and remember how love heals

- ■ **Turning to Professional Help** – Allowed and recommended to ask for support. It's bravery, not weakness

■ Recommended Reading List for Healing and Mental Strengthening

- "Man's Search for Meaning" – Viktor Frankl

- "The Power of Now" – Eckhart Tolle

- "The Journey" – Brandon Bays

- "Loving What Is" – Byron Katie

- "When Things Fall Apart" – Pema Chödrön

- "The Body Keeps the Score" – Bessel van der Kolk

Hope is not a destination – it's a path. Every day, every breath, every heart that opens.

Healing Doesn't Happen Alone

Mental recovery is a personal journey – but it never happens alone. Friends, family, community, and professionals are a network of hearts holding the path back to life together.

■ Sources of Emotional Support

Friends and Family Members:

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Those who love you want to know how to help – even if they don't always know how to ask.

Mutual Support Communities:

Sharing with others going through similar experiences allows the soul to breathe anew. Belonging creates resilience, hope, and sense of being seen.

■ Official Assistance Sources – For Reservists and Their Families

***6690** IDF Mental Health Hotline (24/7) ***8944** "Nefesh Achat" (One Soul) Line **03-6401400** Combat Reactions Unit
1-800-363-363 NATAL – National Trauma & Stress Center **1201** ERAN – Emotional First Aid ***3362** "Safe Passage" Hotline
(Support for Returning to Routine) ***3757** "Good Hands" Center (Medical and Mental Support) **1111 ext. 6** "Keshet Ayin" Center
(Combat Veterans & Families Support) **1111 ext. 4** Reservists Aid Fund

Additional Resources:

- **Rehabilitation Division – Ministry of Defense:** Recognition and support for military service casualties (via 1111)
- **"Shvilim" Program:** Vocational and mental rehabilitation for discharged soldiers and reservists
- **"Lev Ehad" Association:** Support and aid for soldiers, families, and anxiety victims

- **"Returning to Life" Association:** Help coping with post-trauma and loss

■ Captain's Recommended Programs, Organizations, and Communities

Salon 448 - hatashtit.co.il/448

Active home and community for warriors and reservists at Marina Herzliya with activities, water sports, meetings, jam sessions, wellness initiatives, and mutual support.

AMIT Program (Ministry of Defense) - amit.movement4life.co.il

Free toolkit for reservists and discharged soldiers: sports, treatments, and app with 12,000 coins.

"Returning to Routine" Program - shavimback.com

8 free nature meetings (in partnership with Aviram Fund + IDF Disabled Veterans) for former reserve soldiers from Iron Swords War for returning to routine and balance.

Future for Survivors and Wounded Association - lanizolim.co.il

Daniel and Narya Sharabi's association for emotional, vocational, and social support for trauma survivors and wounded in the community.

Hormesis Club (Tel Aviv) - hormesis.club

Wellness complex including ice baths, breathing, yoga, sauna, and sustainable bar. Special benefits for reservists.

Captain IL Reservists Community on Facebook

Open and warm community for reservists for sharing, support, inspiration, and values-based connection.

Don't stand alone. Asking for help is bravery – not weakness.

How to Be There – Without Rescuing, Just Holding Space

■ **For families, mothers, fathers, siblings, and friends** – you are the backbone holding the heart. Healing doesn't happen only with the warrior, but also at home, in the heart of those waiting, listening, and containing.

■ What's Important to Know:

- The soul needs time. Returning to routine doesn't happen in one day – sometimes not in one year.
- Unusual reactions are normal. Sudden crying, anger, silence, confusion – these are expressions of pain, not weakness.
- There's no "correct" way to feel. Everyone reacts differently, and every pace is legitimate.
- Quiet is not always serenity. Sometimes it's a defense mechanism. Don't pressure to talk, just be there.

■ *The key is patience – not judging, not rushing to fix, simply being.*

■ What TO Do:

- **True Listening:** Sit beside them. No phones, no advice. Just listen to what comes out or what doesn't come out.
- **Gentle Presence:** Sometimes it's enough to know someone is nearby. Don't have to talk, just be available.
- **Ask Open Questions:** Instead of "What happened there?" try "How are you feeling today?"
- **Give Choice:** Ask if they want to talk, go out, rest. Need help? Don't force anything.
- **Help with Small Details:** Cooking, organizing, driving. Simple actions create sense of security.
- **Encourage Movement and Activity:** Walking, sea, meeting friends – but without pressure, just as suggestion.

- **Remember Yourself Too:** To support – you need to breathe. Don't forget to care for yourselves.

■ What NOT to Do:

- ■ Don't say "Be strong" – it closes off
- ■ Don't compare ("I was also in difficult situation") – it invalidates
- ■ Don't try to "fix" or solve
- ■ Don't push to open up – real conversation happens only when heart is ready
- ■ Don't ignore. Be present, and ask gently if and how you can help

■ *Sometimes silent presence is worth more than a thousand words.*

■ When to Turn to Professional Help

Important: If you notice any of the following – it's important to encourage turning to professional support:

- Prolonged withdrawal or complete disconnection from close people
- Sharp changes in behavior or mood
- Signs of despair, lack of meaning, or talk about death
- Increased use of alcohol, pills, or addictive substances
- Repeated angry outbursts or verbal/physical violence
- Extreme reactions to noises, news, smells, or daily situations

■ Professional help is not a sign of weakness – it's an act of courage and responsibility.

*"If you meet a broken person, sit with them
On the threshold of the cursed break
Don't try to fix
Don't want anything
With reverence and love of others
Sit with them, so they won't be there alone."
– Smadar Weinstock*

■ You're not just the rear – you're the heart that holds it all together.

■ Sometimes the Path to Healing Begins with One Small Step – in a Heart Ready to Feel

After all we've been through – the body, soul, and heart need time, space, and compassion. There's no one right way to return to routine, and no uniform pace for healing. There's only listening – to yourself, to the environment, and to this moment.

■ *When we suppress the pain or try to "move on" too quickly, the feelings that didn't get space can turn into deep scars – and sometimes into lasting trauma.*

But when we give these feelings expression – through conversation, writing, crying, touch, breathing – we allow them to pass through us, without controlling who we are.

Healing is not erasing the pain, but the ability to carry it – and create from it meaning, compassion, and strength. This is a process that happens slowly, within daily life, where every moment of awareness, breathing, and sharing – is a step of bravery.

■ This is the Time

This is the time to give space to everything rising: fear, confusion, anger, longing, or hope. Emotions are not enemies – they are a compass. They are the body and soul's way of telling what still needs healing. When we learn to listen to them – we gradually return to ourselves.

And just as an entire nation fought – so an entire nation heals.

This journey is not just ours as individuals – it's a collective journey of awakening hearts, learning to breathe, relax, feel, and build together a new world where vulnerability is not weakness – but courage.

*Precisely from the cracks the light enters,
And within every difficulty hides an opportunity to be born anew.*

■ About Captain IL: Mission HOPE

Captain IL: Mission HOPE is a social-communal initiative born from the heart of the People of Israel. A movement of inspiration and healing that connects between combat units, reserves, families, and communities in Israel and worldwide, with the goal of turning personal and national pain into power, hope, connection, and action. To illuminate, empower, and build a bridge between hearts – in Israel and worldwide.

■ If This Guide Touched You

If you feel the call to continue this light – you can take part in the journey and help the project grow, develop, and reach more souls.

The project operates independently, and every support helps keep it alive and breathing – to produce new content, expand activities, and continue spreading hope.

Share your healing, recovery, and hope journeys in the Captain IL Reservists Community – to awaken light, inspiration, and sense of togetherness.

■ Follow **Captain.IL** on Facebook and Instagram, and join the movement of love, unity, and healing.

■ You can support the project via Bit: **052-6363203**

With love and gratitude – for every heart joining the mission of light, hope, and healing.

Captain IL

Mission HOPE is not just an initiative – it's a journey of brave hearts.

Even from the fragments – we choose light, love, and revival.

