

Prologue

It was a warm summer evening. The horizon was a beautiful canvas of oranges, pinks, and gold. They swirled as the sun slowly breathed its way into the distance, wishing me well until we would meet again tomorrow. I closed my eyes to feel the warm breeze on my cheeks, but even with my eyes closed I could still see that sunset.

I used to call this “golden sunlight time” because of how everything glistened in the setting sun’s beams. What I loved most was that even things that weren’t beautiful on their own turned suddenly sparkly and lovely.

I was sixteen, and my best friend, Rena, and I had just finished painting our nails in her secluded backyard. We had one last week until the start of eleventh grade, and we wanted to soak up every last drop of summer. As our nails dried and I stared up at the trees, I was composing some amazing lyrics about the sun hitting the leaves.

Rena interrupted my peaceful reverie. “You know,” she said, her tone playful. She winked at me and pointed to her oversized speakers that were currently playing something soothing and serene. “These speakers can get *a lot* louder...if you know what I mean.”

Her eyes twinkled. Rena loved to party, she loved to laugh, and she always brought out the free-spirited and uninhibited side of me. I could feel the energy bouncing out of her.

“Dance-party time?” she asked, lifting her eyebrows even though she knew that I was always up for anything fun, especially if it involved dancing.

She grabbed me by the hands and pulled me up to standing. She put on our favorite song and cranked up the speakers. We jumped around and screamed the lyrics until our throats hurt. We twisted and wiggled and choreographed a super fun dance that we would enjoy together over and over.

We were completely free. We didn't care how we looked, we didn't care how wild or crazy we might have seemed. We were connecting to ourselves and enjoying being alive.

1

The Mountain Climber

I awoke from a fitful sleep and looked up at the clock. My family all slept, and the moonlight trickled into my room, but I didn't feel tranquil. I was stressed about the campaign I'd be running in the morning. Was it already 3:00 a.m.? I didn't have much time to get the sleep I needed. Oh, what a day I had ahead of me... I would be running my team through a big marketing launch in just seven hours.

Wait...seven hours — that's it! I grabbed the notebook next to my bed and drafted an idea about 7.34 hours of sleep, which is the average night of sleep for an American adult. It was brilliant — so clever! We would weave this into the baby sleep series we were about to run, and my assistant would—

"Batya?" Moshe's groggy voice jolted me out of my flow. "Are you working on business? Now?" Even half-asleep, his disappointment was clear.

"I...umm...was just getting back to sleep," I confessed, embarrassed that I had been caught in the act. Again.

In the early years, I went from job to job trying to find something enjoyable that paid the bills, while Moshe studied in *kollel*. After working for a *kiruv* organization helping Jews discover and reconnect with their roots, I decided to start my own business so I could have more freedom and flexibility.

I had experienced serious sleep deprivation with my first baby, and since none of the big sleep books had worked for me, I'd done my own research. Gaining the knowledge to meet my high-strung baby's sleep needs was empowering, and I started sharing these skills with dozens of exhausted mothers.

Soon the number of neighbors and friends who were calling me for help gave me the confidence that I had a product people wanted. I also knew I had a good business head and could be my own boss. I wanted to set my own hours, hoping that would give me more space to enjoy my family and reconnect with the creativity that I no longer had time for.

Word spread, and my baby sleep coaching business took off. After I had Adina, my beautiful baby number five, I was working more than full-time. I was juggling dinner and bedtime with marketing funnels and sales strategies. I prided myself in being a hardworking doer. I saw what I wanted, made a path to get there, and bulldozed toward it. The balancing act was very challenging, but I rolled up my sleeves and made it work.

I had a bustling home, a flourishing business, and life was beautifully chaotic.

Moshe often urged me to take a few steps back. Although he was so grateful that he was able to learn full-time because I worked so hard, he thought I sometimes took the business too far. Which, um, yes, I did.

But he was always so supportive. There were even a few amazing months when he was a stay-at-home dad... He did all the doctors' appointments, cleaned the house, and made nutritious dinners. I convinced myself that I was living the dream, that this was what I truly wanted.

I worked with business coaches, mindset coaches, and performance coaches. I had a very tight schedule, and there were never enough hours in the day. Some days I didn't eat lunch, and I often barely had time to take even a five-minute break. My work was slowly becoming a vacuum that sucked up more and more of my being. Create, accomplish, rinse, repeat.

But there was a stirring inside of me, an intangible voice that was a muffled scream: *You have it all wrong! You need to let go. Stop trying so, so hard! Life isn't about work...work...work...hustle...hustle. You're wearing yourself down to the bone.*

I ignored that voice. After all, it wouldn't help grow my business, would it?

Below are lyrics of a song I wrote when I felt confused and lost during that time period.

*This nest of complications is jading my faith
And from this twig I'm slipping from grabbing hold too late
Will I ever fly higher than I see?
The others in the sky, like them I'll never reach...*

*Lift your head up
I know you'll get up
Spread your wings, and soon you'll see
That some are broken
While others soaring
Take my hand and you'll learn to fly.*

I loved my basement office. I had painted it a delicate, silvery gray with purple undertones because that shade was so serene but also made me feel powerful and proactive. The sunlight trickled in through the block window above my desk and danced off the bright white curves in the glass. I kept everything neat, giving my office a crisp yet homey look.

I hung my favorite quotes and motivational images on the walls on either side of my "work hub," an oversized dry erase board where I

mapped out all my ideas. If it was blank when I entered my office at 9:00 a.m., that meant that Batya the Baby Coach had finished her last vision from yesterday and it was time to brainstorm, troubleshoot, and recreate. If it still had remnants from yesterday, then I'd plunge further until I was ready to wipe it clean and start fresh.

I usually worked straight until my youngest kids came home. I aimed for a fifteen-minute buffer to tie things up, but often I was still on the phone when Adina, age three, walked in. After a long morning away, she craved attention and, more than that, food. She was always starving when she came home.

One particular Tuesday, I got on my last call of the day at two fifteen. This was an important one. I had just hired a marketing consultant, Katie, to run my Rested Moms Club promotions group. Rested Moms Club was my online membership forum, which formed the core of my business. The group answered sleep questions, but I wanted it to provide more emotional support and a sense of community, which is so crucial for sleep-deprived moms.

Katie was a fun, warm presence, and her job would be to make people feel supported on their journey. Creating community and helping clients feel at ease would open up an entirely new line of communication for me and could be a game changer for the business. We settled down for a half-hour kickoff meeting that was all about putting her straight to work. But as we were knee-deep in mapping out how she could engage with the members beyond their sleep questions, I heard the door slam shut and an annoyed, "Mommy?! Where *are* you?"

"Hang on a second," I said into the phone. "My daughter just walked in. I'm going to give her a snack, and I'll be right back."

I zoomed upstairs and gave Adina a huge hug. She was the sweetest, yummiest little girl in the world. From her golden curls to her freckles, she was so full of life and ideas that I sometimes wondered if she'd explode from all her energy. I could feel the tension in her body melt away as I held her. I told her to sit down on the couch and I'd be back in

a jiffy. Expecting a yummy snack and some attention, Adina took her shoes off, swung her cute little feet onto the couch, and leaned back to relax after her long day at playgroup.

I hustled into the kitchen, grabbed a knife, and sliced the first apple I could find into a bowl. On my way to the couch, I grabbed a handful of books from the kids' shelf.

"Here," I said in an overly perky tone. "A delicious, fresh apple and some books. Hang out here for a bit, and Mommy will be back in just a few minutes."

I adored Adina and, when I managed to put my work down early enough, I loved the fifteen minutes we had together before her sister got home. But sometimes I wished she'd just come home and play quietly instead of immediately needing all of me.

"Just a few minutes?" Adina asked, searching my face for signs of dishonesty.

"Yes, don't worry." I gave her a quick kiss on her forehead.

A pang of guilt gripped me as I raced back downstairs, but I shoved it away. I so wished I could be that mother who had endless time to sit with each child. But that wasn't me right then and there. Quite frankly, it wasn't me at three o'clock in the afternoon ever.

"So sorry about that," I said to Katie as I plonked down in front of my computer screen, which buzzed with spreadsheets and highlighted notes. "I'm back now, let's continue."

A short while later, immersed in our highly productive planning session, I was distracted by Adina's angry footsteps on the basement stairs. She sat down on the floor and whined. "I read two books and ate half the apple. Are you *done* yet?"

I looked up at the clock. It was 3:10. How had that happened? In just a few minutes, my six-year-old, Goldy, would be home, but we were delving a little deeper into how Katie could build relationships within Rested Moms Club, and I wanted her to get started right away.

"Just a few more minutes," I told Adina, annoyed that she couldn't

be more understanding. I knew she was so little, but I wished she knew that I was doing this for the family. For her.

I pushed forward until Adina started wailing so loudly the Katie was inaudible.

“Mommmyyyyy, plaayyy with meeeee!!!!”

She was too loud; I simply had to get off. “I’m so sorry,” I said to Katie again. “We’ll have to continue this another time.” We abruptly hung up.

By now Adina was having a full-blown meltdown in my office, and I heard the door slam shut again. Goldy’s car pool had arrived and, judging by the banging I heard upstairs, she didn’t have the best day. Again. Goldy was an anti-authoritative, headstrong little girl who gave the teachers a run for their money. School was not her thing, and she was only in preschool.

I snatched Adina up and carried her upstairs, her arms and legs thrashing from side to side. Goldy tried to tell me how mean her teacher was, but I could barely hear her over Adina’s cries. Oh, and I forgot I hadn’t made dinner yet! As they both followed me into the kitchen, each trying to yell louder than the other to be heard, I scurried over to the freezer to see if there was any frozen pizza.

I could feel the overwhelm bubbling up inside of me. My unfinished conversation with Katie clouded my focus, my little girls were riled up, the older kids were coming home very soon, and there was nothing to eat for dinner. I wanted to cry.

Remember, Batya, I said to myself in my strongest internal voice. Children are not in the way, they are the way. This is why you do everything that you do. This is who you love, and this is why you work so hard.

I drew in a deep breath and rolled up my sleeves. My little mantra reset me and took me back to the present of what needed to be done: take care of my family right now. I poured the girls each a cup of orange juice, which gave me thirty seconds to mash up some tuna. I ripped open two boxes of crackers so they each had their favorite, and found the cheese in the refrigerator. This filled them up as well as me, since I

hadn't managed to squeeze lunch into my busy work day.

The girls quieted down a bit just as my middle kids walked in. Daniel, my easygoing nine-year-old, strolled over to the fridge for a cup of lemonade. He was never a complainer, and if he had a hard day, he'd relax first and tell me about it later. Studious ten-year-old Tamar sat down and took out her homework without even saying hello. I offered her the plate of crackers, tuna, and cheese that I had fed her younger sisters and got to work tidying up so the kids would have a peaceful area to do their homework.

Later, while I was scrubbing down the table for supper — toast with whatever I found in the fridge and cut-up veggies — came the next tornado. Twelve-year-old Uri, highly sensitive and extremely intense, required all my energy. He entered the kitchen with a storm cloud and needed my complete focus as he wound down from his day. I knew I shouldn't multitask while listening to him, but sometimes I simply had to get supper ready.

Dashing from room to room; lifting, sorting and putting things away; managing a smile and a soft tone of voice; listening with three-quarters of an ear, I somehow managed to get through the afternoon, dinner, and the little girls' bedtimes. Only after that, when things quieted down a little, did I finally have pause to notice how stressed I was feeling.

How had I fallen into this trap? Again!

If I had only gotten off the phone before Adina walked in, I could have prevented the volcano from erupting. Maybe I could adjust my work schedule? Maybe there's a way to really finish work by two forty-five? Two thirty? But I had tried over and over to avoid this scenario, and there simply weren't enough hours in the day.

My mind drifted to a deeper place, that constantly nagging voice: *Why are you working so hard? It's too much!*

The front door opened again, this time without slamming. Moshe walked in, humming. He headed straight for the kitchen, where I was doing homework with Daniel, and turned on the coffee maker. "Hey,

Batya.” He smiled at me. “Rough day?”

I shrugged, watching Daniel write. “Kind of. I’m still doing my day.”

He poured his coffee and nodded. “When you finish what you’re doing with Daniel, let’s take a quick walk, just down the block, to spend a few minutes.”

Inwardly I rolled my eyes. Moshe always wanted me to do this walk with him, catch up at the end of the day, but it was such bad timing for me.

“Not sure, Mo. I’m really still busy with the kids.”

He sipped his coffee. “I know. You work really hard. But it’s important for us to connect and also for you to step outside a bit. I want to help you do that.”

I heard Adina calling me from upstairs.

“Seriously, this is not a night I can go out.” I pushed my chair back. “You’re almost done with this, Daniel. I’m going to see what Adina needs.”

“Five minutes, Batya,” my husband pressed. “It will be good for you!”

I was already on my way out of the kitchen. Now Goldy was yelling as well. “I appreciate what you’re trying to do,” I made myself say, despite my irritation, “but I can’t go out right now. We’ll talk tomorrow. I’m with the kids right now, and then I have a ton of work still left tonight.”

As I climbed the stairs, I heard Moshe address the empty doorway: “This isn’t healthy, Batya. I’m just asking for five minutes.”

I sighed.

The evening continued, and I got everyone to bed. I knew that Uri wanted to spend more time with me when I tucked him in, and I truly loved how much he confided in me, but it was nine thirty, and I had at least two hours of work waiting for me in the basement. I had to write up the plan Katie and I had mapped out, plus there was a lot of prep to do for my coaching call tomorrow with a new group of clients.

I made myself a cup of tea and reentered my cozy office. I was physically exhausted, but excited to finish what needed to be done and wipe

my work hub clean for the next day. Finally, at midnight, eyes burning, I turned off my computer and went back upstairs.

There were dishes everywhere from snacks the kids had made before bed. Someone had spilled a bag of pretzels, and I could see mounds of salty sticks poking out from between the creases of the couch. The state of disarray in my kitchen denied any of the cleaning I had done a few hours before.

The familiar feeling of overwhelm crept in. I sighed deeply and whispered to myself, so quietly that I almost couldn't hear it, "It's just too hard sometimes."

I went to bed. I knew the mess would be waiting for me in the morning.