

## A Commentary on: In God I do Believe, but do not Believe in Lithium

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My name is Ruth Cohen and I wrote a book; its title "Seventy years in a life of a bipolar woman, her deviant thoughts and the powerful medications." It is published in the U.S.A since December 2016 by American Academic Press.

I am a bipolar woman from generations and suffered from depressions – major and less major, went through hypomania as well as a dangerous mania. I started writing my book at the start of my hypomania in 1989 when I was forty one years old (As I felt an urge to write which I never felt previously) and wrote "END" to my book when I was Seventy years old.

I am today seventy two years old and look much younger-a genetic blessing. I was physically healthy always until the Lithium destroyed me; without a noise.

I come from a Jewish and religious family who has lived in Tunisia for a long time. I am not myself religious but I keep the tradition and respect the holidays.

I lived in four different continents and the Bipolar illness followed me always.

The strange behavior of my mother made me very curious and I vowed since I was seven years old to understand more about this human state inside my maternal family.

My way was tumultuous, painful but obstinate. As a teenager I was depressed but went into a major depression only after the birth of my first child. Many depressions followed and after I was hospitalized in the USA in 1984 and was given Lithium even though I was diagnosed as unipolar. I will always remember that on the next day I felt myself again and declared that a medicine was created for me. I was forty years old.

In fact the Lithium played tricks with me for most of my life; and if this medicine helped instantly it never helped over a long period of time, it never stopped my depressions from showing up. Until...the toxicity of this salt brought me to the death's gate.

In 1989 the Lithium brought me to a hippo-mania very enjoyable after years of sadness; I remember this exciting period where I lived almost a normal life with emotions not everyone can reach. Those great times were always interrupted by momentarily depressions until the day when the feelings were so good that I threw the Lithium away as many bipolar people do; this was the beginning of a very dangerous mania.

I can say that the Lithium never prevented from to occur; it also contributed to a hippo-mania and to a dangerous - The only mania I went through.

*Only then in 1995 was I diagnosed as bipolar when my first major depression occurred in 1973, then I was twenty nine years of age.* I was hospitalized for the third time in my life; on that third time I was officially bipolar and was treated not only with Lithium; I was added Depakote to the Lithium; went to Electro-convulsive therapy and came out of the hospital after three weeks.

*Since then, I was a bipolar in remission.*

I became free of all symptoms at the age of fifty three years old

thanks to the new treatment. I got more awareness thanks to the help of psychotherapy and started to make good decisions like divorcing my husband and moving to Israel; the year was 2003.

My affair with the Lithium did not end then and in 2012 after a wonderful trip in Paris I returned home with a banal cold that did not seem to end; I went to the emergency room and unfortunately it was a mediocre hospital that treated me for an upper respiratory infection. There, they also found out an elevated level of Lithium and Creatinine, they lowered the amount of Lithium I was taking and sent me home two days later. I spent three more weeks at home visiting my family doctors every few days but they did not do anything and did not recognize a possible kidney failure; they continued to pay attention to my cold only. I was becoming weak and weaker! My health alarming!

I was rushed to a main hospital which realized the problem immediately. I went through a dialysis and an operation for an obstruction of the thin intestine.

I stayed five weeks at the hospital as psychiatrists debated if I should go back to the Lithium, they were not unanimous and the subject was dropped. Five weeks at the hospital and a very slow recovery, one day at a time, it took me a while before I could walk without a walker; I lost 14 pounds in the process.

I finally went back the medicine gradually from 300 mg to 600 mg.

Back home, I went to my family doctor to check my Lithium's level; the result disastrous. Still my doctor tried to convince me to go back slowly to the lithium. But since that day the word Lithium became for me a dirty word. I threw the medicine away and I went to see a professor in psychiatry in one of the best hospitals in the country.

After the meeting and without any hesitation I left the Lithium for good and...I am on Depakote only since that day.

And since this very day I am feeling much better with the Depakote, my awareness reached a point it has never reached before.

Most psychiatrists and nephrologists say that the Lithium is the best medicine for bipolar individuals. Clearly statistics agree with this statement but when I told a psychiatrist – head of the greatest hospital in Israel that the Lithium kills people, he answered with confidence: "Yes, I know." *But I did want to die!*

My life was saved but the toxicity of the Lithium left me with several serious damages: constant pains on the right side of my back at the

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kidney level. It is difficult for me to walk fast and go up a hill, I suffer sometimes from headaches; shorten of breath, itching in all my body constantly. My blood pressure since the intoxication of the Lithium is higher than ever before.

I happen to read an article telling that a bipolar who suffered one mania only should be taken off the Lithium-This is my case.

Still I battled the illness and its complications with all my will and courage and was never discouraged in spite of the fact that the bipolar disorder has no cure, it is a very painful illness and very dangerous too.

I live today in Israel; I am still bipolar and have put back a puzzle during tens of years as this sickness can confuse you for an entire life.

I read in the New York Times Magazine the article "*I do not believe in God but believe in Lithium*" – July 28, 2015 (This story was translated into Hebrew and was published two weeks later in the ARETZ daily newspaper); I felt urged to bring my story to light.

Jaime Lowe and I are both are bipolar and took Lithium for more than 20 years.

In my article I want to emphasize (not specified in the NY Times article) that a good understanding of the illness is necessary to live a normal life; it took me almost a life time to understand it fully. No need to say that medicine is necessary even though we do know that so far there is no cure to this illness. Yet the bipolar character is special and here to stay. *Just talking about symptoms does give a full picture of this devastating disorder.*

The relationship between thoughts and moods is a fact in our human life and being aware of this relation and using it will prevent from moods to get too high or too low (*This is the definition of the bipolar disorder*).

By paying attention to my thoughts I did control my moods and it helped without a doubt. This relationship is crucial to manipulate moods and is not mentioned in the NY Times magazine [1].

For a long period we both were treated with the Lithium, we both reached a high level of CREATININE and GFR. I went through an intoxication of the lithium; she escaped this nightmare but was advised to take Depakote. Jaime was not convinced; she had several considerations like job, boyfriend, home and mind; went into personal debates and hesitations and as she said: "I don't believe in God, but I believe in Lithium."

Jaime's decision was to take a trip to Bolivia. This place was magical to her, she was breathless, so thirsty and thrilled. She stopped at a camp and slept in a building made of salt bricks – a Lithium igloo. And her thought was: "Maybe and after this experience it would not feel so bad to let go of the medicine."

In my case I felt very good when I let go of the Lithium!

As she claimed "I don't believe in God, but I believe in Lithium" my life as a trial and error with the Lithium makes me declare "I God I do believe but do not believe in Lithium."

The two articles are a call, a cry and a challenge to all bipolar and their families, to doctors obsessed with statistics. Every bipolar has to be treated individually with care and empathy.

To learn more about Ruth Cohen's book, visit [fb.me/SeventyYearsinALifeofABipolarWoman](https://fb.me/SeventyYearsinALifeofABipolarWoman).

#### Reference

1. Lowe J (2015) In God I do Believe, but do not Believe in Lithium. American Academic Press, New York.

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