

Don't let pretend get too big.



An illustrated social story for young people with ASD who are managing the effects of fantasy in their lives.

Joel
Shaul

Note to the professional or parent:

This illustrated social story is part of a [collection of free materials on my website](#), to help children with ASD to increase awareness about how their social and emotional condition is affected by involvement with fantasy, and to suggest points of intervention. [Please look over the free materials](#) to see which are best for the young person you are helping. The other free materials on this topic include a “board game” regarding pretend and a checklist of multiple areas of possible concern.

In my own work with children, teens and young adults on the autism spectrum who are dealing with anxiety, depression, social isolation and skills deficits, I often encounter problematic involvement with fantasy-based interests and activities. These problems include:

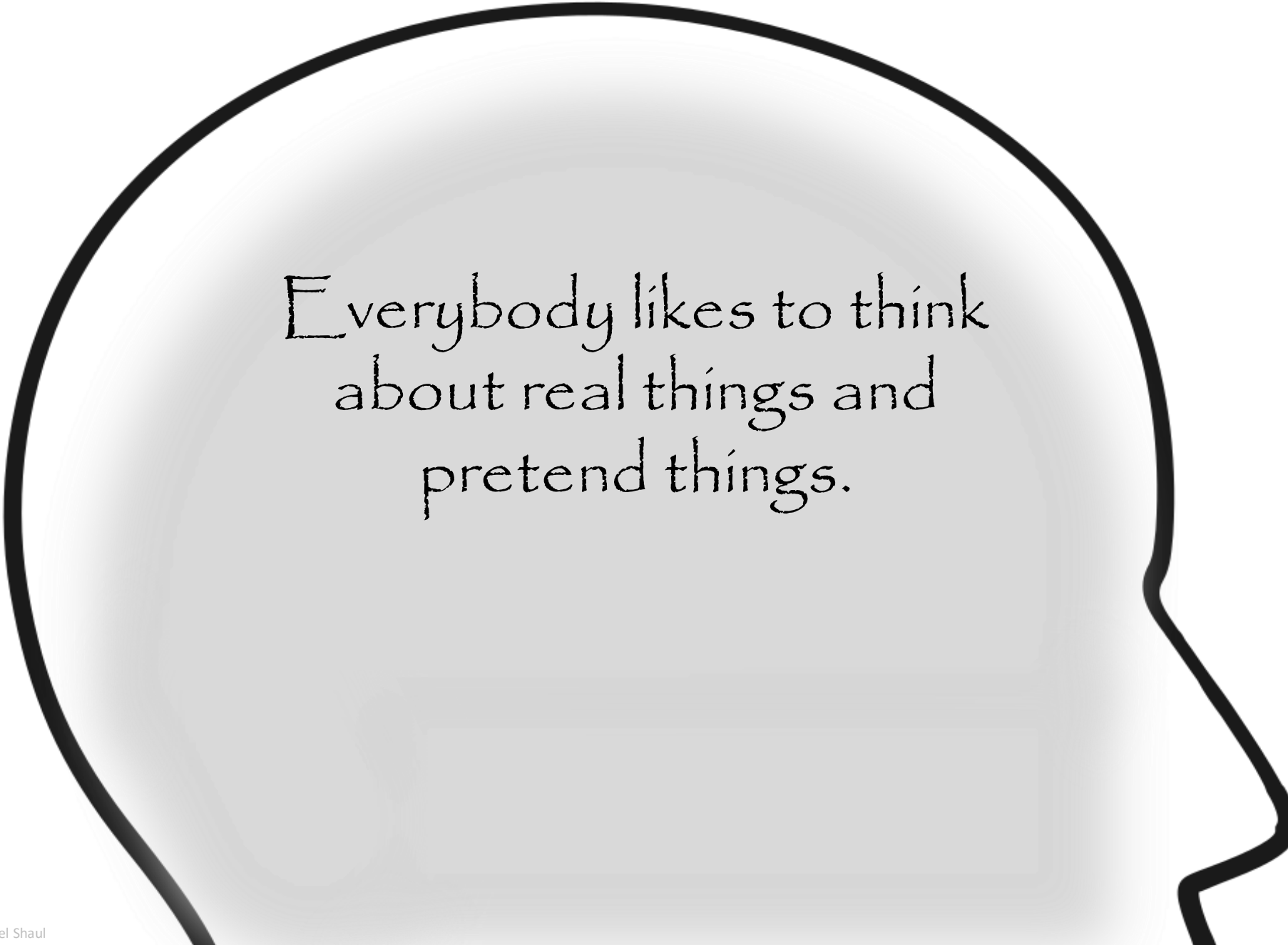
- *Enthrallment with the fantasy aspects of video games, contributing to withdrawal from social engagement and life skill activities
- *Creation of imaginary friends and imaginary worlds which last too long and assume too much importance to the young person with ASD
- *Awkward attempts to engage others in play based on the fantasy system

In my therapy with young people experiencing fantasy enthrallment, my objectives are to:

- *Help them to give candid and full descriptions of the fantasy-based thoughts and activities they value
- *Validate their creativity and the functional aspects of activities powered by their imaginations
- *Raise their awareness of ways that fantasy-based fixation can affect their lives and prospects adversely
- *Reduce the severity of the problematic fantasy enthrallment and explore better ways to deal with boredom, anxiety and stress
- *Engage parents and other family members in exploration of possible solutions

My best wishes to you in your own work.

Joel Shaul, LCSW



Everybody likes to think
about real things and
pretend things.

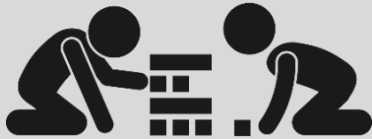
Real things:
Your family



Real things:
People you know.

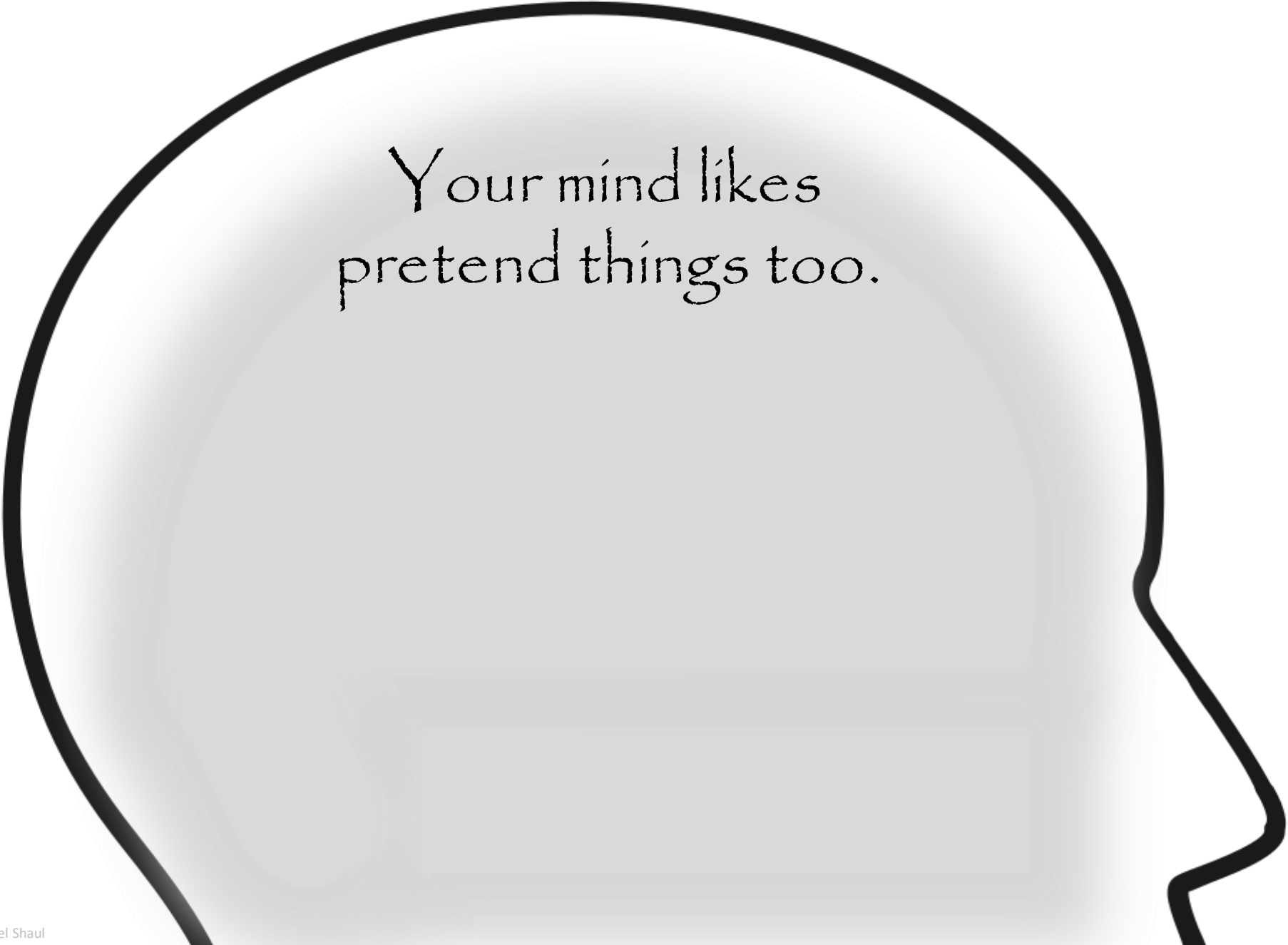


Real things:
Playing.



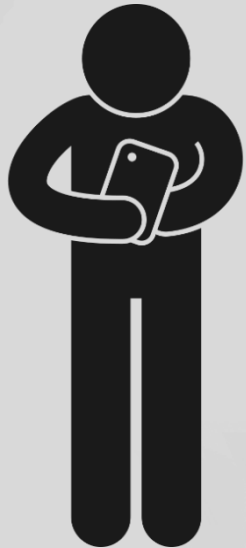
Real things:
Doing your work.





Your mind likes
pretend things too.

Pretend things in
videos, shows and movies.



Pretend things in
video games.



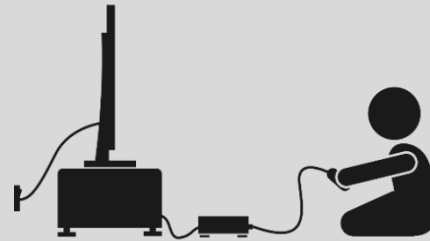
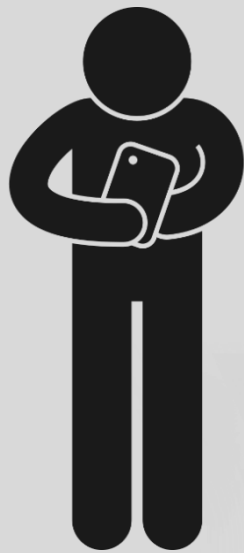
Pretend things in
books and comics.

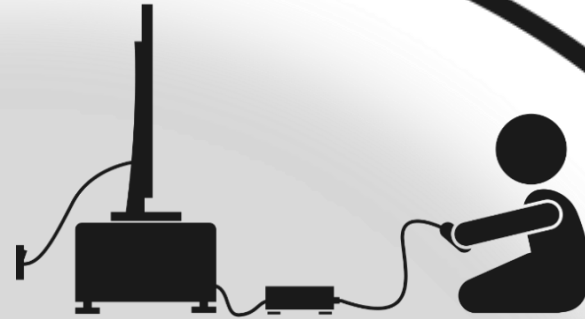


Pretend things you
make up on your own.

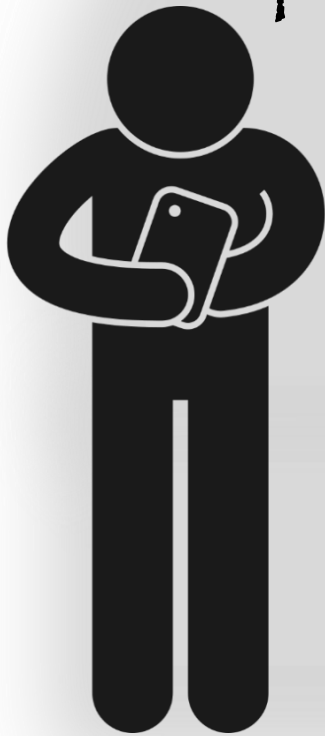


All these things take
up room in *your* mind.

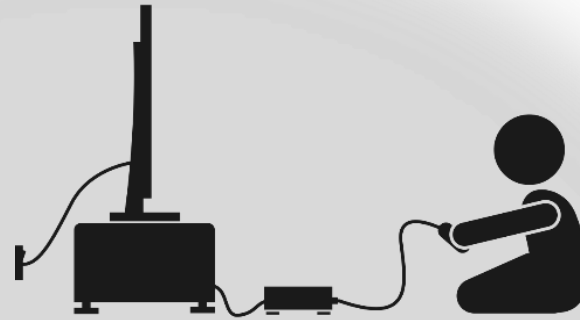




People need to make sure
that pretend thoughts
don't get too big.



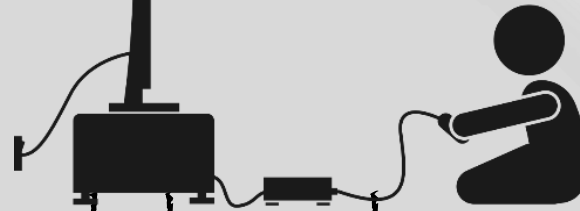
He doesn't pay
much attention
to us.



When pretend thoughts get too
big, you might ignore your peers.



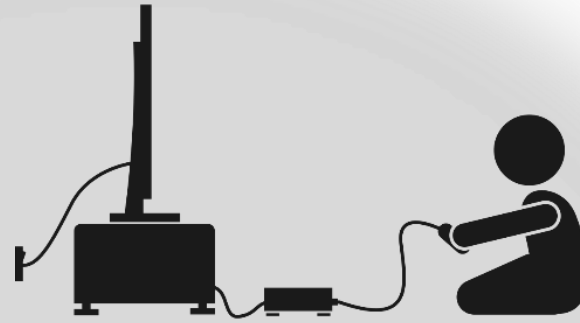
She knows the names of a
hundred fantasy characters
but doesn't know
our names.



When pretend thoughts get too
big, you might ignore lots of
real people.

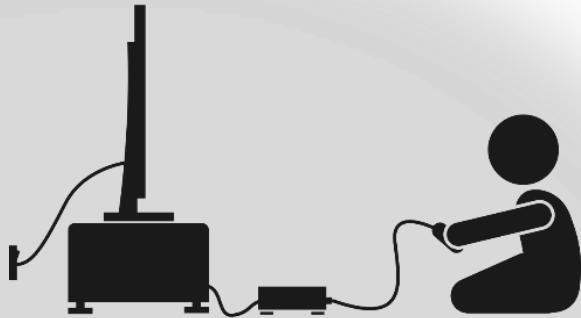


My fantasy world is way better than playing tag.



When pretend thoughts get too big, you might forget about playing.

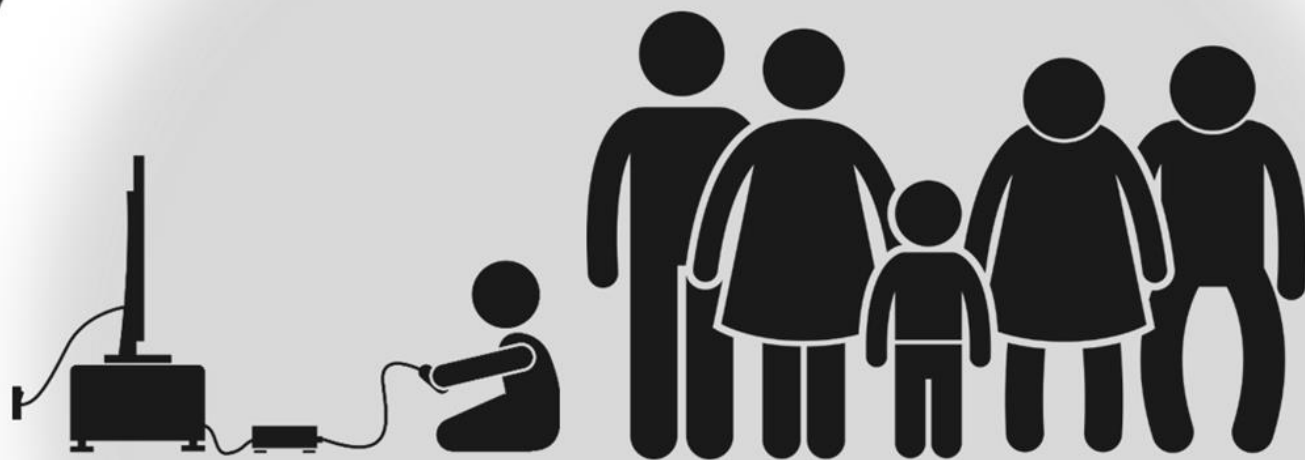




When pretend thoughts get too big, you might ignore your work.



What to do:



Try to make pretend
smaller than real things ~
like family.

What to do:



Try to make pretend
smaller than real things ~
like people in general.

What to do:



Try to make pretend
smaller than real things ~
like doing work.

What to do:



Try to make pretend
smaller than real things ~
like playing in real places.

Making pretend the right size
can be hard.

But it's really worth it.



You will be
happier later.



Many people get help from
family, counselors
and teachers.

Best wishes,
~Joel Shaul