



Is it a Mitzvah to Overcome the Fear of Coronavirus?

Struggling with Fear

I've been struggling with fear and worry most of my life. Some of the fears are less rational than others. I'm especially afraid of illness. Whenever I hear about someone suffering from a certain ailment, I may feel the symptoms of her illness and worry that I too, G-d forbid, am afflicted. The world seems to be a very fearful place. Many of us are afraid that we won't succeed, and then, even if we 'make it,' we may be afraid of 'losing it.' There are many kinds of fears: fear of the unknown, not only fear of dying but also fear of living, fear of being successful, fear of moving forward – fear of progress. The coronavirus pandemic is stressful for all of us. Coronavirus anxiety, otherwise known as 'coronaphobia' (Asmundson and Taylor, 2020), is an emotional construct based on fear and anxiety about a new disease and what could happen. Coronaphobia can be overwhelming and cause strong emotional reactions. Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can cause fear and worry about our own health, the health of our loved ones, our financial situation or job, and the loss of support services, we rely on. Social distancing may also make people feel isolated and lonely. Yet, these emotions increase stress and anxiety. All these negative emotions disturb restful sleep, worsen chronic health problems, and mental health. Coping with stress in a healthy way will make us, the people we care about, and our community stronger. Although, we know deep down that we must aim at fearing nothing but Hashem, it is a great challenge to control our fears. During 40 years of being Torah observant, I have found keeping the mitzvot outwardly much easier than changing my inner emotions. Yet, the Torah not only expects us to do just that, but actually commands us to be happy during our holidays and sad during days of mourning. We are commanded to believe and trust in Hashem perpetually and never to get angry or be afraid. The Jewish midwives didn't fear even the death threat of Pharaoh. Therefore, they were rewarded (*Shemot* 1:21). Their ability to be so brave stemmed from fearing only Hashem. We need to learn from our holy matriarchs, that there really is nothing else to fear in the world but G-d. Now is the time to reflect on the fears in our lives (terrorism, accidents, illnesses, corona etc.) and reprogram ourselves to fear nothing but G-d. With true fear of G-d, we would be more afraid of wrongdoing – which could cause a black spot on our eternity, G-d forbid, than finding a black spot on the Xray, , *lo aleinu*, which only affects our life in this world. We can use our fear as a springboard towards the three stages of true fear of G-d: 1. fear of punishment, 2. fear of wrongdoing, 3. awe of Hashem's greatness. Easier said than done.

יראה נפול / *Yirah Nefula* – Fallen Fears

My husband often tries to calm me, saying, "Pray that all your fears will be unnecessary." I respond that all fears are unnecessary, as fear only increases the risks that what we fear will occur. This realization causes me 'fear of fearing.' Although fear is the body's alarm system – an innate emotional response to a perceived personal threat – [when fears dominate us, they tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies](#). Not only do we unconsciously twist events to match our worst expectations, however, the fearful energy we send out, actually reverberates in the universe, in such a way that attracts the object of our fear to come true. It is like a thick, black, blanket with specks of light. Fear holds us back and keeps us focused on the idea of lack, while love fills us with positivity, and heightens our energy vibration in a way that makes our manifestation abilities much more powerful. In my emunahealing practice, I deal with many women, who are controlled by various fears. Among the emotional blockages I encounter among my clients, the main one is

fear, which often the underlying cause of various physical symptoms. The Hebrew word for fear **יִרְאָה**/*yirah*, is etymologically linked to **רָאָה**/*re'iyah* – ‘seeing.’ Fear derives from focusing on the darkness and from not seeing Hashem in every part of our lives. When we are fearful, it is because our **יִרְאָת ה' Hashem** – ‘awe of G-d’ got mixed up with darkness and became a fallen fear.

Elevating Our Fears

We can raise up fear through teshuva from love, prayer and energy healing. Our work is to elevate the fear from the darkness and then allow it to once again transform back into light. This means returning our fears to their root in the ‘awe of G-d, as well as to contemplate on our deeds, whether we possibly blemished the honor of the King. It may be helpful to remember that “worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow, but only saps today of its strength” (A.J. Cronin). As Rabbi Manis Friedman explained, whenever we fear a negative outcome: in case it didn’t come true, our fear made ourselves needlessly miserable the entire time of our worry. Alternatively, if our fears eventually did materialize, then we caused ourselves extra suffering, not only while experiencing the actual misfortune, but also all the time we spent worrying about it. No one would hold it against us to be optimistic and believe in a good outcome even if in the end our hopes were unfulfilled.

Our Fear of G-d Must Override Our Fear of People

War with its inevitable bloodshed and fatalities is a cause of great fear the world over. Many mothers, who have sons in the army, find it hard to sleep at night. Yet, *Parashat Shoftim* warns us against fearing even an army which is stronger than ours:

סֵפֶר דְּבָרִים פָּרָק כ פסוק א
כִּי תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה עַל אִיבֶיךָ וְרָאִיתָ סוּס וְרֶכֶב עִם רַב מִמֶּךָ לֹא תִירָא מֵהֶם כִּי הָשֵׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ עִמָּךְ הַמַּעֲלֶיךָ מִמִּצְרָיִם מִצְרַיִם:

“When you go out to war against your enemy and you see horses and chariots, an army greater than you, do not fear them, for Hashem your G-d, Who took you out of Egypt, is with you” (*Devarim* 20:1).

Fearing an enemy stronger than ourselves is far from irrational. If the Torah prohibits us to have rational fear, how much more so is the harboring of irrational fears against the Torah. The assurance that we don’t need to fear a stronger enemy doesn’t come without strings attached, as we learn from the juxtaposition of appointing judges and law enforcers and going out to war. Only if you conduct complete and perfect righteousness in judgement, may you be assured that you will win in war (Rabbeinu Bachaya, *Devarim* 20:1). Moreover, to be victorious, we must have pure intentions for the sake of Heaven: “In a situation where he can give honor to G-d and his people, every individual Jew must put his trust in G-d and not fear for his own personal life. One who fights with all his heart, with the intention of sanctifying G-d’s Name, is assured not to be harmed, and will merit for himself and his children a faithful home in Israel and eternal life in the World to Come (*Sefer Hachinuch*, Mitzvah 525). The mitzvah not to fear in war can be extended to include fears in general as Rabbeinu Bachaya continues,

DO NOT FEAR THEM, FOR HASHEM YOUR G-D IS WITH YOU – It is proper that our fear of G-d overrides fear of people. Any fear of flesh and blood is considered like forgetting G-d. As the prophet states, “...who are you that you fear man who will die and the son of man... and you forgot Hashem your Maker...” (*Yesha’yahu* 51:12-13). Likewise, King Salomon said, “A snare brings terror to a person, but he who trusts in Hashem will be safeguarded” (*Mishlei* 29:25); (Rabbeinu Bachaya, *Devarim* 20:1).

Six Torah Tips to Overcome Fears

Although, we are aware that we will live much healthier and happier lives, if we can overcome all those fears and worries, that no longer serve us, it is not easy to let our intellectual awareness enter our hearts and emotions. Below are a few tips that have sometimes helped me personally. But nothing is a 'cure-it-all' fix. Overcoming fears is a constant struggle. Above all, we must continue to pray to Hashem to help us strengthen our emunah in Him and rise above our fears.

1. Overcoming fear doesn't mean we don't take positive actions to prevent the object of our fear from materializing. We are not permitted to rely on a miracle (Ramban, *Vayikra* 26:11; Rav Shlomo Ganzfried, *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 192:3). Emunah must be balanced with *histadlut* (effort) exercising our free choice. Ignore what you cannot control and focus on preventing what is in your control instead.
2. Make a conscious decision to develop optimism. Everything can be regarded in a negative or positive light. Choose to focus on the half-filled glass and believe in a positive outcome.
3. When you feel afraid, take a moment to meditate, close your eyes, and pay attention to your breath. Allow your fast breaths to slow down into a deep relaxed breathing. Visualize the matter – that causes you fear – happening in the best possible way. Let yourself feel the joy of anticipating a beautiful outcome.
4. Create positive affirmations that counteract your fears. If, for example, you are afraid that you will never meet your soulmate, your affirmation could read something like: "I choose to believe that I will meet my soulmate, at the time Hashem knows is best!"
5. Articulate your fears and anxieties to a loved one or a therapist as it states, "If there is anxiety in the heart of a person, articulate it, speak about it, and a good word will bring joy" (*Mishlei* 12:25).
6. Strengthen your emunah in Hashem by focusing on how everything that happens to us is from Hashem. Since Hashem is ultimate good, even if, G-d forbid, our worst fears materialize, that too is for our good, to help us grow and attain our mission in life.