



HOW
JEWS
DEAL
WITH

SECOND IN A FOUR-PART
SERIES ON ANXIETY BY

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anxiety

WE ALL HAVE SOURCES OF anxiety.

Whether related to health, finances, shidduchim or something else, there is no way to rid life of trying situations. The only thing we can control is how we respond to them.

The Rebbe Rashab's brother, Reb Zalman Aharon (the Raza), invested his life savings in buying a forest to sell lumber. One day, a fire burnt the whole forest down. His friends came to break the news to him and they found him sitting and learning. They searched for a way to soften the blow but finally they just told him the truth.

"I know. Someone came by an hour ago and told me," said the Raza.

"How come you're not upset?" they asked in astonishment.

"I was upset. I was upset an hour ago. Now I'm done," he said.

"In an hour? How can you get over something like this in an hour?"

So the Raza asked him, "How come you're not upset?"

"About what?"

"About your child's health. Don't you remember he had a health problem?"

"That was ten years ago!"

"So what took you ten years took me an hour," the Raza explained. "Why should I *shlep* out the grief and misery for ten years when I can get over it in an hour?"

Anything that isn't going to be a problem in ten years from now doesn't have to be a source of anxiety now. When you're grappling with a worry, ask yourself if this will be relevant in a day, a week, a month or a year. Probably not. So, like the Rebbe Rashab's brother, find something else to occupy your mind.

QUESTIONS ANSWERS

BACHUR: What advice would you give a regular *bachur* who is dealing with anxiety? I'm trying to learn and grow, but there are challenges. I'm anxious that things won't work out because I'm such a failure and I keep doing wrong things...

RMF: There's a lot in that question. You said, "I'm such a failure and I keep doing wrong things." But saying "I'm a failure" is actually your explanation, not your question. You're justifying your failures by saying that you're a failure, instead of taking responsibility and vowing to do better. This probably started with unrealistic expectations. You were determined to be the best, and the smartest, and the greatest, and you couldn't live up to your own expectations. So you decided you're a failure. But you're still a *bachur*. You're still in *yeshivah*. You're not even close to a failure yet.

Tomorrow morning, wake up and say, "Today I'm going to concentrate on learning. I'm not going to become a *talmid chacham*, I'm not going to become a genius, I'm not going to become the best *bachur* in *yeshivah*. I'm just going to dedicate myself to learning." Dedicate yourself to the project, not to the outcome. And see how that feels.

WOMAN: How can I get rid of a fear of a specific person who has threatened in the past to turn my life upside down and keeps succeeding in doing it?

RMF: I wouldn't call that anxiety at all. You're not describing a condition, you're describing a problem. It needs to be solved.

Now you have a question: What responsible steps can you take to protect yourself from this person? Some guy in California said, "What can I do to get rid of my fear of earthquakes?" The answer for him is to move to Manhattan. While you live in California, the fear of earthquakes is a reality, not a paranoia.

If you're living next to a neighbor who's harassing you, or you have a family member who's out to get you, you need to find a realistic way to put space between you and that person. If it's a serious threat. Perhaps you should call the police, or get someone in your community or support system involved.

MAN: On the subject of putting space between people, there is someone in my life who I cannot cut out who triggers me and gives me anxiety. How can I stop letting this person have free rent in my head?

RMF: It sounds like the threat of this person is not a serious one, just an annoying one. You want to know how to get rid of this anxiety? This one has a very simple answer: Don't harbor it.

Here's an important principle: "*Taanug tmidi eino taanug*," a constant pleasure stops being pleasurable. The same is true with a constant worry; a constant worry is no longer worrisome. You can't get shocked and upset every time an annoying person annoys you. The more comfortable you get with the fact that this is just an anxiety-inducing person, the more you can stop feeling anxious about it.

WOMAN: I have a birthday tonight. I'm turning 64. I've been divorced for almost five years. As each birthday passes and I'm not remarried yet, I'm getting very anxious that I will never get remarried. My greatest fear is that I'm never going to find my soulmate. What if it's not meant to be?

RMF: Perhaps you are right, and it's not meant to be.

WOMAN: How do I make peace with the fact that this might be my reality?

RMF: It might be. It's a maybe. But if you're going to go with maybes, there's an even better maybe. Ask yourself: Does G-d want people to be married or does G-d want people not to be married? Who invented marriage? Who stays up all night making *shidduchim*? If you had to guess which maybe is more probable, there's no question that Hashem wants people married. Why would you assume that you're the exception? G-d wants you married more than you want to be married.

WOMAN: *Halevai*. I'll send you a wedding invitation, Rabbi.

RMF: Please do.

Let me give you a powerful model of how to think. Imagine you have 1,000 pieces of paper. On 999 pieces of paper it says yes and on one it says no. Mix all these pieces of paper into a hat and pick out one randomly. You open it up and it's the no. Wow, what are the chances? Put it back in the hat, mix them up and pick one again. Again, it's the no. How strange. You do it ten times in a row, and ten times the no comes up. Okay. Now do it the eleventh time. What are you expecting, a yes or a no?

WOMAN: A no, of course.

RMF: There are 999 yeses and one no, and you're expecting a no? Why?

PAST EXPERIENCE CAN MAKE YOU *irrational.*



WOMAN: Past experience.

RMF: Exactly. Past experience can make you irrational. You should not expect a no! It's already shocking that it came up ten times. Why would it come up an eleventh time? That's not rational. But your bad experiences have soured your judgment and now you think that out of a thousand pieces of paper you're going to get the one that says no. That's what nature does to us— it dampens our reason. Everything in G-d's world is for the good. He's a Creator, not a destroyer. And yet, we've had so many painful experiences that we're starting to predict things that are completely irrational. It's going to go badly. It's not going to work... What are you talking about? Whose world is this? Don't let bad experiences make you irrational. People say, "Be realistic, it will be the no again." That's not realistic at all.

WOMAN: I have a nine-year-old son who suffers from anxiety, hypochondria, and panic attacks.

He doesn't seem to have any deep-rooted issues or trauma to explain it. I've asked advice from two different professionals, and I've been using their techniques for the last two years. Thank G-d, he's been showing signs of improvement. I'm wondering if you have any advice to help him?

RMF: I would suggest a homeopathic remedy. Those remedies are absolutely magical, particularly with children. And it's not a torturous process that requires you to explore your past lives, childhood, subconscious, or repressed fears. It's a simple remedy. It's safe, it's harmless, and it's very effective. I would suggest you give it a try.

This four-part series on anxiety is based on an interview by Menachem Bernfeld of Rabbi Manis Friedman on 24 Av (August 2, 2021), which was followed by callers' questions. The podcast is called "Let's Get Real With Coach Menachem," and it may be found online.