

DEALING WITH FEAR

QUESTION When a person fears the repercussions of doing an *aveirah*, is this a contradiction to feeling close to Hashem?

ANSWER The inner part of our soul feels a complete closeness with Hashem, so it is not possible in that point to feel any fears from *aveiros*, because the inner part of the soul is above the point where *aveiros* are possible. Therefore, when a person feels this part of the soul where he is completely attached with Hashem, there is no fear of the effects that come from *aveiros*, because there is no possibility of *aveirah* there.

QUESTION So whenever a person feels a fear, it is a sign that something is wrong and that he needs to improve in some area? Does it mean that he did an *aveirah*? Or that he is not close enough yet to Hashem?

ANSWER Yes. If a person is feeling a very intense fear, it is a sign that something is amiss. But if you keep alternating between being afraid and feeling close to Hashem – meaning that at the same time that you feel calmed by the knowledge that Hashem is near you, you are still afraid [of Hashem], this is called *pachad d'kedushah*, “holy fear”, which is constructive.

This weekly parsha sheet is based on translations from HaRav Isamar Schwartz, Shlit"a the author of the Bilvavi & DaEs series. The Rav attended the Pachad Yitzhak Yeshiva of Rav Yonasan David, Shlit"a and graduated from the Ponovitch Yeshiva of Rav Gershon Edelstein, Shlit"a. The earliest of more than 50 sefarim of the Rav where enthusiastically endorsed by Rav Gamliel Rabinovitch, Shlit"a, Rav Moshe Sternbuch, Shlit"a, Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlit"a, the Tolna Rebbe, Shlit"a, Rav Moshe Mordechai Karp, Shlit"a, amongst others. Using an eclectic approach, the Rav's teachings speak to the hearts of Jews from all walks of life.

TAKING SHELTER UNDER HASHEM

Hashem protects us, and He has different ways how. He can send *Malachim* to protect us if He wants, like when He sent angels to protect Yaakov *Avinu*, or He will use people as His messengers to protect us. But it is always Hashem Himself who is really protecting us. When a person merits to be protected by *Malachim* or by messengers of Hashem, it's really because he has been *zocheh* to be protected by Hashem Himself.

When a person lives a body-oriented kind of life, and his *neshamah* isn't so accessed in his life, he will seek security in the physical sense. But when a person lives a life of the *neshamah*, along with learning Torah and keeping the *mitzvos*, he is more protected. When Yaakov *Avinu* was leaving *Eretz Yisrael*, he now needed protection, because he was leaving behind a life of *ruchniyus* and entering a place that would be bad for his *neshamah*.

Chazal said that Torah learning protects a person from doing *aveiros*. But we see that people learn Torah and they aren't protected from *aveiros*. Why does this happen? Torah can only protect a person if he makes it into the main pursuit of his life. If he only learns Torah 'every here and there', then his Torah learning can

only protect him 'every here and there', and not on a permanent basis. His Torah learning will only on the level of "*mitzvos*", not on the level of "Torah." But when a person is accustomed to learning Torah and he is deeply connected to his learning, he is connected to the Torah, and in turn, the Torah protects him.

Who is behind this protection? Hashem, Who is our Shield. Hashem told Avraham, "I will be a shield for you." If a person recognizes that the very essence of his life is to be close with Hashem, then he merits protection from Hashem Himself.

There are levels of protection, and the more we penetrate into our soul, the deeper of a protection we can merit. How can person know how much he is protected or not? It can be determined by knowing the following: When a person feels a danger, where does he run to for security? And what kinds of thoughts are racing through his mind as he's escaping the danger? From where he is drawing his feeling of security from? What is going on in the depth of his soul in the midst of his terror?

There are all kinds of fears a person can have. We have small fears, like being scared of a cat when it jumps out of a garbage

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can, and bigger fears, such as fears of getting into a car accident, *chas v'shalom*. When a person is in the midst of these fears, where does draw his feeling of security from?

A person who lives a deeper and more “internal” kind of life, upon becoming afraid, will immediately feel secure from the internal world of *ruchniyus*. A person who lives superficially, though (a life not connected to his *neshamah* but more of a body-kind of life), though, when he is afraid. He might turn to *segulos*, giving *tzedakah*, or going to *tzaddikim* for *berachos*. These are not bad things. Our *sefarim hakedoshim* say to do it. But if that is all a person does, it is still a superficial response to fears. The real way to respond to fears is to run away to the Torah for protection.

What does it mean to run away to the Torah? Compare this to a scared child, who will run to his mother or to his father for protection. Why does he run to his parents? It is because when we are afraid, we run to the place where we feel secure. The place where we feel secure is what we recognize as the source of our life, and that is why we run to it. The child runs to his parents when he's scared, because he recognizes them as his source of life, and that is why he gets his security from them. That is what happens when a person is afraid – he runs to where he gets his source of life from. A person needs to have a true source of life to run to, when he's afraid. Without a real source of life, a person gets his entire sense of vitality from things like food and chatting, and he never develops a real source of life (*chiyus*). When he encounters a great fear, he has no real source of life to run to. So he will become desperate and he panics, looking for

anyone who can save him.

But if someone has revealed his *ruchniyus* and his Torah learning as his true source of *chiyus*, he will truly have where to run to when he's afraid. This is only when one considers his learning to be a *Toras Chaim*, a Torah that gives him his life.

When he feels sad or afraid, he runs back to his source, where he draws *chiyus* from – from the Torah that he learns, which he identifies as the main source of vitality in his life. If a person enters even deeper into *ruchniyus*, the fact that he just knows about Hashem's Presence is what gives him life. When he feels afraid, he can run to Hashem to feel secure.

What does it mean to run to Hashem? Does it mean to run to Him for help only when we are afraid? That is not what it means to run to Hashem. If our *emunah* in Hashem is already our source of vitality in our life, then we will run to Hashem automatically when we are afraid - and not just because we are running to Him so that He can save us. When a person is in danger, he cries out to Hashem to save him. But if a person lives a truly spiritual life, he already recognizes before the trouble, that Hashem is our source of life where we draw our security from, and when he goes through a fearful time, he runs back to his Source of life.

He's not just running to Hashem so he can be saved – he runs to Hashem because he clearly recognized that Hashem is the source of all life. Our soul can derive tremendous enjoyment from just from the knowledge of Hashem.

Avraham *Avinu* merited that Hashem was his Shield. Avraham merited this

because of his great *emunah*. Avraham was the one who shined *emunah* onto the world. The real protection we need is to draw our security directly from Hashem Himself [by having *emunah* in Him].

This always applied, but in our generation especially, in the *ikvesa d'meshicha*, it is especially true. There are many enemies and troubles in the world that we face, and they continue to increase with time. *Chazal* said, “There is no day that is not more cursed than the day before it.” Our task in all of this is to get by all these troubles in an inner way. We need to know how to run away from troubles, but in the right way.

What does mean it to run away to Hashem? It doesn't just mean for a person to rely on Hashem for everything, and to “let Him take care of everything.” This is a mistaken attitude. The way to run away to Hashem is to already enjoy a relationship with Him, before the troubles and difficulties of life come. This way, when the troubles do come, we will naturally run to Him, having developed a bond with Him from before [as opposed to suddenly running to Him for safety when we get afraid, in which there is no bond].

Of course, since we have a body too, we need physical security in order to be calmed. But our main sense of security in life should be coming from our relationship with Hashem - to have a relationship with Him, on a daily basis.

May Hashem protect us from troubles and *chevlei Mashiach*. But even more so, may we realize that Hashem is our Magen, the Shield, Whom we can be protected by. (תפילה_030_מגן)

ELEMENTS OF OUR MIDDOS

Even someone who sits and learns all day may have a terrible inner void inside him, feeling empty and bored. He learns robotically and without a drive, and without feeling inwardly connected to his learning. He's not "tasting" in his learning, and also lacks structure in his learning. He remains as a person who doesn't have anything to do with the life that he lives. He gets up in the morning and really feels like he has nothing to do.

Some people like this will wake up very late in the morning, while others will always get up on time (because they have a stronger *yesod ruach* (element of wind) in them which gets them moving, so they won't sleep late). But even this kind of person can feel like he has nothing to do. He may fill up the time by chatting with others, or by catching up on the news - anything that "drags" him and entices him outward. He has a terrible inner void inside him. And he is not even searching for a way to fill it.

All he is interested in is "how to kill time", so he will be "dragged" after whatever he pulls him. Both children and adults can suffer from ongoing boredom and inner emptiness. A person who keeps going in this way, without doing anything about it, has basically ended his life. It's as if the person is wearing a sign that says, "Here is so-and-so buried." The problem can also be found in people who work at jobs they have no interest in, and more commonly in older adults who have already received their pension and they wake up in the morning with nothing to live for, just reading the news and riding the bus and staring out the window at everybody, wondering who this person and who that person is.

Every person can feel an empty void in his soul, but most people never discover it, simply because they never pay attention to it. When a person does get some subconscious feeling of it, what does he do? He will probably get busy with some activity that takes his mind off it, so that he shouldn't have to feel the emptiness. Those who do feel their inner emptiness, in most cases, are terribly depressed and need a lot of therapy. Most people never feel their emptiness because

they are always running away from it, and the few people who do feel it are usually depressed, as we can all recognize. In rare instances, a person is very truthful with himself and he discovers this emptiness.

How does he discover it? Because it is screaming out to us from every corner of the world! One does not have to sink to very low levels to feel it. We can feel it as a result of our very existence on this world. A person can sit and reflect with himself, and reach the truth, that indeed, this world is truly empty from any real content. We all need certain things to live, a house and a dining room set and whatever else we need, but even if we would have everything we need, we would still feel empty from this world, because the void in our soul cannot be satisfied, וגם הנפש לא תמלא.

Whenever we feel an internal emptiness, we are meant to fill the void with recognizing the truth of "*Ain Od Milvado*" ("There is nothing besides for Hashem"), even in the *chalal* (empty space) of the world." One can experience this thousands of times, every time that he is truthful with himself. After identifying the void, one should then realize that this void will only be filled with (1) having a deep connection to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, (2) to the Torah, (3) to feeling true ahavas Yisrael with all the *neshamos* of Klal Yisrael, and (4) to be connected to one's own *neshamah*. (ספר תיקון כח הריכוז, פרק י')



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QUESTION Is fear ever a good thing? Is there anything wrong with being afraid of being attacked by Arabs?

ANSWER The only thing a person must ever be afraid of is the fact that he fears anything besides Hashem. This is the only pure fear which exists. Either we will fear Hashem Himself, or we fear anything that is besides for Hashem, and that is causes us to have the fears. Whenever we experience a fear, like when we are afraid of being attacked by the Arabs, we should view it as an awakening to remind us that we are not afraid enough of Hashem, and that is why we have become afraid of something. It is an awakening to us that we are not close enough to Hashem. Because if we would really feel close with Hashem, there would be no reason to fear anything. I want to emphasize that this is not a mere intellectual definition. If a person would really believe that Hashem is close to him, he would not be afraid! When you are found with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, there is no fear there. So if a person experiences a fear, it is a reminder to the person that he needs to be afraid of the fact that he is not close enough to Hashem. And that is why a person becomes afraid of the Arabs!

QUESTION Is there a concept that thinking and imagining about fear causes the fear to actually happen in reality?

ANSWER It is possible for a person to “cause” bad things to happen when he imagines about them, because *Chazal* say that if a person worries obsessively about poverty or other forms of suffering, the poverty or the suffering will chase after him. Therefore, we don’t try to deliberately imagine bad things. But if a person is in any case experiencing fears in his imagination, he needs to face this imaginary fear by bringing the fear out into the open and then uprooting it with thoughts of *emunah* in Hashem and Hashem’s love for us. If a person is not having a problem with fears, we are not encouraging him to re-imagine them. Only when a person is in any case having imaginary fears do we need to get him to redirect his thoughts. When a person is afraid, he is suffering from his imagination, which really means that he is lacking in *emunah* and in a feeling of Hashem’s love, and it is this kind of person who needs to re-imagine his fear and remind himself of Hashem next to him. So we don’t encourage a person to deliberately imagine something fearful so that he can increase his *emunah*. Why should he do this, if he doesn’t have the fears? It is only if someone already has fears that we want to help such a person face them in the right way.

QUESTION If so, why was Aharon *Ha-Kohen* afraid of the people when they killed Chur?

ANSWER The answer is because even the greatest *tzaddik* is not always completely attached to Hashem, and for this reason, there is room for fear even in the biggest *tzaddikim*. Rav Dessler calls this *tzeil haguf* (the shadow, or the effect, of the body). Even the greatest *tzaddikim* ultimately have a physical body that places limitations on them, so there is always some part of a *tzaddik* that is not attached completely to Hashem, and this is also why no *tzaddik* is perfect. Yet, it is always possible for a person to minimize his fears. Although we can never totally uproot all of our fears, there is a very big difference between someone who has is consumed by fear with someone who has greatly minimized them.

There is also another kind of fear: Yaakov *Avinu* was afraid of Esav, even though Hashem promised him that he would not be harmed, because he was afraid that perhaps he had sinned in the interim and that he was no longer worthy of Hashem’s protection. However, in order for this kind of fear to be holy, a person needs to be balanced with feeling Hashem’s closeness. If one feels that Hashem is close by, then it is valid for him to fear the effects of sin. But if one does not feel this closeness, then fearing the effects of an *aveirah* is not a constructive kind of fear.

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