



Dealing With Anxiety

G-d created fear for a purpose – to motivate a person to act to save himself. On the other hand, unhealthy anxiety is dangerous: “Do not introduce anxiety into your heart, as anxiety has killed mighty men” (Ben Sira 14:1). How can we help our children and students, and ourselves, overcome fears and anxieties?

- 1. Hishtadlut.** Fear is caused by a feeling of helplessness. Initiation and action can help remove fear. It is mistaken to believe that *bitachon* means passiveness. On the contrary. We must do *hishtadlut*. Put in the effort. As long as the *hishtadlut* is logical, and does not become excessive and hysterical, it does not contradict *emunah*.
- 2. Rationality.** Some fears stem from exaggerated imagination. The cure for this is the light of reason and logic. A dry analysis of the facts can significantly decrease anxiety. The media shows us harsh footage of disasters and tragedies, and the viewer may get the impression that these are the norm in a country. Light overcomes darkness, and understanding that what the media portrays is only a small fraction of reality can help us overcome our fears.
- 3. Discussion.** אַנְיַטְי בְּלֵב אִישׁ יִשְׁחַתֵּם – Anxiety in a person’s heart dejects him (Mishlei 12:25). Chazal bring two understandings of this verse: Either “he shall remove it [*yesichena*] from his mind,” or “He shall tell it [*yesichena*] to others” (Sanhedrin 100b). When worries fill one’s heart and overcome us to the point we cannot deal with them, one should remove them from one’s mind. For example, every time a fearful thought enters our heads, we should force ourselves to think of something else or busy ourselves with an alternative activity. Creating distractions. But when we feel worries are weighing us down – or when we feel we are carrying them

alone – we should speak them out to others. Sharing worries and concerns with others brings relief and eases anxiety. Through discussion, one can organize and sift through thoughts and emotions, bringing logic back into the equation.

- 4. Bitachon.** Belief in G-d is not a magic cure for anxiety. But it can help us overcome our fears. Rav Kook explains that *bitachon* is not the belief everything will work out the way I want it to. It’s a belief in the Divine kindness with which G-d created the world and continues to run it. It’s a belief that even if ‘bad’ things happen, there’s a Master Plan behind it.
- 5. Belief in ourselves.** The times preceding Mashiach will be wrought with spiritual and physical turmoil. There were Rabbis who feared living in the times of Mashiach: “Let Mashiach come, but after my death [as I fear the suffering that will precede his coming]” (Sanhedrin 98b). Meaning, let the Mashiach come – but not in my lifetime. I’d rather give up seeing him than have to suffer. But Rav Yosef said the opposite: “Let the Mashiach come, and I will be privileged to sit in the shadow of his donkey’s excrement!” Rav Yosef announced that he was emotionally ready for the times before Mashiach. He did not deceive himself that everything would be rosy; he knew very well that we would stumble upon “excrement” – difficulties

and crises of many kinds – but he was not afraid. He was willing to undergo all the pain and disgrace associated with Mashiach’s arrival.

We were not asked whether we were afraid or not. G-d did not give us the choice to be born in these times. If G-d sent us to live in a generation preceding Mashiach’s arrival, there is no doubt we have the necessary emotional strength to deal with the difficulties and fears.

- 6. Create a positive atmosphere.** Children are especially sensitive. If they live in a tense atmosphere, they will become anxiety-prone. As parents, we must ensure the home atmosphere is calm, instilling confidence and peace within the children. If the parents give a sense of hopelessness and despair or lack of confidence in leaders and teachers; if they constantly prophesize a dark future and belittle the security forces, if they display anger and frustration, they fail to help their children overcome their fears.
- 7. Seek help.** If you feel you or your child are suffering from serious anxiety, seek professional help.

Rabbi Elisha Aviner is the Head of Kollel at Yeshivat Birkat Moshe, and founded an organization to help parents with adolescent education.

