

7 Steps to Worry-Free Living pt. 2 by Rabbi Ze'e Smason

4) Faith

What does having faith mean, and how does it help us to combat worry?

A young woman brought her fiancé home to meet her parents for dinner. After dinner her mother told her father to find out about the young man. The father invited the fiancé to his study for a talk.

"So what are your plans?" the father asked the young man. "I am a Torah scholar," he replied.

"A Torah scholar. Hmmm," the father said. "Admirable, but what will you do to provide a nice house for my daughter to live in?"

"I will study," the young man replied, "and Hashem will provide for us."

"And how will you buy her a beautiful engagement ring, such as she deserves?" asked the father.

"I will concentrate on my studies," the young man replied, "Hashem will provide for us."

"And children?" asked the father. "How will you support children?"

"I'm not worried, sir. Hashem will provide."

The conversation proceeded like this, and each time the father questioned the young man, he insisted that Hashem would provide.

Later, the mother asked, 'How did it go, Honey?'

The father answered, 'He's a fine young man; he thinks I'm G-d!'

Faith that G-d provides, provides longer life.

If you want to grasp the power of religion in survival, consider this extraordinary fact: People who go to Church & Synagogue regularly live around seven years longer than people who don't. That's right: seven years. This remarkable statistic comes from a 1999 study conducted by researchers at the U. of Texas at Austin.

More precisely, if you go to church or synagogue once a week, your advantage is 6.6 years. If you worship at church or synagogue more than once a week, your edge increases to 7.6 years, a bonus of one additional year. It's well known that factors like gender and race influence how long people live, but who knew that religious attendance makes a significant difference, too?

Dr. Harold G. Koenig of Duke University Medical Center is one for the pioneers in the field of faith and health. He's written more than 35 books and 300 articles on how people's religious beliefs influence their mental and physical well-being. Speaking about the 7 year statistic, Dr. Koenig says,

This has nothing to do with whether G-d exists or not, whether prayer works or not. It's based entirely

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on the fact that religious attendance produces psychological, social and behavioral consequences that help you live longer.

Not only can faith extend your life, but it'll make you feel a whole lot better, also -- including taking away many of your worries.

Not long before his death, Henri Nouwen wrote a book called *Sabbatical Journeys*, in which he wrote about some friends of his who were trapeze artists called the Flying Roudellas. They told Nouwen that there is a special relationship between the flyer and the catcher on the trapeze. This relationship is governed by important rules such as "The flyer is the one who lets go, and the catcher is the one who catches." As the flyer swings on the trapeze high above the crowd, the moment comes when he must let go. He flings his body out in mid-air. His job is to keep flying and wait for the strong hands of the catcher to take hold of him at just the right moment. One of the Flying Roudellas told Nouwen, "The flyer must never try to catch the catcher." The flyer's job is to wait in absolute trust. The catcher will catch him, but he must wait."

Like a small child who jumps off a diving board into the arms of a waiting parent -- G-d is there to catch you.

.And with faith, you'll never be discouraged.

A man approached a little league baseball game one afternoon. He asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, "Eighteen to nothing -- we're behind."

"Boy," said the man, "I'll bet you're discouraged.

"Why should I be discouraged?" replied the little boy. "We haven't even gotten up to bat yet!"

With faith your worries will be reduced, because true faith means:

-- G-d provides (like a father-in-law)

-- You'll live a longer, healthier life (depending on how often you come to shul, of course)

-- If you fall, G-d will catch you (trapeze, diving board)

-- You won't get discouraged.

5) Kosher Worrying

A big storm approaches. The weatherman urges everyone to get out of town. The rabbi says, "I won't worry, G-d will save me".

The morning of the storm, the police go through the neighborhood with a sound truck telling everyone to evacuate. The rabbi says "I won't worry, G-d will save me".

The storm drains back up and there's a foot of standing water in the street. A fire truck comes by to pick up the rabbi. He tells them "Don't worry, G-d will save me."

The water rises some more. The rabbi is forced up to his roof. A boat comes by to rescue the rabbi. He

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tells them "Don't worry, G-d will save me."

The water rises higher. The rabbi is forced up to the very top of his roof. A helicopter comes to rescue the rabbi. He shouts up at them "Don't worry, Go- will save me."

The water rises above his house, and the rabbi drowns.

When he gets up to heaven he says to G-d, "I've always been loyal to You. Why didn't you save me?"

G-d replies, "First I sent you a fire truck, then a boat, and then a helicopter. What more do you want from me!?!?"

Ever hear the expression, "G-d helps those who help themselves"? It's a Jewish concept.

Hishtadlus, or *effort*. A delicate balance needs to be struck between *hishtadulus* and *bitachon* -- *effort* and *faith*. But regardless, we have to do our part. Like the words of Kenny Roger's 'The Gambler': *You've got to know when to hold 'em. Know when to fold 'em.* We have to know when it's time to act.

At the Red Sea G-d said to Moses, "*Mah titzak eilai, daber el B'nei Yisroel v'yisa'u* – *Why are you crying out to me? Speak to the Jewish People, and go!* (Ex. 14:15) G-d told Moses that it was time to act, not time to pray.

Jacob readied for his encounter with Esav by preparing with prayer, and bribes; first, however, he prepared for war by dividing his camp into two sections.

Not all worry is created equal. Some or most is *traife* (non-kosher). However, there's such a thing as 'Kosher Worry'. Just as it's important to know what *traife* worry is and how to remove it from your life, it's just as important to know when TO worry.

Kosher (productive) worrying helps you get problems solved and that leads to action that you can take right now. *Traife* worry (unproductive) generates a lot of what-ifs that don't lead to any concrete, practical actions.

Traife worry is based on three beliefs:

- 1) If I have a worry, it is important and I should dwell on it
- 2) If I have a worry, then I need to identify all of the possible solutions
- 3) I can't accept uncertainty

Let's imagine you're preparing to drive from St. Louis to Miami.

Examples of unproductive worry would be:

- What if, while driving, my car hits a giraffe? I don't think I have a rider on my policy covering that.
- What if there's a sniper on the way?
- What if when we get to Miami, there's a no-Parking sign on the side of the street by the home we'll be staying with?

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Examples of productive worry would be:

- Where will be able to get gas?
- Where is a map?
- Is the spare tire properly inflated?

The Hebrew word for "luck" -- *mazal* -- is an acronym composed of three different words. *Makom* means "the place". *Zman* means "the time". *La'asot* means "the act". Taking action is an integral part of having good *mazal*.

Conclusion

So Dave was praying. He prayed, "G-d, I've been loyal to you for all these years - why won't you let me win the lottery! I helped those homeless people, went to shul every Shabbos for the last 10 years, even when I was sick. But still you don't let me win the lottery!"

And a voice from Heaven comes down "Dave! Dave! Meet me halfway on this! Buy a ticket!"

Instead of worrying, put your energy into dismissing or accepting the problems you can't solve, or can't reasonably solve now, and pay attention (kosher worrying) to the things you can do something about.

6) Friends and Family

Melvin is walking on a downtown street one day, and he happens to see his old high school friend Harry a little ways up ahead.

"Harry, Harry, how *are* you?" he greets his old buddy after getting his attention.

"Not so good," says Harry.

"Why, what happened?" Melvin asks.

"Well," Harry says, "I just went bankrupt and I've still got to feed my family. I don't know what I'm going to do."

"Could have been worse," Melvin replies calmly. "Could have been worse."

Continuing, Melvin says. "And not only did I go bankrupt, but our house burned down last night."

"Could have been worse," says Melvin again. "Could have been worse."

And then Melvin adds, "If you think that's bad, after all that tzuris, my wife left me!"

Harry nods his head and gives a little optimistic-seeming smile, accompanied by his usual words: "Could have been worse."

Now Harry grabs Melvin by the shoulders.

"Wait a minute!" he says. "What's going on? I've just told you three disasters that happened to me. And every time you say the same thing--"could have been worse."

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For G-d's sake, Harry, I want you to tell me--*How in Heaven's name could it have been any worse?*"

Melvin looks at Harry and says:

"Could have been worse," he says. "Could have happened to me."

Unlike the above-story, there's tremendous power in friends and family to relieve worry, distress and anxiety.

1) Few things make us happier than family. And it's a universal experience; joy and happiness are available to those who have close personal relationships.

Let's look at three questions from a 2005 *Time Magazine Poll*.

1) *What one thing in your life has brought you the greatest happiness?*

Children/grandchildren -- 35%
Family -- 17%
G-d/faith/religion -- 11%
Spouse -- 9%

2) *What are your major sources of happiness? (top 8 answers)*

Your relationship with your children -- 77%
Your friends and friendships -- 76%
Contributing to the lives of others -- 75%
Your relationship with spouse/partner or your love life -- 73%

3) *Do you often do any of the following to improve your mood?*

Talk to friends/family -- 63% of women identified this as their first response -- the most popular response among women. 51% of men identified this as their first response -- second most popular next to 'listen to music.

Notice a trend? People overwhelmingly identify relationships as their greatest joy in life. Can people at times be difficult? Absolutely. The challenge of interacting with others brings to mind the words of the comic who said, "I love humanity; it's people I can't stand!" But at the end of the day, we need people.

So what does this have to do with living a worry-free life?

King Solomon said, "... *da'ageh b'lev ish, yisichena..*" "*If you have a worry in your heart, tell it to others.*" (*Proverbs 12:25*)

In the movie *Crocodile Dundee*, Dundee is talking with some fellows in a bar. One man says that a friend of his going to see a shrink. Dundee, from the Australian outback, doesn't understand what the fellow is talking about.

"You know ...a shrink," the fellow explains. "A psychiatrist. A person who listens to other peoples problems."

"What's the matter?" Dundee wants to know. "Don't he have any mates?" "Mates," of course, is Australian for friends.

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When we speak about something, we bring it out into the open and allow for others to help us. Also, speaking about a difficult situation with an understanding person generally gives us a great sense of hope.

There is a custom in Israel that following a suicide attack on the first day of mourning—when generally only immediate family would come and visit—other victims of terror come as well. The reason is because there is nothing stronger than someone who can walk in and say, "I know how you feel." And speaking about it with someone who understands and cares means that you are no longer alone, you are not the only one facing this situation, but that you have support, you have help.

When you share your worries with those who care about you, three things can happen:

- Maybe you'll get good advice
- Maybe the listener will pray for you He'll daven for you
- Or maybe, the listener will simply listen

According to a trainer of Clydesdale horses, the average Clydesdale is able to pull about 7,000 pounds. Put two Clydesdales together and their combined pull should equal 18,000 pounds. However, working as a team with proper training, the two Clydesdales are capable of pulling 25,000 pounds, more than three times as much as one Clydesdale by itself. This, of course, is the power of synergy. Synergy refers to the phenomenon in which two or more persons working together produce far more than the sum total of them all working separately.

If you have a worry in your heart, tell it to others.

Dr. David Spain is a Professor of Medicine at Stanford University, and runs the trauma and critical care department at Stanford Medical Center. Dr. Spain estimates that 85% of survival in critical care is determined by two standard variables:

- 1) Your age (younger is better) and injuries
- 2) Circumstance -- if your heart attack strikes at Dunkin' Donuts while paramedics are waiting in line for their morning coffee.

One huge X factor in trauma survival rates, Dr. Spain says, is the support of family and friends. It's unquantifiable, but Dr. Spain believes there's some kind of correlation between the size of the crowd in the waiting room and the chances that a patient recover. It's definitely not a guarantee. Plenty of people have perished surrounded by a horde of loved ones. But there's something powerful about family and friendship.

The average American male doesn't have a single close friend. Men have difficulty maintaining relationships. Women, of course, fare better. Does it make a difference if men don't have close friends? . It could be a factor in men's mortality rates -- and worry rates.

Soon after Jack Benny, the famous comedian, died, George Burns was interviewed on TV about his famous friend. "We had a wonderful friendship for nearly 55 years," said Burns. "Jack and I laughed together, played together, worked together, and ate together. I supposed for many of those years we talked every single day." There's a friendship. Everyone needs friends like that.

The *Chofetz Chaim* said: A person who keeps to himself will find it difficult to be in a state of joy.

Get a friend, and get close to your family ...and watch your worries wither away.

7) 4 'Extra Arrows in your Quiver'

Finally, here are 4 'bonus tips' for reducing worry.

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1) Gam zu l'tova

Accustom yourself to say *Gam zu l'tova* -- *This, also, is for the best*. We often don't see the silver lining in the dark cloud. When we're in a tight spot, faith and a good memory can give us the confidence that there's something beneficial going on that we don't yet see.

On doomed Pan Am Flight 103, a checked-in passenger never made it onto the plane because he ducked into a bathroom just before final boarding call -- and got locked into the stall. When he finally got out, the plane had departed.

2) Life is a test

And tests are catalysts for growth.

The Talmud says that had we not been given the Torah, we would have been obligated to learn proper life habits from the observation of G-d's creatures. We can learn something about faith from a very unlikely customer: the lobster.

A lobster is a soft animal that resides within a rigid, inflexible shell. As it grows, the shell becomes very confining. When it becomes oppressive, the lobster retreats to an underwater rock formation where it is safe from predatory fish, sheds its shell, and forms a larger, more spacious one. Eventually this new shell becomes oppressive as the lobster continues its growth, and the process is repeated several times until the lobster reaches its maximum size.

The stimulus for the lobster to throw off its restraining shell so that it may grow is discomfort. Our various tests in life contain the potential for personal growth and closeness to G-d.

3) G-d listens to all prayers. Sometimes, the answer is 'No', or 'Not Yet'

Three Indians -- a Navajo, a Hopi, and an Apache -- were speaking about how powerful their prayers were. The Navajo said, "You know, we Navajo pray for healing, and the patients get well about half the time."

The Hopi said, "We, we Hopis pray for rain, and it happens about 70% of the time."

Finally the Apache spoke up and said: "Yes, but we Apaches have the sunrise prayer dance, and it works every time."

Lack of an answer to our prayers doesn't mean Hashem wasn't listening. It just means his answer was 'no', or 'not yet.' And with a broader perspective and deeper faith, we will be able to even thank Hashem for our unanswered prayers.

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4) One day at a time

יְעַמְס־לָנוּ--הֵל יִשׁוּעָתָנוּ סֵלָה בְּרוּ י, יוֹם יוֹם: Psalm 68:20

*Blessed be the Lord, day by day He beareth our burden, even the God who is our salvation.
Selah*

A Jewish community in medieval Europe was once threatened with expulsion unless a Jew could teach the local ruler's dog to talk. Members of the community prepared to leave, until an elderly man stepped forward to volunteer for the seemingly-impossible task. When asked by the rabbis and others how he could possibly teach a dog to talk, the man said, "I'll inform the ruler that just as it takes two years for a child to learn to speak, I'll need two years to teach his dog to talk. And if you'll ask me, 'what will happen at the end of two years when the ruler sees his dog doesn't talk' -- who knows? Maybe by then the dog will die. Maybe the ruler will die. Maybe G-d will perform a miracle for us. But in the meantime, let's take things one day at a time."

A sign in a 12-Step treatment center reads, "The elevator is broken; please take the 12 steps."

Today's worries may likely disappear tomorrow. Enjoy life, one day at a time.