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How to Deal With Fears



FROM THE SHIURIM OF

HARAV YISROEL BROG שליט"א

ROSH HAYESHIVA, YESHIVAS TIFERES AVIGDOR
GRANDSON OF HARAV HAGAON AVIGDOR MILLER, ZT"L

Dear Loyal Readers,

Regretfully we would like to inform you that due to severe financial constraints, unfortunately, we have to suspend the printing and distribution of Sichos Yisroel (starting from Parsha Balak) in the US, for a foreseeable future. While there is a cost to producing Sichos Yisroel every week (transcribing, editing, type setting) the majority of the week to week expenses are due to the printing and distribution nationally, and at this time we are not able to continue due to our limited resources.

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We ask for your continued financial support so that we can make Sichos Yisroel available week to week. Of course, if you would like to discuss more significant fundraising efforts, please do reach out to us directly so that we can continue to grow this tremendous publication.

With Hashen's help, as we learn to adapt to the current challenges and become a more financially stable organization, we'll inform our readership when we can re-restart the printing of our weekly Sichos Yisroel pamphlets. Meanwhile, we welcome your encouragement, tefillos and support.

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DUDI'S FRIGHTENING DREAMS

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה אֵל תִּירָא אֹתוֹ כִּי בְיָדִי נֹתַתִּי אֹתוֹ וְאֶת כָּל עַמּוֹ וְאֶת אֶרְצוֹ וְעָשִׂיתָ לוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ לְסִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָאֱמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר יוֹשֵׁב בְּחֶשְׁבּוֹן.

“And Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Do not fear him, for I give him and all his troops and his land into your hand. You shall do to him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites who dwelt in Heshbon.’” (Bamidbar 21:34).

Today, we’re going to discuss how to deal with certain fears. I’m going to introduce the topic with a story first.

There was a fellow named Rav Tuvia. Rav Tuvia used to come to a *mosad* once a week. The *rebbe'im* of this *mosad* held a weekly meeting, and he would be present to answer questions and suggest possible answers to issues they faced. He was an expert in dealing with issues, and he would tell them how to deal with various difficulties. In all his years as an expert *mechanech* and in spite of the fact that he dealt with all kinds of problems, the problem he was presented with now was something new. It was a whole file. They opened up the folder. It had the name of somebody there: Dudi. His name was Yehudah, but they called him Dudi. The whole life story of Dudi was spread out over the papers. In very dry letters, it described his *matzav*, his behavior, his *lachatz*. He saw a picture that was very, very rough. The *madrachim* in the *mosad* explained to Rav Tuvia that the problems begin every night. “Dudi wakes up in the middle of the night in a dream, and the whole *binyan* starts to shake from his hysterical cries. We run to help him, and he fights us off with unusual *kochos*. After he gets into a fully awakened state from his dream, he begins to cry *shreklach*, and talks about groups of scary *sheidim* who are all dressed in black. They have these long tongues and their eyes are spitting fire, and they come to him and jump at him, and pursue him with their claws. They *mamash* squeeze him by the neck and hurt him, and choke him until he’s ready to die.”

“The whole fear that darkens this boy’s life is when he goes to sleep. He begs the people in charge in the dormitory where he is staying that they should save him from the monsters that are chasing him. He’s *pashut* desperate. Then eventually, he falls back asleep until he wakes up again with his dreams and starts screaming and shouting again unbelievably, shaking like a leaf.”

You understand that a boy who is missing sleep and has all these fears gets *tzubrachen*. He’s dysfunctional. He goes from day to day, night to night like this. His nights are awful, and his days are far from wonderful. You understand he has a difficult time getting along with people. He’s a *vilde mentsch*. It’s not a *pelah*. The stuff that comes out of his mouth... But his *rebbei'im* and all the people trying to help him are just full of *rachamim*.

Rav Tuvia hears the whole story and says he wants to talk to the child.

They call the child in, and he has a private meeting with the child. He looks at him and gives him a very warm *shalom aleichem*. He tells him to sit down in a chair on the other side of the table. He gives him a drink. Not that he knew he was thirsty, but he wanted to calm him down. He asked him a few questions, and finally when he warmed up, he started to question him about his dreams and the colors of the people who were scaring him in his dreams. After hearing the whole story, he then decided to ask him about his family. Dudi told him that his father and mother are both blind and that he has two brothers who are deaf-mutes. He's the only one that's healthy as of yet. He painted a picture of his life that could not be darker, could not be more bitter. *Pashut* "9 measures" of *yesurim*. The guy was living in fear that any minute something was going to happen to him. With parents like that and two brothers like that, it's four to one! He was the youngest. He was crying while he was talking, and *nebach* not all the tears were Dudi's. Some of the tears were Rav Tuvia's!

When Rav Tuvia got the whole picture of his life, he went over to the drawer, and took out a few pieces of paper, plain white pieces of paper. Then he took out three sharpened pencils. And he said, "Dudi come here. Take these pencils and these pieces of paper." He said, "My dear Dudi, tonight go to sleep regularly. Read *krias shema al hamitah bekavanah rabah*. Read it carefully. And then when you wake up from your sleep and you see these *malachei chabalah* who are frightening you, you wash your hands *netilas yadayim*, put on the light, and I want you to draw a picture of these people, the *sheidim*, as best as you can on this piece of paper."

Dudi said, "Do you think I'm an artist? I'm not an artist, and I'm not the son of an artist." Rav Tuvia said, "That's okay. You just have to do it to the best of your ability. We're not going to sell these pictures. We're not opening an art gallery. Not at this point, anyway. Right now, just write as many things as you can without missing anything. Every eye, every funny-looking nose, every tongue, every fire, red blood, whatever you see, just write it down. Just make the picture the best that you can. You understand, my dear Dudi, what I'm asking you to do?" Dudi swallows hard, and shakes his head. He's *mekabel* to do it. "So tonight," R' Tuvia said, "instead of screaming, what you're going to do is you're going to draw the pictures for me. Use as many papers as it takes. And then, after you finish drawing the pictures, line them up, grab them on both sides, and tear them into little pieces. Not one tear. Keep tearing them to as many pieces as you can. Then, take those pieces of paper and throw those pieces of paper in the garbage can. Then and only then, go back into bed and continue to sleep. If those *reshaim* come back again to you and bother you, don't be afraid. Do again just what I told you. If you listen to me, Dudi, and you're going to follow this *eitzah*, I'm guaranteeing you that within fourteen days, these *malachei chabalah*, these *reshaim*, will never again come to visit you forever. They'll never have the *chutzpah* to come back. You will be *patur* from them and from the ruthlessness *leolam vaed*."

In the recesses of this child's mind, there was now a little light of hope. He never got such a strong promise. He was already imagining himself doing this and being free.

Now, after a number of nights, the trial proved itself and the promise of Rav Tuvia was kept. It didn't take fourteen days. It took much less. After eight days of doing this exercise, it was over. Now that Dudi had begun to have some peace in his bones and he began to sleep like a *mentsch*, he became like all the other children. His mind *pashut* came back. His behavior

came back. The *rebbe'im* could not believe this was the same child. They were whispering between each other about the strange *kishuf* that Rav Tuvia pulled off. The famous *mechanech*. How is it *shayach*? What is the secret? How do you get rid of such monsters who were tearing this kid apart?

HOW DID HE DO IT?

One day, some of the *rebbe'im* came to Rav Tuvia and said, "Could you tell us what was behind this *kishuf*?" Rav Tuvia said, "You have a few minutes? Sit down, and I'll tell you a story. It's a story that I heard from someone. I'll tell you who it was shortly. He told me, as a *mechanech*, he would share it with me."

There was once an *ish chassid*, a *tamim*, a simple man. His name was Baruch, the blacksmith. He lived on the edge of the city, and was *mekushar*, *davuk bechol libo uvechol nafsho* to his rebbe. Who was his rebbe? He was a *chassid* of the first Slonimer Rebbe (R' Avraham Weinberg, 1803-1883), who was known as the *Ba'al Yesod Ha'avodah*. That was the name of a *sefer* the Slonimer Rebbe wrote. Not only Shabbos, not only Rosh Chodesh, not only Yom Tov, any day possible, Baruch the blacksmith of Slonim came knocking on the door asking for *brachos* and advice. He would come into the Rebbe and he would come with urgency every time. When he would finally get into the Rebbe, he would burst out crying and tell the Rebbe about the terrible *tzarah* he's struggling with. What happened? He told the Rebbe, "In the middle of my *melachah* in the shop, my blacksmith shop, while I'm hitting the hammer on the anvil and I'm wearing my stained apron and big gloves, I'm singing *chassidishe niggunim*, and I'm surrounded with all kinds of sparks suddenly, all of a sudden I see all around me a *gantza kapanya* of *sheidim*. I see *ruchos raos*. They're laughing at me, putting me down, and then threatening me. They're trying to frighten me and *shuckel* me. I can't do work anymore. One day and another day I can't work. I can't go on like this." Every time he would come running to his Rebbe and he would tell the Rebbe, "Give me a *brachah*. You have to help me out. What should I do?"

Finally, the Rebbe tells him, "Baruch, my *tiere* Baruch," he says, "Tell me. Do these *mazikim* that come to you in the middle of work wear belts?" That's what he asked him. He said, "Rebbe, they're all wearing belts." The Rebbe said, "Baruch, let me tell you what the *eitzah* is. Go back to work and don't be afraid anymore. The next time they come to you, take your hands, you're a strong man, stick it in their *gartel*, and tell them my name and my mother's name and bring them here to me. Bring them to Slonim straight to my house. You hear what I'm telling you? I'm telling you I'm going to take care of it. You have my word. You shouldn't be afraid. If you have them by the *gartel* they have no *koach*."

The guy said, "Let me *chazer* it over. I should grab them by the *gartel*, tell them the Rebbe's name and his mother's name, and then it's all going to be fine?" "Yeah." *Bekitzur* he said, "Rebbe a *dank*," and the guy skips out of the Rebbe's house and back to his shop in his little *shtetl*. He *mamash* felt empowered.

For the next few months, the guy didn't show up. Then, finally, one day he shows up but without any *mazikin* in his hand. Without any *gartlach*. Without even a piece of a *gartel*. The Rebbe asked, "What happened to the *chevra*?" "Rebbe, you should have *arichus yamim veshanim*," he said. "All I had to do

was say the Rebbe's name and the Rebbe's mother's name and they became so frightened that before I could even grab them by the *gartlach*, they were out the door. They never came back again. From then on, they were frightened of me."

The Nesivos Shalom, Rav Shalom Noach Berezovsky (1911-2000),¹ was the one who told this story to Rav Tuvia. He said, "I'm telling you, Rav Tuvia, I want you to hear this story as a *mechanech*." He said to him, "Did you hear the *ma'aseh* Rav Tuvia?" He said, "Yeah." He said, "I want to ask you a question. Tell me, was the story I just told you a *sugya* in *meseches mofsim*, something that was taught and learned in the *beis medrash fun de alter zeida*, the Ba'al Yesod Ha'avodah, or maybe it's *stam* a lesson in psychology, in understanding the human mind? How do you *farshteit* this *ma'aseh*?"

Rav Tuvia thought for a minute, and he said, "*Leaniyas da'ati* since you're asking me this *shaylah* it wasn't a *mofes*. It wasn't a *rebbishe mofes*. It was an understanding in human psychology." The Rebbe, Rav Shalom Noach asked him, "Why do you think that?"

THE IMAGINARY WORLD

Rav Tuvia said as follows. The *mekor* of the suffering of Baruch the blacksmith was in the *olam hadimyon*. Every person lives in a conscious world, a conscious mind, and then there's also the subconscious mind. In the subconscious mind, there is awareness. People are aware of the subconscious. There is imagination, all kinds of imagination. And there are also things you're not aware of. He said no medicine in the world can heal a sickness that has its source in the realm of the *dimyonos shel ha'adam*. The only way to heal something that's in the *dimyon* of the person's mind is to take it out of the realm of imagination and bring it into the world of *ma'aseh*. Once you bring it into the real world, now you can be *mevatel* it with the *koach* of reality. He said when the Yesod Ha'avodah told Baruch the blacksmith to grab these imaginary *mazikim* by the *gartlach*, do you know what he did? At that moment, he took these *mazikim* out of the world of imagination and brought them into the physical world. The second he told the Yesod Ha'avodah that they have *gartlach*, it brought it into reality. "Great, you can grab the *gartlach*." So, the Rebbe said, "Grab those *gartlach* and bring them to me." That's all. Once Baruch started relating to those *mazikim* as something he has to *chap* onto in the physical world and he wasn't *matzliach* he became aware that they did not exist. "You see them. Where? Show me."

Rav Shalom Noach, the Nesivos Shalom, told Rav Tuvia he understood well. Rav Tuvia now turned to the *rebbei'im*, and he said, "When I walked out of the room of the Nesivos Shalom after he told me this story, I didn't *chap* what the purpose of him relating this story was. But I know from my experience he doesn't say *zachim stam, sh TUYOT*. So I wrote this story down, and I thought about it, and now when I heard this terrible story of Dudi, I understood that now was the time to utilize this *pach shemen*, this insight into the *nefesh* of a *mentsch*, that the *kohen gadol* hid by me."

¹ Ed. note: R' Shalom Noach's mother, Rebz Tzvia Berezovsky, was a granddaughter of R' Hillel Weinberg, a brother of the first Slonimer rebbe R' Avraham Weinberg (Ba'al Yesod Ha'avodah, 1803-1883). In 1933, R' Shalom Noach married Rebz Chava Miriam Weinberg, the daughter of R' Avraham Weinberg (1889-1981), the Ba'al Bircas Avraham, who became the Rebbe in 1954. R' Shalom Noach succeeded his father-in-law as the Rebbe in 1981.

"Now, you have to understand," he said. "Dudi was under tremendous *lachatz* because of the tremendous experiences that he had in his life. These things don't leave a person for a second. People have certain defense mechanisms that help them deal with challenges. They have behavioral techniques. They act wild. They get involved in different activities. They act like this or that. Different versions. They're really covering up inner fears or inner struggles. What happened here was that when nighttime came and this child would deposit his *neshamah* with the Ribono Shel Olam, these defenses fell down, and the dreams and all the fears came out and destroyed this child. My purpose was to take the *pachad* from the world of imagination and put them down on a piece of paper, bring them into this world so that Dudi could see and demonstrate his control over them. He can rip them to pieces and throw them in the garbage. Until he finally destroyed them. When you write them down, you see that it's not a reality. It wasn't *kishuf*. It was the *koach* of understanding human psychology."

BRINGING IMAGINATION INTO REALITY

The whole idea is it's *dimyon*. You see people have imaginations. Everybody has *dimyonos*. When you were a kid you remember you thought you wanted to fly? I met a guy like that in a hospital. I asked him, "What were you trying to jump off the roof for?" He told me, "I thought I could fly." He took a sheet, got on top of a roof and jumped off. I said, "Are you out of your mind?" I said, "I also thought I could fly, but I realized I better fly on the ground. You start from the ground. You don't start from on top of the roof. You start from the ground, and when you start from the ground, you start running. If you take off then you know you were successful. But sometimes takeoff doesn't work, and it's a bad day for flying. You don't start from the roof and jump off. If you start from the roof and jump off, if you don't make it, you're going to end up in the hospital like you did." The guy said, "I didn't think about that." I said, "Next time that's what you have to do."

But the idea is to always take a person's *dimyonos* and bring them into the real world. When you have a child, and the child says, "I'm afraid of monsters." You know what the *eitzah* is? There is only one *eitzah*. You turn on the light and you say, "Let's look under the bed together." You lift up the bed so everybody can see. You look under it, and you say, "Where is it?" The kid looks because he could almost swear that he saw a monster. He almost saw that big head sticking out. Then you say, "Is it in the closet?" Let's say a kid is afraid of the dark. I've done this with a number of children. What you do is a very simple thing. You say, "Come with me." I take them into a room that's lit. I sit down on a chair with them, and then I turn off the lights. I tell them to start breathing. I say, "Do you think any monster is in this room? We were just in this room when it was lit, and there were no monsters." Then you go into another room where the lights are off. You sit down, and you say, "Are there monsters?" Maybe. So you put the light on. There are no monsters here. What you do is you bring the *dimyon* into the world of reality. Then you know what happens? All fears dissipate.

DEALING WITH PHOBIAS

I've dealt with people who were afraid to go shopping. There are people who are afraid to get into a car. They have tremendous phobias. There are people in this world who have such phobias you would not believe it. They're afraid to go on buses. I told you I had a roommate back in the day, in the

yeshivah. This roommate used to ask me all the time why I wasn't afraid to walk from my side of the room to his side of the room. There was a big picture window. I said, "Afraid of what?" He said, "How do you know a rock or a brick is not coming through the window when you're going across?" I said, "It's set back from the road. You'd have to have a machine to throw a rock in the window." I said, "I don't see any trucks out there. I don't see any machines." When he would come to my side of the room he would literally get down on all fours and come to my side of the room. I would walk with him. I would say, "Here, stand behind me," and he would stand behind me. I said, "See? There is nothing there. Look over my shoulder." He was a very tall guy. He was much taller than me. He would hunker down and look over my shoulder. I said, "Look over my shoulder. Look there's nothing. Nobody. Now stand up." I used to walk away and he used to jump. People are afraid.

I used to walk with him in the street. He always used to ask me, "How come you're not afraid a car is going to come on the sidewalk and run you over?" I said, "Because it hasn't happened yet. I never saw it happen. I don't know anybody it happened to." He said, "Didn't you ever read about it? I said, "I read about a lot of things."

Parents sometimes instill fear in their children, unfounded fears. Parents say, "Oh, that's so dangerous!" And the kid thinks who knows what's going to happen. It's not so dangerous. You have to know how to train a child to deal with fears. But the *yesod* of all fears is that they exist in the *olam hadimyon*, and all you've got to do is bring them out of the *olam hadimyon*, and then they become real. Just talking about it makes the fear go away. That's why when people tell me they're afraid, you know what I tell them? "You have to face your fears and you will see that they are not serious."

I will give you an example. I had a *talmid*. The guy was so petrified, I can't explain it to you. To the point he would get hives and sweat to go shopping in a store! He didn't know what was going to happen, how he would find the way. I knew it was his imagination. You know what I said? "You have to go shopping." He would literally start hyperventilating. You *mamash* saw physical manifestations in him. I told him, "Go to the store and come back. You made a mistake, go back to the store and come again."

Now, there are some people that have certain fears because of a trauma they've experienced. Dudi was a young man who experienced trauma. His parents were blind. His first brother was a mute. His second brother was a mute. He was sure the other shoe was about to fall on him. I don't blame him. *Baruch Hashem*, he could see, and he was able to talk and speak and hear. Even with such situations, there are ways to deal with it. You come to the realization that what you experienced is a single episode. This is a single episode. It's not a daily episode. The trauma is also using imagination. Once you have an experience, imagination plays an exaggerated game with you. This is what people have to understand.

PEOPLE IMAGINING THEY ARE TZADDIKIM

Many people have an imagination that they are big *tzaddikim*. I'll tell you a little thing. Big *reshaim* have this imagination, too. They're just as crazy. They don't live in the *olam hametzius*. They live in the *olam hadimyon*. They're really convinced that as much *rishus* as they do, as little *ratzon Hashem* as they do, they tell themselves they're very big *tzaddikim*.

I once knew a mother who was a *rebbetzin* with twelve kids. She was very involved with the community. One day, she decided to become *frei* and to become a *pruste prutzah*. My wife met her one time and asked her, "What are you doing? What happened?" We're talking about a *rebbetzin* who used to go like an *emesse rebbetzin* and now was walking in the street like most people wouldn't walk in their bathroom! "What is this?" She said, "I know Hashem loves me. Hashem judges me by the inside." She gave a whole speech about *ahavas Hashem* and about how Hashem loves people. My wife said, "What should I say?" You know what she should have said? "Wake up and smell the roses."

MUSSAR HELPS PEOPLE CONNECT TO REALITY

That's all in the imagination. People imagine that everything is fine and rosy. All of us do it. You know how many people today, if you tell them there's going to be consequences to your behavior, you know what they say? "Come on. You're always so negative. Come on. It's not true. How do you know that? Were you ever in Gehinom?" You say to them, "Did you ever know anything in life that you can do in a failing manner and get a passing grade? Can you get a job if you fail the interview? Can you become a doctor if you don't go to medical school? You don't show up. You sleep through medical school. Could you do anything afterward? Could you build a house successfully without being there on the job?" No. Things don't happen in your imagination. Then you have to reverse it. The person has to come out and live in the world of reality. That's what *mussar* does.

People don't like reality. They don't like that kind of *mussar*. They like to live in the *olam hadimyon* where it's comfortable for them. When it frightens them, they don't like it, but when the imagination makes everything hunky dory and rosy, then they go for it. So, you try to bring them into the world of *metzius*. It's the same thing. You have to bring them into the world of reality and say, "Where is the behavior you're doing now going to get you in a year or two?" You tell a person, "Do you want to get married in two years? But your behavior is not going to get you married. You're going to mess up. You're heading for failure."

That's what a person has to understand. If you understand that, then you're going to be *matzliach*.

Participant question: What do you do if a person is terrified of lightning, when he's outside?

Answer: Usually if a person is afraid of lightning, it's no big deal. If you're afraid of locomotives or spaceships hitting him, you don't have to be afraid of that. What's the big deal? You don't face it every day. The fear of lightning is not a bad fear. Let's say a person is afraid of fire. Because of that he won't play with fire. That's not a bad fear. Fear is only a problem when it impedes your life. If you're afraid to do *aveiros* because you're afraid you're going to choke - even if it's not true and you won't choke - it's not a bad fear. Many people used to have a fear of *aveiros* and that kept them from doing *aveiros* until one guy tested it. He took a pork sandwich and he took a bite out of it, and said, "See, I'm not choking." That guy broke many people's fears. People began to see that you can be *mechellal Shabbos*, and you don't drop dead. Beforehand, everybody told you "a car is going to hit you on the spot," meaning to say, you'll get *sekilah* on the spot if you *mechallal Shabbos*. But

we don't see it happening. No. It takes a couple of weeks, a couple of months, a couple of years. Maybe this *gilgul*. Maybe the next *gilgul*. Eventually, you get it but what happens is that when it doesn't happen, the fear dissipates.

Participant question: What if you have a fear of lightning while you are in the house?

Answer: You have to know the following: thunder and lightning Hakadosh Baruch Hu makes to instill fear in a person. That's what the *gemara* says, so that's the message. There is a message when lightning occurs, so to make nothing of it would be incorrect. How do you deal with a message that comes together with fear? The question is how to deal with it. And the answer is all you've got to do is *teshuvah*. If you do *teshuvah* you have nothing to fear. If you accept the message, the fear goes away. That's how you deal with that. If a person is afraid of Hashem and therefore he can't put a light on Shabbos. *Baruch Hashem*. That's a good fear!

Participant question: How should a person deal with a fear that they won't pay their rent?

Answer: If you are talking about choosing *not* to pay your rent, that's not a fear. Now, what commonly happens is a lot of people are afraid they won't be *able* to pay the rent because they won't have the money. That's a rational fear. "I'll get kicked out of my apartment." That's a fear. But choosing not to pay rent - that's also an unimaginable fear because you have to be responsible. There is a difference between responsibility and fear. If a person is afraid he can't pay his rent and because of that, he goes and gets the rent money, that's a good thing. If a person is afraid he can't pay the rent and because of that he doesn't answer his door when his landlord is knocking, and he puts on his own locks and only goes out at night, then that is *meshuge*.



IN SUMMARY

Hashem created us with imaginations and a whole world of *dimyon*. The olam *hadimyon* can be a place people go to because it is comfortable for them. Sometimes the olam *hadimyon* breeds fear. The stories with Dudi and the blacksmith from Slonim demonstrate that taking an imaginary fear out of the world of imagination and into the world of reality gives us a handle on it. This was the advice of the Nesivos Shalom that enabled people to extinguish their fears. People must realize who they are in reality. This means 1) the reality of being who you are and not deluding yourself that you are someone else and, 2) being honest with yourself about where your ma'asim will take you in life (like a person who does aveiros and believes they will be okay). If a fear helps a person be more responsible it can be considered a good fear. However, if a fear is debilitating a person should use the tools mentioned here (or seek professional help if necessary). We should use living in reality to focus on our responsibilities in life. This week (bli neder) I will think about one fear I have. I will try to ask: Does this fear limit my living in a healthy way? Is there a way I can bring the fear into the world of reality, such as by speaking about it, drawing it and tearing it up, or writing about it? Can I see how reducing or removing the fear will help me improve my avodas Hashem?

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