

Dealing with Anxiety. Dealing with Plague. Some Wisdom from Jewish Sources.

Source Sheet by Rabbi Howard Goldsmith based on sheet by Rabbi Scott Bolton

Coping With Anxiety

Exodus 32:1

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him.”

What "gods" are we in danger of making at our time of uncertainty?
What "gods" have you already seen people creating?

Proverbs 12:25

If there is anxiety [*yashchena*] in a man’s mind let him quash it, And turn it into joy with a good word.

Yoma 75a:2

§ The Gemara explains another verse in Proverbs: **“If there is care in a man’s heart, let him quash it [*yashchena*]”** (Proverbs 12:25). **Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi** dispute the verse’s meaning. **One said: He should forcefully push it [*yaschena*] out of his mind.** One who worries should banish his concerns from his thoughts. **And one said: It means he should tell [*yesihena*] others his concerns,** which will lower his anxiety.

When should we push away our anxiety?
What is a healthy way to do that?
And, when do we talk to others about our anxiety?

The following texts will be read together and discussed in BREAK OUT GROUPS

Yevamot 63b:15

A The Gemara quotes additional statements from the book of Ben Sira: **Do not suffer from tomorrow's trouble**, that is, do not worry about problems that might arise in the future, **as you do not know what a day will bring. Perhaps** when **tomorrow comes**, the individual who was so worried will **not** be among the living, and **he** was **consequently upset over a world that is not his**.

B **Prevent a (public) crowd from inside your house**, do not let many people enter, **and do not** even **bring all** your friends into **your house**. Make sure, however, that **a crowd seeks your welfare**, and that you have many allies.

Text A:

Is the possibility of death the only reason not to worry about the future?

Text B:

The value of this advice today is clear. What is the value of it in normal times?

Why are these texts right next to each other in the Talmud? How might they be related?

We will come back together to read and discuss this text

Public Health

Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 116:5

One must refrain from putting coins in one's mouth, lest it's covered with dried saliva of those afflicted with boils. He should not put the palm of his hand in his armpit, lest his hand touched a *metzora* or a harmful poison. He should not put a loaf of bread under his armpit, because of the sweat. He should not put a cooked item or drinks under the bed, since an evil spirit rests on them. He should not stick a knife in an esrog or a radish, lest one fall on its edge and die. Hagah: Similarly, he should be careful of all things that cause danger, because danger is stricter than transgressions, and one should be more careful with an uncertain danger than with an uncertain sin/forbidden action. They also prohibited to go in a dangerous place, such as under a leaning wall, or alone at night. They also prohibited to drink water from rivers at night or to put one's mouth on a stream of water and drink, because these matters have a concern of danger. It is the widespread custom not to drink water during the equinox, and the early ones wrote this and it is not to be changed. They also wrote to flee from the city when a plague is in the city, and one should leave at the beginning of the plague and not at the end. And all of these things are because of the danger, and a person who guards his soul will distance himself from them and it is prohibited to rely on a miracle in all of these matters.

In our context, what is the distinction between a "danger" and a "sin"?
What do we think of these (very strict) rabbis drawing the distinction between the two?

Bava Kamma 60b:2-3

In case you need it: "The Talmud teaches: "The Sages taught, if there is plague in the city, gather your feet – i.e.-limit the time you spend out of the house, as it is stated in the verse: And none of you shall go out of the opening of his house until the morning.' And it says in another verse: 'Come, my people, enter into your chambers and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself for a little moment until the anger has passed by (Isaiah 26:20)"

Why is it so hard for us to self-quarantine when, apparently, we've been at it for thousands of years?