

Getting the Message

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Negative emotions are extremely powerful and often completely debilitating. In fact, nothing has the ability to stunt our spiritual growth and life satisfaction like negativity. It's essential for us to take the initiative to learn about ourselves and evaluate our reactions when dealing with such emotions. With Rebbe Nachman's guidance, we can transform these emotions into great tools.

Let's deal with fear. Like everything else in the world, fear is not some unfortunate feeling, but a creation of God. The opening word of the Torah, *BeReiShYT* (In the beginning) (Genesis 1:1) is an acronym for *YaREi BoSheT* (fear-humility). The purpose of Creation, says the *Zohar*, is for man to humble himself and appreciate God's greatness by means of fear.

Perhaps fear of God conjures up a vision of sinister angels smacking the living daylights out of you for doing something wrong. That idea is simply misplaced. True, there is punishment in store for our misdeeds; however, the punishment itself is a cleansing process for the soul and truly for our

eternal benefit.

Fear of sin is actually destructive when we view it negatively. In that case, it's a tool used by the *yetzer hara* to bring us to anxiety and to feeling that God is utterly distant from our lives. Basic fear of God reminds us that He is always present, especially when we're at a moment of weakness and are most vulnerable. Wouldn't you wish for your mother to appear waving her finger before you made some really dumb choice? Positive fear creates awareness that God is before us always, available to us and cautioning us to avoid the painful pitfalls of life. When we gain this God-awareness and humble ourselves, we can also begin to develop the deeper levels of grasping His greatness and awesomeness. This is the essential purpose of Creation – to get to know God.

The fears and anxiety we experience from suffering or worrisome situations are really wake-up calls from our loving Father in Heaven. They are reminders that He misses us and that we've become distracted from our real purpose down here on earth. By remembering Him and the purpose of Creation, we elevate fear back to its true, positive source, thereby dispelling the negative version of fear that we live with.

This can all be seen in our *parashah*. All the miracles and wonders that God performed in Egypt were meant to demonstrate to the world that He is in charge. Pharaoh, however, refused to recognize God. God responded to this by saying, "But regarding you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear God" (Exodus 9:30). God sent the Egyptians plague after plague, but they refused to get the message. Finally they allowed the Jewish people to leave, but then pursued them to the Sea of Reeds, where they met their untimely end. The Jewish people witnessed these same awesome plagues and had a completely different reaction: "And Israel saw the great work that God did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared God" (ibid., 14:31).

Rebbe Nachman teaches that the whole world is a very narrow bridge – but the main thing is not to cause oneself to fear at all. We all experience rough times in life and, more often than not, live with much fear and anxiety. Yet each of us has the ability, with the help of God, to elevate these negative feelings to a place of faith and recognition of God's sovereignty. When we live with the constant recognition that God is in charge and that whatever He does is for our best, we are able to elevate our fears, transforming them into a positive life of purpose and meaning. Amen.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhoh Bekhor Beheimah Tehorah 4:3