

sixth&i

The Night is Dark and Full of Terrors: Jewish Help for Nighttime Anxiety

R' Jesse Paikin | rabbijesse@sixthandi.org

When the lights are out, the world is quiet, and there are no more distractions. That's when anxiety often rears its ugly head. Late in the night, join Rabbi Jesse for some very human stories of how our tradition approaches anxiety, and how we can work together to calm the soul.

1. Psalm 91:1-6

O you who dwell in the shelter of the Most High and abide in the protection of Shaddai—
I say of Adonai, my refuge and stronghold, my God in whom I trust,
that God will save you from the fowler's trap, from the destructive plague.
God will cover you with pinions; you will find refuge under God's wings;
God's fidelity is an encircling shield.
You need not fear the terror by night, or the arrow that flies by day,
the plague that stalks in the darkness, or the scourge that ravages at noon.

יֵשֶׁב בְּסִתְרֵי עֲלִיּוֹן בְּצִלְ שָׁדַי יִתְלוֹנֵן:
אִמַּר לַיהוָה מַחְסֵי וּמְצוּדֹתַי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתַי־בְּנֵי־אָדָם:
כִּי הוּא יִצְיִלְךָ מִפֶּחַח יְקוּשׁ מִדְּבַר הַיּוֹת:
בְּאֲבָרֹתָי וּבְתַחֲתֵי־כַנְפָיו תִּתְחַסֶּה צְנִיָּה וְסַחְרָה אֲמִתּוֹ:
לֹא־תִירָא מִפֶּחַח לַיְלָה מִחֵץ יְעוֹף יוֹמָם:
מִדְּבַר בְּאֲפֵל יִהְיֶה מִקָּטָב יִשׁוּד צְהָרִים:

2. Midrash *Bereshit Rabbah* 11:2

When the sun then began to set at the end of the Sabbath and it began to get dark, Adam became afraid. What did God do? God appointed for Adam two flints and struck one against the other. And light emanated from them. And Adam made a blessing on it. What did he say? "*Borei M'orei Ha'eish*" (who creates light sources for fire).

כיון ששקעה החמה במ"ש התחיל החושך ממשמש ובא ונתירא אדם הראשון, שנאמר (תהלים קלט) ואומר אך חשך ישופני ולילה אור בעדני, אותו שכתוב בו הוא ישופך ראש ואתה תשופנו עקב בא להזדווג לי, מה עשה הקב"ה זימן לו שני רעפים, והקישן זה לזה ויצא מהן אור ובירך עליה. מה בירך עליה? בורא מאורי האש...

3. Babylonian Talmud *Avodah Zarah* 8a

The Sages taught: When Adam on the day of his creation saw the sun sinking in the sky before him, he said, "Woe is me! Because I acted offensively, the world is darkening for me and is about to return to darkness and desolation—indeed, this is the death that Heaven has decreed for me."

So he sat down to fast and to weep throughout the night, while Eve wept beside him. But when the dawn began rising, he said, "Such is the way of nature," and then proceeded to offer up a bull.

He arose and sacrificed a bull... as it is stated: "And it shall please the Lord better than a bullock that has horns and hoofs." (Psalms 69:32)

ת"ר יום שנברא בו אדם הראשון כיון ששקעה עליו חמה אמר אי לי שבשביל שסרחתי עולם חשוך בעדי ויחזור עולם לתוהו ובוהו וזו היא מיתה שנקנסה עלי מן השמים היה יושב בתענית ובוכה כל הלילה וחווה בוכה כנגדו כיון שעלה עמוד השחר אמר מנהגו של עולם הוא עמד והקריב שור שקרניו קודמין לפרסותיו שנאמר (תהלים סט, לב) ותיטב לה' משור פר מקרין מפריס

4. Babylonian Talmud *Avodah Zarah* 8a

The Sages taught: When Adam saw that the day was progressively diminishing, he said, "Woe is me! Because I acted offensively, the world is darkening for me and is about to return to darkness and desolation—indeed, this is the death that Heaven has decreed for me." (as it was written about him (Gen. 3:19): "And to dust shall you return"). He arose and spent eight days in fasting and in prayer.

Once he saw that the season of Tevet, (i.e., the winter solstice) and saw that the day was progressively lengthening, he said: "This is the order of the world."

He went and observed a festival for eight days. Upon the next year, he observed both these and these as days of festivities...

ת"ר לפי שראה אדם הראשון יום שמתמעט והולך אמר אוי לי שמא בשביל שסרחתי עולם השוך בעדי וחוזר לתוהו ובוהו וזו היא מיתה שנקנסה עלי מן השמים עמד וישב ח' ימים בתענית [ובתפלה] כיון שראה תקופת טבת וראה יום שמאריך והולך אמר מנהגו של עולם הוא הלך ועשה שמונה ימים טובים לשנה האחרת עשאן לאלו ולאלו ימים טובים הוא קבעם לשם שמים והם קבעום לשם עבודת כוכבים

כיון שראה תקופת טבת וראה יום שמאריך והולך אמר מנהגו של עולם הוא הלך ועשה שמונה ימים טובים לשנה האחרת עשאן לאלו ולאלו ימים טובים הוא קבעם לשם שמים והם קבעום לשם עבודת כוכבים.

5. Baal Shem Tov, *Tzava'at HaRivash*, 87 (1700-1760, founder of Hasidism)

Each [thought] has an *erev* (evening) and a *boker* (morning). *Erev* is an expression of *ta'aruvot* ("mixture," i.e.: having an alien thought – *machshavah zarah* - a thought that is disconnected from an awareness of the Divine). And *boker* is an expression of *bikur* ("visit", i.e.: visiting God – an aspect of the thought that is connected to God.)

When you see something of which you are afraid, say to yourself: "Why should I be afraid of this? It is but a human like myself – let alone if it is but an animal or beast! As the awesome God, blessed be He, is vested in that being [enabling it to exist], how much more should I fear [God] Himself!"

6. Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav, *Eitzot*, Joy #27 (1772-1810)

When a person despairs, their intellect and mind go into exile. This makes it very hard for them to concentrate their mind on *teshuva*, returning to God. The main reason why people are far from God is that they do not stop to consider what the main purpose of their existence is. But when someone is happy their mind becomes settled and they are able to understand things clearly. Joy is freedom. When a person fills their mind with joy, their intellect becomes free from its exile. They can control their mind and intellect however they want so as to concentrate on their goal and return to God.

7. Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* p. 87-88

An active life serves the purpose of giving man the opportunity to realize values in creative work, while a passive life of enjoyment affords him the opportunity to obtain fulfillment in experiencing beauty, art, or nature. But there is also purpose in that life which is almost barren of both creation and enjoyment and which admits of but one possibility of high moral behavior: namely, in man's attitude to his existence, an existence restricted by external forces. A creative life and a life of enjoyment are banned to him. But not only creativeness and enjoyment are meaningful. If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete.

8. Mishlei / Proverbs 28:14

Happy is the man who is anxious / fearful always;
But one who hardens their heart falls into misfortune.

אֲשֶׁרִי אָדָם מִפְתּוֹד תָּמִיד
וּמִקְשָׁה לָבוֹ יפול בְּרָעָה:

9. Babylonian Talmud Yoma 75a

“If there is anxiety 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.” And one said: “He should tell [*yesichena*] others his about it.”

(משלי יב, כה) דאגה בלב איש ישחנה רבי אמי ורבי אסי חד אמר ישחנה מדעתו וחד אמר ישיחנה לאחרים

10. Psalm 6

Chastise me not in Your anger, Adonai, Chasten me not in Your wrath.
Be merciful to me, for I am weak.
Heal me, for my very bones tremble, my entire being trembles.
Adonai – how long?
Turn to me, Adonai; save my life.
Help me because of Your love.
In death there is no remembering You.
In the grave who can praise You?
Weary am I with groaning and weeping, nightly my pillow is soaked with tears.
Grief dims my eyes; they are worn out with all my woes.
Away with you, doers of evil!
Adonai has heard my cry, my supplication; Adonai accepts my prayer.
All my enemies shall be shamed.
In dismay they shall quickly withdraw.

לְמַנְצַח בְּגִיבוֹת עַל־הַשְּׁמִינִית מְזִמּוֹר לְדוֹד: יְהוָה אֶל־בְּאֶפֶס תּוֹכִיחֵנִי וְאֶל־בְּחֶמְתְּךָ תִּיַסְרֵנִי:
חַנּוּן יְהוָה כִּי אֶמְלֵל אָנֹכִי רַפְּאֵנִי יְהוָה כִּי נִבְהַלּוּ עֵצָמִי: וְנַפְשִׁי נִבְהַלָּה מְאֹד וְאֵת [וְאֵתָהּ] יְהוָה עַד־מָתִי:
שׁוּבָה יְהוָה חֲלֹצָה נַפְשִׁי הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי לְמַעַן חֲסֹדְךָ: כִּי אֵין בְּמוֹת זְכָרְךָ בִּשְׂאוֹל מִי יוֹדֵה־לָּךְ:
יִגְעָתִי בְּאַנְחָתִי אֲשַׁחֶה בְּכָל־לַיְלָה מִטְּתִי בְּדַמְעָתִי עַרְשִׁי אֲמֹסָה: עֲשִׂשָׁה מִכְעַס עֵינַי עָתָקָה בְּכָל־צוֹרְרָי:
סוּרוּ מִמֶּנִּי כָל־פְּעֻלֵי אֲנֹן כִּי־שָׁמַע יְהוָה קוֹל בְּכוּי: שָׁמַע יְהוָה תְּחִנָּתִי יְהוָה תִּפְלֹתִי יִקַּח:
יִבְשׁוּ וַיִּבְהַלּוּ מְאֹד כָּל־אֵיבֵי יִשְׁבּוּ וַיִּבְשׂוּ רַגְעַ:

11. Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav, *Sichot HaRan* 274, 275

It is very good to have a special room set aside for Torah study and prayer. Such a room is especially beneficial for secluded meditation and conversation with God.

And *Rabbeinu z"l* said that it is very good even just to sit in such a special room. The atmosphere itself is beneficial, even if you sit there and do nothing else. Even if you do not have a special room, you can still seclude yourself and converse with God. The Rebbe also said that you can create your own special room under your tallit. Just drape your tallit over your eyes and converse with God as you desire.

You can also seclude yourself with God in bed under the covers. This was the custom of King David, as it is written, "Each night I converse from my bed" (Psalms 6:7).

12. Babylonian Talmud *Ta'anit* 11a

A person should be distressed together with the community. As we found with Moses our teacher that he was distressed together with the community, as it is stated (during the war with Amalek): "But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat upon it" (Exodus 17:12).

But didn't Moses have a *pillow* or a *cushion* to sit upon?!

Rather, Moses said as follows: Since the Jewish people are immersed in suffering, I too will be with them in suffering. And anyone who is distressed together with the community will merit seeing the consolation of the community.

יצער אדם עם הצבור שכן מצינו במשה רבינו שציער עצמו עם הצבור שנאמר (שמות יז, יב) וידי משה כבדים ויקחו אבן וישמו תחתיו וישב עליה וכי לא היה לו למשה כר אחת או כסת אחת לישב עליה אלא כך אמר משה הואיל וישראל שרויין בצער אף אני אהיה עמהם בצער וכל המצער עצמו עם הצבור זוכה ורואה בנחמת צבור.