

Kol Ha-Rav

The Buddhist argued that we must sever our attachment to things, life, love, and possession, for these things will only lead to misery, once we inevitably lose them. If we no longer crave things, if we don't worry about that which is dear to us, then we will find a sense of inner peace, our radical detachment. Don't worry about the things that are precious to you, like your health, your key to a house, or your brother's welfare, because they are not really yours to own. Your attachment to them is fleeting, so don't worry about them. Detachment can lead to inner peace. Some faiths teach a different approach to worry. They tell us to surrender ourselves to the will of God. Don't worry about that which you cannot control. Let God navigate your life through the pain, anxiety, and fear.

The seventeenth century philosopher, Baruch Spinoza thought of worry is "an inconstant pain" arising from the thought that something bad might happen in the future. For Spinoza, worry is essentially future oriented. Even if our focus of worry is about something that happened in the past, it is only in relation to how it will affect our future.

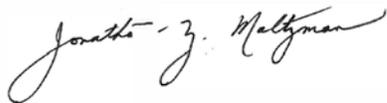
We all worry about something or someone; the health of our parents, our children, our investments, our jobs, the future, our spouses, even ourselves. But not all worry is unhealthy. Sometimes, if it's at appropriate levels, it can indicate a commitment to life and all that we hold dear. To worry shows that we care about our lives. Rabbis worry about their congregations. Doctors worry about their patients. Lawyers their clients, teachers their students, businesspersons their customers, and on and on. That's the way it should be.

But worry, if it goes unchecked, unmanaged, if it starts to consume our thoughts, can rob us of life. So many things that we worry about never happen. We worry about our children driving, and the threats to their safety come from a completely different direction. We worry about cancer, and we get struck down by heart disease. It is said that only 8% of our worries are "legitimate." Forty percent will never happen to us. Thirty per cent is worry about people's criticism of us. Twelve per cent over old decisions that we can't change. Ten percent over our health. Thus 92 per cent of our worries are useless.

It's like the story of a woman who visited the Planetarium in New York. A show was given about the sun and its relationship to the earth. After the performance, the woman approached the narrator and asked, "How many years before the sun blows up?" "Twenty **billion**," said the man. "Thank goodness," replied the woman. I thought you said "twenty **million**."

Throughout the centuries our faith has encouraged different strategies to confront our worries. Some turned to humor. Some turned to prayer or meditation. The mystics and disciples of the Musar movement, founded by Rabbi Israel Salanter in the mid 19th century, would address their fears and worries, by chanting prayers in a repetitive fashion in order to center the mind and focus the soul. It might seem odd, but when we are overwhelmed with worry and anxiety, we can try reading a psalm or coming to the shul and sit quietly in the sanctuary.

There are times to worry with intensity. Worry can make us wiser and more deliberate in our choices. And when we find ourselves in those circumstances when there is nothing we can do may we find peace in that as well. We are, all of us, traveling down the same road that many before us have followed, and it was ok. As we begin the year 2017 may we find comfort in our faith so we can center our agitated minds and calm our troubled hearts.



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