



Overcoming Fear in the Time of Corona

Sitting around the kitchen table, eating a bowl of cereal, I kept myself busy going through one of the neighborhood magazines that happen to be lying on the table. After quickly going through a bunch of ads and articles that didn't apply to me, I took interest in an article about an individual in the neighborhood who was doing acts of kindness. At the end of the article the highlighted individual shared a favorite quote from French Author Andre Gide: "*Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore.*"

Wow, I just loved that quote! It hit me right in the gut. Every new year greets me with new ideas, resolutions and self-reflection. When I examine some of the things I didn't accomplish or resolutions that were left undone, I have to admit that there are simply times I was afraid. Afraid of failure. Afraid of what others might think. Afraid of taking on too much or too little.

Fear can be paralyzing, and subversive.

So how do we overcome fear?

Belief in one self is a good start. Practice on easy tasks that lead up to bigger tasks is another. Accompany yourself with good friends or teachers who encourage you to grow. But I would say, that overcoming fear requires *courage*.

Andre Gide reminds us that we can not grow as people unless we are willing to take chances. A child can not learn to ride a bike without removing the training wheels and getting a skinned knee or two. Likewise, we can not expect ourselves to learn a new skill, be successful at a new job or even make a new friend unless we are willing to overcome our fear of failure or rejection. A little bit of courage goes a long way.

Andre Gide's quote has a counterpart in Jewish thought. "*The whole world is a narrow bridge and the main thing is not to be afraid.*" This sentence, written more than 200 years ago by Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav, a famous 18th century mystic, reminds us that our life journey is a series of challenges. The bridge from one destination to another portends both fear of falling and the excitement of success. Fear is what stops us from crossing. Courage is what gives us the strength to move forward.

As we look at 2020 and into 2021, the Coronavirus has filled our lives with so much fear. Some of it is justified to be sure. No one wants to come down with Covid. But we do ourselves a disservice if we become paralyzed by our fear, afraid to use this time to improve our lives in ways that demand courage.

Maybe there is a relationship that needs repair. Maybe there is a business opportunity that you have avoided because of lack of confidence. Maybe you need to make changes to improve your health but are afraid to see a doctor. Maybe you are stuck in your ways and need the resolve to change.

The time between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is often a time when we become similarly introspective. We call this "*cheshbon ha-nefesh*"; an accounting of the soul. I would argue that *this entire time of Covid* is one of *cheshbon ha-nefesh*. For months our fear has caused us to wonder whether we or our friends will be written into the book of life. What better motivation do we need to look at our lives and understand ourselves-our weaknesses and strengths; our successes and failures-more deeply than now?

Hmm. All this thinking, and it started with a quote found in a throwaway magazine. Amazing where we can find the encouragement to find courage if we only look.