

HOW TO STAY SAFE IN THE WORLD TODAY

1 Avoid riding in automobiles because they are responsible for 20 percent of all fatal accidents.

2 Do not stay at home because 17 percent of all accidents occur in the home. (that's 37 % already)

3 Avoid walking on streets or sidewalks because 14 percent of all accidents occur to pedestrians. (now that's 51%)

4 Avoid traveling by air, accidents involve these forms of transportation. (that's 67%)

5 Of the remaining 33 percent, 32 percent of all deaths occur in hospitals. Above all else avoid hospitals.

6 You will be pleased to learn that only 0.01 percent of all deaths occur in a synagogue, and these are usually related to previous physical disorders.

Therefore, logic tells us that the safest place for you to be at any given point in time is in Synagogue services.

Torah Study is even safer. The number of deaths during Torah Study is too small to register. For safety's sake, go to Shul as often as possible, and attend Torah Study. It could save your life!

And yet—virtually every Temple at this season has extra security guards. Because security is not a matter of reason, statistics are not the chief determiner of most of our anxieties related to security. Security is a matter of feeling. The only thing that matters is feeling safe. Today I want to address the topic of security and safety—how concerns for security pervade all of our lives and how Judaism offers us a unique and balanced approach to addressing our security concerns at every level.

From the moment we wake up until we go to sleep many aspects of our lives have a security or safety demission. We lock our homes and many of us set an alarm. We lock our cars. We have so many codes that protect our computers, bank accounts, entrance ways that a large source of stress—in life at least—is remembering all the codes that give me access to my life. We pass by security guards at banks, malls, schools and even the temple. Since 9/11 travel has become more about security than anything else. When packing for a trip we must consider what we can take with us in order to get on a plane without hassle. And then there is the news and our national policy—how we vote, our political activities now are often based on our personal feelings towards the security of the nation. And these are just our security concerns that relate to keeping the bad people out and the good people in.

We are also concerned about the safety of our bodies, our health. We slather ourselves with hand sanitizer and sunscreen. We eat only organic to keep out the chemicals. We avoid prewashed bagged green like lettuce and spinach. Did anyone hear about the heath concerns related to microwave popcorn? That one took me over the edge.

Our lives are filled with security and safety concerns and thus our lives are filled with fear—of illness, of terrorism, of poisons, of other people. We live our lives on the defensive. Threats are everywhere.

And yet there is one spiritual truth that is core to most religious/spiritual systems and especially highlighted at this season within Jewish liturgy—there is no such thing as security. In our liturgy for the high holidays we read the una tonetokef prayer—who shall live on and who shall die, who by fire, who by drowning, who by sword and who by wild beast, who by hunger and who by thirst, who by earthquake and who by plague, who shall be safe and who harmed, who will be poor and who rich, who will be taken down and who will be raised up. Our tradition leaves us with questions-haunting questions instead of comforting answers.

Our ancestors who wrote this prayer concerns were limited and benign compared to our own litany of anxieties:

This poem by Jeanne Marie Beaumont entitled afraid so seems a good addition to the traditional prayer:

Is it starting to rain?

Did the check bounce?

Are we out of coffee?

Is this going to hurt?

Could you lose your job?

Did the glass break?

Was the baggage misrouted?

Will this go on my record?

Are you missing much money?
Was anyone injured?
Is the traffic heavy?
Do I have to remove my clothes?
Will it leave a scar?
Must you go?
Will this be in the papers?
Is my time up already?
Are we seeing the understudy?
Will it affect my eyesight?
Did all the books burn?
Are you still smoking?
Is the bone broken?
Will I have to put him to sleep?
Was the car totaled?
Am I responsible for these charges?
Are you contagious?
Will we have to wait long?
Is the runway icy?
Was the gun loaded?
Could this cause side effects?
Do you know who betrayed you?
Is the wound infected?
Are we lost?
Will it get any worse?

Who, where, when, how? We do not know...We must humble ourselves. These questions cannot be answered on this day or any day. There are no guarantees in life. And this leaves us feeling fundamentally insecure. This is what leads us to surround and fill our lives with security measures thinking that passwords, locks and bolts, walls and barbed wire, all these things will help us not feel afraid.

But it does not work. All this security all around us and we still feel afraid.

Rabbi Nachman of bratzlov wrote—the entire world is a very narrow bridge and the most important thing is not to be afraid. The entire world is a very narrow bridge—we could fall this way or that, or have something come at us that pushed us off the side. And our goal needs to be figuring out how to live without fear as we journey along our way. The first thing that God says to Abraham when God calls him to journey towards the promised land is “fear not”. God repeats this time and again to our ancestors-fear not. Fear does not help you along the way. In the words of rabbi Shmuli Boteach—who wrote a great book about living with courage in the age of caution--fear is the hammer that beats our lives into dust.

So how do we do this? How do we live without fear, how do we feel safe in an age of insecurity? Other religious traditions suggest embracing the insecurity—both Buddhist and Christian writers speak of letting go, living with the reality of insecurity, not struggling against it. In many ways this is appealing—but then I remember but I am Jewish. Jews historically have not had a very Zen approach to security and safety. We are not supposed to live in fear but does this mean that you will ever let your child ride a motorcycle or play in a public sand box or walk home alone before

the age of b'nai mitzvah? Does that mean that we drink the tap water when we travel? It does not mean that we just go with the flow.

The first commandment in the torah is to be fruitful and multiply. The most important law from the rabbinic tradition—that supercedes Shabbat, Yom Kippur, anything—is pikuach nefesh—to save a life. There is a story that during a time of community wide illness famous rabbi brought a roll on to the bima during yom kippur and ate it in front of the entire congregation just to show that you must eat if you are not well—even on yom kippur! Life is our primary value in Judaism—not the next life or the after life but this life—right here and now. Therefore we are going to take security measures Because God forbid we did not take precautions, and what if something happened? The torah makes it very clear—you must build a little fence, rampart, on your roof because god forbid some kids got up there and one fell and died—not only would someone loose his life but then you would have to live with the guilt-oy, the guilt.

So let me am clear—going with the flow, letting go, having faith that God will make everything Ok, abstaining from security measures is not going to make most Jews feel more secure and therefore less fearful. We are not going to embrace insecurity as a spiritual practice. We have our entire history and all of our values with us as we journey and all of this tells us—you must do what you can in order to safe a life, in order to protect life. We have lost too many to be mellow or low key when it comes to protecting life.

But this does not help us with the fear. It probably contributes to it. Therefore there must be other things that we can do to cope with the insecurity of life—to at once feel safe and free of anxiety and fear.

Ralph Waldo Emerson writes, Don't waste life in doubts and fears; spend yourself on the work before you, well assured that the right performance of this hour's duties will be the best preparation for the hours and ages that will follow it.

Emerson, not a Jew, hit the nail on the head. This is the answer. This is what will help us break free from the chains of fear—tikkun olam and gimmiult chasadim.

There is real work that we can do, must do that will help us feel safe and make us fearless:

- For every door in your home that is dead bolted you need to make friends with a neighbor. Pay attention to the lives of your neighbors—if someone is sick make them a meal, if someone has a baby offer to take care of their kids. Connect. This will help you feel unafraid, this will help you feel secure.
- For every bottle of hand sanitizer and bottled water you buy you should donate an equal amount of money to help people all over the world who are living without clean water, who have sewage running through their streets. This will remind you that your life is relatively safe but there is still so much work to do to make our world safer for all people.
- For every dollar you spend on sun screen donate an equal amount to help the fight against global warming. Bike to the beach instead of driving if you are so worried about the harmful effects of the sun. Do something—don't just sit there and worry and protect your own back.
- For every child of our nation we send off to war, we should send an equal number to work around the world for peace, to build homes and schools and

libraries. This will truly help us feel that we are working towards making our word a more secure place.

- For every security guard we hire to protect our temple we should plan an interfaith event with the surrounding churches and mosques and neighbors—this will help us feel safe and welcome in our larger community.
- This Thanksgiving TBT is hosting the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service on November 24th. For any of you who have had security concerns about this community I strangely encourage you to attend. This event will help you feel safer, feel more security because you will feel the love and care of all of our neighboring faith communities in side the walls of this building.

Judaism teaches us that that we must protect life at any cost and we also must avoid living in fear. We cannot sacrifice one for the other. This is an ambitious request. This requires that our approach to security and safety is both short and long term. It requires action on our part—to make sure that we feel safe today and in the future. Judaism does not have a strong focus on the end of days—we believe that there will be many, many tomorrows. Tomorrows that will certainly bring both happy and unhappy surprises. Tomorrows that belongs to our children and grandchildren.

We must pass on to the next generation the legacy of a healthy approach to security and safety. We must teach them that when bad things happen to our community—like 9/11 or the federation shootings—our response is not to simply to close in on ourselves and block out the world. We must not pass on a legacy of self ghettoization. We may do some temporary wall building, take a more security precautions—it is in our protective nature to attempt to shield ourselves from all that

is harmful but I hope and pray that the next generation will also know that when we felt scared and at risk we not only built walls to protect—we also built bridges.

In Israel today they are completing a wall that separates many West Bank Palestinian communities from Israeli communities. It breaks my heart that this wall exists. And yet when I lived in Israel 6 years ago and lived within the context of constant terrorism I myself would have given anything for a wall. Sometimes you get that desperate to feel safe. I hope and pray that this wall is a temporary measure—something that will help Israelis feel stronger and safer. Something that will give them the emotional and mental space to regroup and figure out a sound plan for peace. I know that my job is to encourage Israel to build bridges—to help build communication and understanding that will rise above the wall and that will lead to the eventual dismantling of the wall. I hope that we will all support Israel in creating lasting peace and building bridges to a life affirming future for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Bridges and walls—temporary walls I pray and strong and unyielding bridges. We cannot afford to miss any more opportunities to build bridges and connections and peace in the name of security. We are pretty good at building walls, that is instinctive but this Yom Kippur, as we stand and face the uncertainty of our lives, as we leave and walk into the new year with pocketful of questions about the future my charge to you is to comfort yourself with acts of loving-kindness, to appease your anxiety through working for justice, to quiet your worry through building bridges to with other people and other communities. For every wall there need to be a bridge. This is the only way that we will not close ourselves off to love and care that exists in infinite forms in this world. This is the only way that we can truly ever feel safe in this world.

