

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

WHAT TO DO WHEN WE'RE AFRAID

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News events in these last weeks has brought to mind a question most of us hope never to face, i.e., how would we respond if we were suddenly to see something so horrible that we could not process it? If, God forbid, we were witness to a terrible criminal act, would we be able to respond appropriately? Or would we be so shocked that our "fight or flight" instinct would take over? Or would we simply be so horrified that we would stand rooted to the spot in disbelief, incapable of action?

Before you answer quickly, think of the Virginia Tech shooting spree. One of the people who responded most effectively was Liviu Librescu, a Holocaust survivor. Because he had lived through such incidents before, when he heard the gunfire and the screaming he understood what it meant and how to respond. He blocked the door to his classroom and instructed his students to flee.

The Talmud gives us some guidelines for dealing with paralyzing fear:

When a person is seized is seized with fear, he sees nothing...what is the remedy? He should recite the Shema.

If he is in a place of ritual impurity [where he cannot say the Shema], he should move 6 feet away and say the Shema.

If he cannot say this, he should say this: The goat at the butcher's shop is fatter than me [so if a victim must be taken, let it be the goat]. (B. Megillah 3a)

The Talmud seems to be suggesting that, when one is in danger, one should try to prepare oneself for death and/or center oneself by saying the Shema. And if one cannot say the Shema, one should request that the knife should fall on a replacement, i.e., a sacrificial animal.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever been in a situation that left you so stunned that you were paralyzed? Were you able to regroup or did the shock overwhelm any response? If you were able to respond, how did you move through the shock to formulate a plan of action?
2. Is there a way we could train members of society to prepare them with a plan of action for situations that fall far outside the realm of the everyday? What do you think would be effective? How could we disseminate the

training?

3. If you had, on your "software" the immediate response to danger of, "Say the Shema", would it help clear your mind and figure out what to do?

As always, I look forward to your answers!