

Is love related to fear, and if so, how? How can the space between two people actually bring you closer together? What can you learn from fear? And even when you are fearful, can you choose to trust?

In the third and final installment of the *Love & Fear* trilogy, Hanan's parents teach him that although it may seem counterintuitive, fear is an essential ingredient in finding real love. Judaism agrees. Jewish wisdom, teaching, and stories frequently pair the two emotions, both in describing love and fear of God and between people. In fact, rabbinic commentary teaches the same lesson Hanan hears from his parents - the importance of learning and embracing fear in order to experience genuine love.

① THE SPACE BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE

Real love, as Hanan's parents teach, can only exist in the space between two people, without the ego.

Martin Buber, one of the Twentieth Century's most influential philosophers and theologians, created a relational model which he called *I-Thou*. Buber differentiates between relationships which are primarily based on important but largely straightforward interactions (*I-It*) and those which are deeply interpersonal (*I-Thou*). Because of the challenge in negating our own egotistical needs while recognizing the space between people, *I-Thou* relationships are rare. But they are the relationships we each strive to have.

In describing the goal of I-Thou relationships, Buber explains the importance of removing the ego from the space between people:

No purpose intervenes between I and Thou, no greed and no anticipation; and longing itself is changed as it plunges from the dream into the appearance. Every means is an obstacle. Only where all means have disintegrated encounters occur.

I and Thou, pg. 63

1. Buber teaches that in an *I-Thou* relationship, the space between people has no obstacles. How does this kind of relationship feel different than one that is weighed down with expectations or needs?
2. What do you think Buber means when he says "no purpose intervenes between I and Thou"?
3. In which of your own relationships do you feel your ego is least present? When are you able to put your ego aside and let the other really be who he or she really is?

Hanan's mother adds another element to the relationship between fear and love and the space between two people. She adds that

while it is important to remove the ego from the space between two people, it is also in this space where an important kind of fear can live. She teaches where and how fear exists in the paradigm of love.

MOMMY

Real love needs to be created, in the space **between** the two people **without** the ego. That space **between** the two people is the **unknown**, the uncertainty, the otherness...the FEAR.

1. Why do *you* think otherness and uncertainty feels so frightening?
2. Based on the midrash in this episode about Adam and Eve, what can you do to make the space between you and others feel less scary? When do you feel it is most present?
3. What are examples in your own life of real love or a relationship that was created, as Hanan's mother says, "in the space between two people without the ego"?

② WHAT CAN YOU LEARN FROM FEAR?

Once the inherent uncertainty and fear that exists in the space between people is acknowledged it can offer a way to grow. Though it is difficult, by *embracing* fear you can actually get much deeper, because fear is always pointing to something which is hidden. By following fear, rather than avoiding it, fear can teach us essential things about ourselves and our relationships. This is ultimately a necessary part of growth and love.

One of the core ideas of Chasidic thought from teachers as varied as Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav (1772-1810) to the Sefat Emet, Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (1847-1905) is that when you fall, when you have fear, *if* you embrace it, you have the chance to learn from it.

Rabbi Nachman taught:

Whenever a person rises from one level to the next, it necessitates that he first has a descent before the ascent. Because the purpose of any descent is always in order to ascend. (LM 22)

Hanan's mother teaches it this way:

MOMMY

...They say that when we're falling, we should be happy, because we're being taught how to get back up....

She goes on to incorporate this teaching with previous ones taught earlier in the episode.

MOMMY

...if we embrace the fear as an **opportunity** to discover something deeper,... something more meaningful,... then... fear can become a catalyst to **GROW BEYOND** ourselves, ... and it is in **THAT** space **beyond** ourselves, ...without ego, where we can ultimately

find our **true** selves, where can we find meaning, and where **REAL LOVE** exists!

Hanan's mother wants him to see that when there is fear, you can embrace it as an opportunity for growth.

1. Does the concept of "embracing fear" feel counterintuitive to you or do you agree with its ultimate necessity?
2. When have there been moments in your life when you were able to embrace fear? What have you learned from the experience? What were the differences between the times when embracing fear did and didn't work for you?
3. How difficult is it to choose to embrace something which is frightening? Does the idea that real love can emerge from the choice make it easier or is that an outcome which is too hard to contemplate from the outset?

③ EMBRACING FEAR AND REALIZING THE POWER IN FAITH

This episode ends with a powerful and mystical statement by Hanan's mother, as well as a deeply symbolic story told by Hanan's father. The dialogue is filled with essential Jewish teachings which open up ideas about the transformational power of faith and hope.

MOMMY

...letting go of the ego and embracing fear is possibly the most difficult thing a person can do...But if one chooses to do it, if you choose to trust because there is hope,...then your choice gives meaning to the idea of Echad.

HANAN

What's Echad?

DADDY

One.

HANAN

One?

DADDY

There is a story about a ship that was in the middle of the ocean, in the middle of a terrible storm. All of the passengers were hiding below the deck. But a young boy was outside, on the deck sitting calmly. One of the passengers asked the boy: Aren't you afraid? And the boy answered: "No, my father is the captain."

Hanan's mother's statement has two very important teachings in it. The first teaching is a quote taken from the Book of Job:

Job, even in the midst of the most challenging trials, including the loss of his wife, his children, his health, and his livelihood, continues to choose to have faith in God. His friends try to offer words of comfort., Though their theology is simplistic, largely based on

reward and punishment, in regard to the calamities which have befallen Job, one friend, Zophar, encourages Job to still have faith. Zophar tells him:

Trust because there is hope.

Job 11:18

Hanan's mother then explains that if you "trust because there is hope,...then your choice gives meaning to the idea of Echad". This second teaching delves deep into Jewish mysticism. Echad is the Hebrew word for One. The idea of One is central to Judaism, encompassing everything from the Jewish understanding of God, to the importance of community and peoplehood.

Part of the power of Echad is its inherent paradox. In Jewish teaching Echad is One, yet at the same time, "everything" is a part of Echad. Defying logic and common understanding, Echad is simultaneously One and "everything". Hanan's father attempts to illustrate some of the power and meaning of the paradox of Echad with a story. In it, the boy's calmness seems counterintuitive and unexpected in a situation that would normally and logically evoke tremendous fear. Everyone around him is afraid and while the boy "should" be afraid, he isn't. He feels something that the others do not.

Hanan Harchol, the author of the script, felt that on the surface, the story of the boy and the ship might appear to convey that we should simply accept difficult things without frustration or that we should not worry even in the midst of impossibly dangerous situations, relying on a type of "blind" faith. But Hanan believes that the story actually points to something far deeper: If we can let go of our ego, embrace fear, and learn from it, letting go of our earthly logic can connect us to something much larger.

In the context of a relationship, while it is very frightening to encounter another person, while the space in between us can feel like a chasm, by giving into that fear and trusting that it will be safe, we can begin to experience genuine love. Choosing to trust because there is hope, even in the face of utter fear, can make all of the things that don't make sense, make sense. It is essentially a statement of faith.

1. What was your first reaction to the story about the boy on the ship?
2. How does Hanan Harchol's explanation deepen the idea of faith for you?
3. Have you ever been in an incredibly dangerous situation? How did you respond? How would you respond differently now?
4. What does "Trust because there is hope" mean to you?