

“Some say that during the time a plague [rages] one does not observe mourning rites due to fear it causes, and I have heard that some have adopted this practice.” (*Rema, Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 374:11*)

Why would fear be a sufficient reason to nullify the mitzvah of aveilus? It seems that these authorities viewed fear itself as a danger during an epidemic. Why is this so?

We find the Ben Yehoyada (*Bava Kama 60b*) mentioning the detrimental effect of fear regarding the cholera epidemic: “Regarding the cholera epidemic, fear has a negative effect and one may contract it through fear. The doctors explain this with a parable: The cholera once reached a large city, and before it spread widely a man met the angel in charge of it and asked, ‘How many souls do you wish to take?’ He responded, ‘Five thousand.’ In the end fifteen thousand died from the epidemic. When he met the angel again he asked, ‘Why did you lie? You said you were sent to take five thousand souls yet you took fifteen thousand?!’ ‘I didn’t lie,’ responded the angel, ‘for with my own sword I only took five thousand, those extra ten thousand died from the overwhelming fright they experienced due to the sickness in the city.’”

It seems the Ben Yehoyadah understood the detrimental effect of fear to be physical in nature and specific to the epidemic of cholera. This would still not explain the authorities who rule that one does not mourn during any epidemic. However, based on the words of the Ariza"l and Chovos HaLevavos we mentioned in previous weeks, there is a simpler way to explain the detrimental effect of fear and it is not limited to the epidemic of cholera alone, rather it is lack of Bitachon that reduces one’s chances of survival during any danger.

*Established By:*



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