

SEASON 2

OLAMI MENTORSHIP

SESSION 8: WORRY/ANXIETY

DEAR MENTEE AND MENTOR,

Our era has been called the Age of Anxiety, which isn't surprising considering the pace of modern life, financial stresses, family pressures, and global unrest. When we add to the already complex lives that we live, the events of October 7th and the subsequent situation in Israel and around the globe, we cannot help but feel a certain level of anxiety and worry.

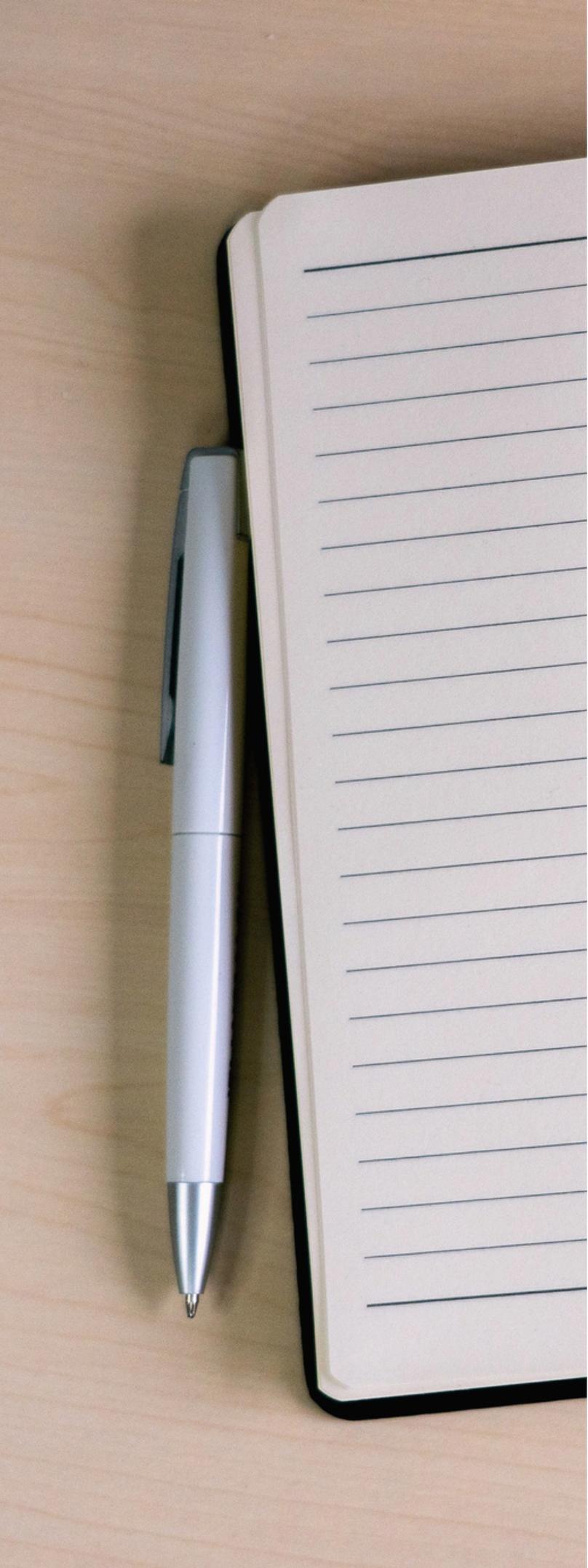
In a recent survey, 86% of people polled described themselves as "worriers," spending an average of 1 hour and 50 minutes a day fretting. Over the course of the average adult's lifetime, that equates to 4 years and 11 months of agonizing over things that are mostly out of our control.

Additionally, anxiety and worry are associated with all types of physical and emotional illnesses and even though we know this, we still spend considerable time ruminating about all the things that could go wrong in our lives. What's even more astonishing is that we somehow think that if we worry about something enough we will gain control over it. But the opposite happens. The more we obsess about something, the more it gains control over us.

One of the incredible benefits of trying to live a Jewish way of life is the understanding that it was designed by Our Manufacturer Himself to foster tranquility and peace of mind. As a matter of fact, one of the primary benefits of bitachon, or trust in the Almighty, is the feeling of letting go and the understanding that ultimately we are not in control.

In this session, we will analyze why we worry and feel anxious, we will examine the detriments of worry and the benefits of overcoming our anxiety, and we will also try to identify some real-life strategies to worry less and diminish our anxiety.

Please note: This session will address worry and anxiety which are within the norms of day-to-day living. When anxiety begins to take over one's regular function, we highly encourage seeking professional help.



REMINDERS:

- Check-in: How was your week?
- Journaling: The journal is a space to track progress and growth throughout this journey.
- Set a time for your next meeting.



INTRODUCTION

Feldman's wife wakes up in the middle of night to the sound of her husband pacing around the room.

"Feldman," she says. "What's wrong with you? Come back to bed!"

Feldman replies, "Dora, I can't sleep. Tomorrow I'm supposed to pay Levine the \$15,000 that I borrowed from him and I don't have it. I'm worried sick."

"You owe Levine money and you're worried?" Dora asks.

"Yeah, I can't sleep," says Feldman.

"Silly man," says Dora. "Go back to sleep! Let Levine worry."



PART 1: WHY DO WE WORRY?

1. Please take a moment to discuss with one another if and how worry impacts your personal lives.
2. Take a moment to analyze a particular worry that you can identify. Why do you think that you worry?
3. The APA research shows several sources of worry:
 - a. Fear of losing control - While people may worry for a wide variety of reasons, it mostly comes from a place of fear — a fear of something happening that they can't control.
 - b. Care too much - Anxious people have trouble stopping themselves from getting overly invested in a worrisome line of thought.
 - c. Prepare for the worst - We worry as a way to feel emotionally prepared for negative outcomes.
 - d. We feel Insecure - We are concerned about what others will think about us.



4. Which of the above causes for worry do you identify with most?

5. Is worry always a bad thing? When can worry be a positive character trait? Explain.

6. If you had to guess, what are the things people worry about the most?

7. Here are the number 1 concerns in Americans' lives:

1. Money and their financial future
2. Job security
3. Relationships
4. Health

Do you think that these areas of concern are the most important in life?

PART 2: THE EFFECTS OF WORRYING

1. The Happiness Factor: Sefer Hachinuch 74:2 (“Book of Education”), an anonymous work written in the 13th-century

The opposite of happiness, peace and enjoyment is worry!

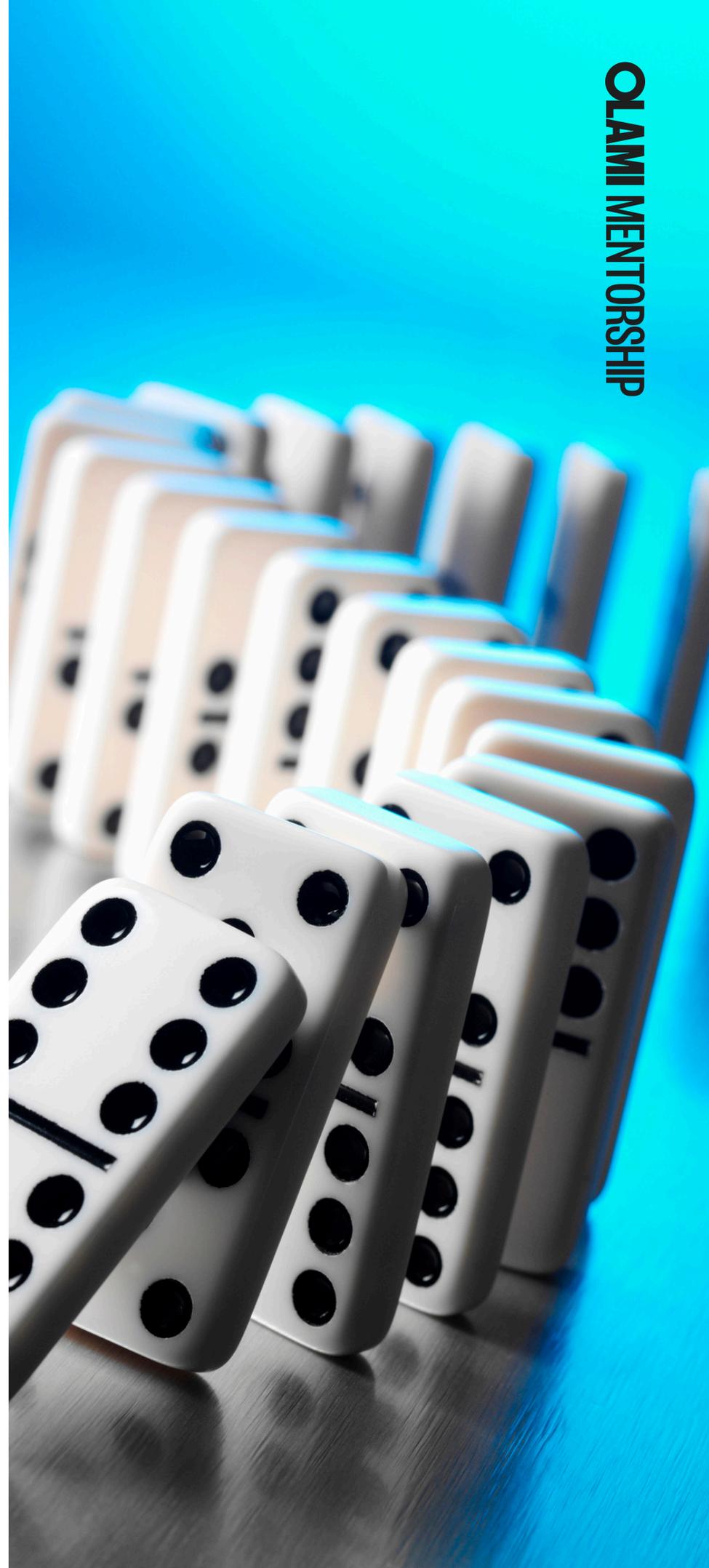
וְהַפֶּךְ הַשְּׂמֵחָה וְהַשְּׁלוֹם
וְהַתְּעִנוּג שֶׁהֵם אֵתוֹ, הוּא
הַדְּאָגָה

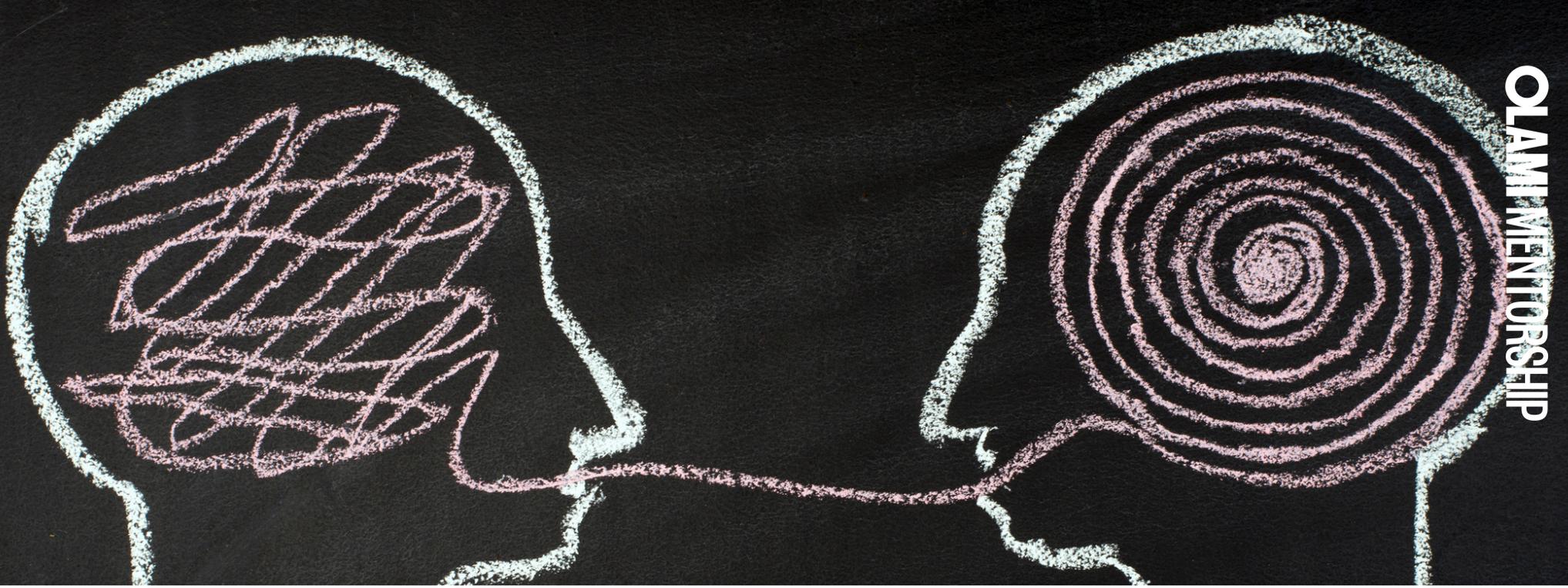
2. The physical ramifications: Excessive worrying can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, obesity and diabetes

3. Lifespan:

Researchers at Purdue University followed 1,600 men, ages 43 to 91, for 12 years to examine how those with worried and neurotic personalities fared over time. At the end of the study, only 50 percent of the men with high or increasing neuroticism were alive compared to 75 percent to 85 percent of the other group.

4. Quality of Life: The research across the board indicates a lower day-to-day quality of life for individuals that worry excessively.





PART 3: PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR DEALING WITH WORRY

1. Talmud Yoma 75a Two Approaches for dealing with worry

“If there is worry in a man’s heart, let him quash it [yashchena]” (Proverbs 12:25). Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi dispute the verse’s meaning. One said: He should forcefully push it out of his mind. One who worries should banish his concerns from his thoughts. And one said: It means he should tell [yesichena] others his concerns, which will lower his anxiety.

“דאָגה בלב איש
ישחנה,” רבי אמי ורבי
אסי, חד אמר: ישחנה
מדעתו, וחד אמר:
ישחנה לאחרים.

2. The Talmud’s First Approach: Ask yourself: What’s the worst thing that could happen?

Dale Carnegie, in his book *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*, says whenever you are worried about something, ask yourself: what’s the worst thing that could happen? What would you do if you lost your job? Visualize yourself working through the situation and calmly preparing yourself for how you would deal with the worst scenario. Once you accept the possibility in your mind and you can see yourself having the resources to cope you will find yourself much calmer.



3. The Talmud's Second Approach: Talk to somebody about your worries.

Sometimes just talking to someone helps us realize that things aren't as problematic as we are making them out to be. We are making a mountain out of the proverbial molehill.

Talking to someone helps us gain perspective, be more objective, think about the situation differently, and prevents worry from building up so much that it becomes overwhelming. Who in your life is your go-to person for your worries? (Your mentor??)

4. Approach 3: Gratitude

Gratitude is a powerful antidote to worry. Focus more on gratitude. Talk about things that you are grateful for with your family and friends. Write in a gratitude journal every day. Notice and share that the things that are going right in your life significantly outweigh the things that are not.

5. Approach 4: Trust in the Almighty

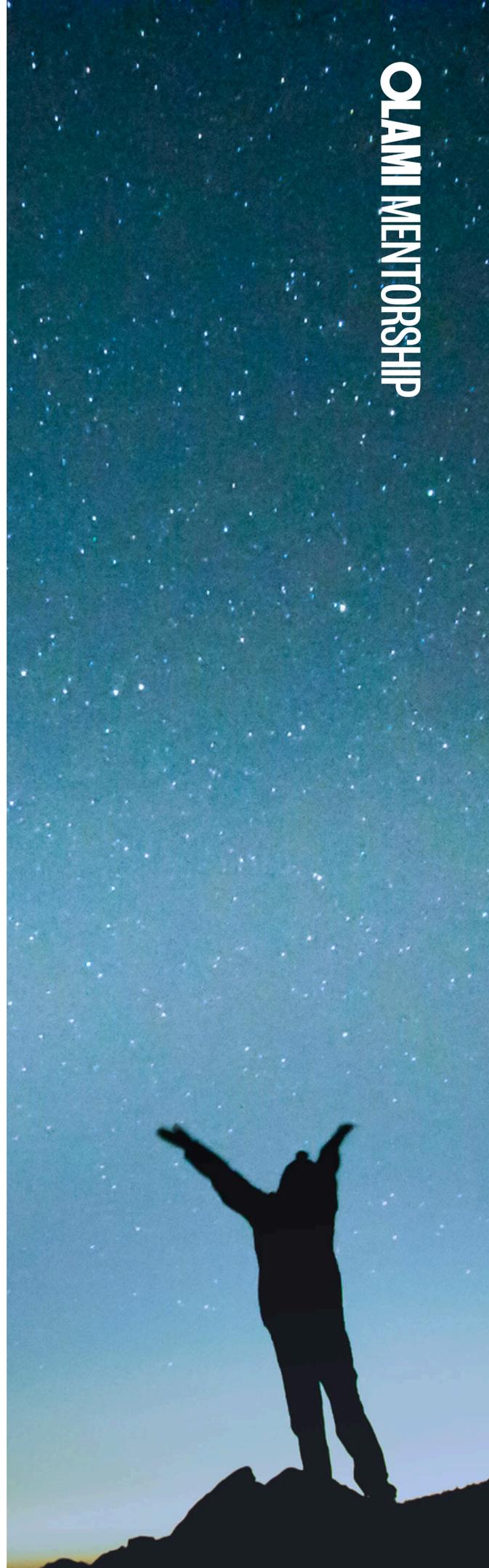
Chovos Halevovos; Shaar Habitachon Ch. 1 (R. Bachya 1050–1120)

The essence of trust in the Almighty is peace of mind. That one's heart relies on the Almighty that He will do that which is good and right.

מהות הביטחון היא מנוחת
נפש הבוטח, שיהיה לבו
סמוך על מי שבטח עליו,
שיעשה הטוב והנכון לו"

Judaism's greatest anti-worry solutions are cultivating faith in an all-powerful God who is guiding the world and our life with compassion and love. We don't understand His ways but we trust that all God does is for our good and our growth. Faith and trust in God enables us to have the courage to live with the uncertainty of life, to live with our own lack of control and understanding and to know that life is not at all random. Bitachon or trust in the Almighty is being able to say every day "Everything I need I have, and everything I have I need." - R. Chana Heller

Can you implement 1 or 2 of the above tools to diminish some of the worries in your personal or professional life?



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