



No Pressure

You open that bill. Your heart starts to race. Blood begins to rush to your head. Out of the corner of your eye you catch the amount owed and the service cut-off date. Without a dime in your pocket or bank account, you feel overwhelmed by this problem as well as many others in your life. Panic sets in. Yes, the problems are real, but, your perspective on them is only making matters worse. Stress is a state of mind. When faced with problems in life you have two choices: You can obsess about them until they break you, or you can turn to

G-d and literally free yourself from them. There is no life that is problem-free. The challenge in life is to overcome your problems so that they don't overcome you. Then you are a free man, otherwise the pressure will only drive you to the point of despair. Learn to take life more in stride. When the going gets rough, train yourself to say, "Hey, it's no big deal!" Learn to replace anxious responses to stress with serene and calm ones. "Easier said than done", you say, yet how can this be accomplished? It takes some cognitive footwork. When a person is under stress his whole mind becomes narrowly fixated on his problems. To get relief, you must take the opposite approach: step out of the narrow confines of excessive focus on the self, and return to G-d. To begin with, open your eyes and remind yourself who is the author of reality? Everything you see, everything you hear,

smell, taste and speak comes from G-d. The entire creation including all matter, vegetation, the animal kingdom and Man himself, are the products of His handiwork. Underlying everything that exists is the breath of G-d sustaining it and fashioning it in earthly garb. Ah! But the common man in the street doesn't fathom this. His heart and mind are too focused on satisfying his banal wants and desires, to think for a moment about his Creator. We are all born in a crude, raw state with only primal needs and selfish wants. In our pleasure-seeking culture, these desires only become more reinforced and part of our character. The pressure is on then to enhance personal gain, by stepping on others, while moving further and further away from G-d. Concern about your image only makes you uptight with yourself and with others around you. Living with this pressure is no life. Take

a moment and start to think about others. Shift the focus off yourself and start to show some concern for your fellow man. You will feel the difference! You will become a warmer, more sensitive person and your character more refined. When you make room in your heart for others, there's also more room for what's been so lacking in your life until now – which is G-d. Sensing His presence in your life lifts the pressure off you. With image-consciousness removed you will be more relaxed and less hard on yourself and nervous with others. So, stop putting so much pressure on yourself, and don't be bought in by societal pressure. Rather, commit yourself to the obligations of performing the *Mitzvos* and learning *Torah*, and paradoxically you will feel a sense of freedom and relief, as stated in the Ethics of the Fathers, (Chap. 6) “There is no free man, except one who

engages in *Torah* [study]”. The reality is that, when the heat is on and you feel the pressure hitting you from all sides, you can snap. Mounting pressure has a snowball effect; the tension just builds and builds until bust, leaving bitterness and anger in its wake. In your needy state, everyone becomes an easy target for blame, and in extreme cases, your anger becomes directed towards G-d and religion. Yet, all the “shoulds” and “have tos” that are bending you out of shape to conform are only in your mind. A Jew grounded in faith and conviction does not get swept away by the imagined pressures of the outside world. If the strings are being pulled by heaven, why look elsewhere? The only refuge from problems is to turn to G-d. Speak to Him regularly. There is no sweeter sense of satisfaction than seeking out whatever you need or want from G-d directly. He really listens to every word that falls

from the mouth. If you would only know how much compassion G-d has on every Jew and how much He desires to hear the voices of Israel raised in prayer, you would engage in it constantly. Our very faith is shaken to the core by unremitting stress of life as we know it today – not to mention the continuous wear-and-tear on our health. Societal pressure has most of us feverishly dancing at an impossible pace to the point that we are ready to throw up our hands and just quit. How absurd! Is this genuine *Torah* Living? Is not the *Torah* and the *Mitzvos* described as, “Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her pathways peace” (*Mishlei*, Chapt. 3, V. 17). G-d gave the *Torah* to the Jewish people, as a guide towards sane living, freeing us from the mind-numbing shackles of the oppressive exile. The alternative is to face the strains and stresses of daily existence by yourself,

until they become unmanageable. This is what is meant by the tyranny of the exile. Bombarded from all sides by problems, you feel as if life seems to be closing in on you. No longer able to cope with the encroaching pressure, you slip into depression and dysfunction. The further you drift from G-d, the deeper you fall into the bitter abyss. Develop coping mechanisms for the inevitable pressures of life. The moment you sense the slightest pressure from others, tell yourself, "Wait a minute, stop putting pressure on me!" Stress in any form, emotional, financial or otherwise, is counterproductive. On a deeper level, man can only transcend his precarious position in life, by accepting G-d's complete and thorough control over all its predicaments. Be patient! Thorough awareness of G-d and His ways is not achieved overnight. Limited by crude intelligence, man cannot easily fathom

the workings of the Divine nor penetrate its mysteries. Just as the body masks the soul, so does the substance of this world conceal the utterly spiritual makeup of the next. You have to work long and hard on yourself to refine your character and become a more sensitive individual. In particular, you have to eliminate natural tendencies towards callousness and selfishness, which drives you to seek domination over others. The moment you relax your control over others, you will experience automatic relief from the hold they command over your life. Then you will realize your true aim in life which is, to become aware of G-d. In truth, everything is G-d, and G-d is everything. Indeed, it is only your soul that gives life to your body. And that same G-dly spirit is what animates and sustains all of creation from the lifeless stone, to the rustling leaf, the animal kingdom and all

members of the human race. All of us are essentially an extension of G-d, whose anonymous presence lies hidden behind the substance and matter of this world. Just peel away the shell and G-dliness will be revealed. Translated into action this means: break bad habits to refine your character and you will start getting in touch with your inner-self. Clear away the interference and you will begin to hear the message; your soul will be speaking to you. How lucky can you get! All of life's pressure generated by having lack of clarity, begin to dissipate and dissolve. But don't stop there; share the wealth with others. Develop goodness in yourself, by helping others. Offer support, encouragement and good will to those in need. Empathize with those enduring hardship and life's pressures and you will be emulating G-d Himself, of Whom it is written, "G-d is good to all; His mercies

are on all His works” (*Tehillim*, Chap. 145, V. 9). Keep it up, until you internalize these G-dly traits within yourself. People are suffering so much today, from self-inflicted pressure or pressure from others, why not seek every opportunity to relieve them of their stress? The ordeal of mere survival in the long, bitter night of the exile, has reinforced the impression in our collective mind, that we are so far from G-d. And so, you’re caught in the vicious cycle of a tragic catch-22, along with so many others. Typically as the years pass, the cumulative effects of the strains and stresses of life begin to catch up with you. What began as a pinch of stress here and some anxiety there, suddenly becomes a steady mount of unbearable pressure. Observing the light at the end of your tunnel growing dimmer and dimmer, and seeing no way out, you despair of ever being helped by

G-d. Ultimately, your connection to Him becomes so weak that it seems as if He is removed from the picture. How foolish! Who do you think is behind all of this? How is it even relevant to speak of G-d as being absent and not there? Recall what King David said, “Where can I go from Your spirit or where can I flee from Your Presence?” (*Tehillim*, Chap.139, V. 7). Behold, G-d is right here! How is it possible to forget about Him for even a second? To be sure, sustaining uninterrupted focus on G-d is a very high level and demanding. You have to become inured to the extraneous pressures in life that pull you in all directions and make you feel scattered. Don’t get caught up in trying to satisfy imagined needs – yours or others. The only valid need you have in life is to satisfy your soul’s longing for meaning. And this can only be accomplished by learning *Torah* and fulfilling the *Mitzvos*.

Just as the body needs to eat and drink, so does the soul. Deprived of nourishment the body grows progressively weaker, until it nearly expires. Conversely, a steady diet of *Torah* learning and performing the *Mitzvos* fortifies the soul and staves-off the natural cravings for worldly desires. Underlying the insistent demand for pleasure and instant gratification that's driving you mad, lies a hunger for a deeper meaning and purpose in life. The *Torah* and *Mitzvos* offers welcome relief to the stress of trying to fill the empty parts your life with the wrong things – by filling them with the right ones. Free yourself from pressure of survival that arises in those dark moments, when you feel abandoned by G-d, by renewing your connection to Him. Tell everyone openly, “Don't hassle me! I trust in G-d and He will help me get out of my rut”. If your in a tight spot, and you're feeling

the pressure, then open your mouth wide and speak to G-d, as the Sages remarked on the verse, “whenever we call to Him” (*Devarim*, Chap. 4, V. 7) – in any language that the Jews call out to the Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He – He answers them (*Midrash Tehillim*, Chap. 118, V. 9). This is the essence of prayer! – pouring your heart out to G-d in all trying circumstances whether material or spiritual. You will feel the difference when you open yourself up to G-d, and let Him in. Naturally, you will feel awkward in the beginning. You can’t expect to change in an instant. To be sure, lingering childhood fears and insecurities have accompanied you into adulthood. Always on edge and highly anxious, you stumble through life making poor choices out of quiet desperation. Now, feeling at the end of your rope and like an utter failure, you despair of ever making it through life.

Nothing can be further from the truth! The moment you are prepared to open yourself to G-d, by firmly accepting in your mind that He is running the world – you will gain relief. Get a grip, and resolve to make a commitment to G-d. Remember, His hand is always extended to those that want to make positive changes in their lives. Those who make the attempt to return to G-d are assisted. The road gets cleared from the clutter and the path towards meaning emerges. You only stand to win! Remember, “In the place that penitents stand – there, the completely righteous cannot stand” (*Berachos*, 34b). And why is that? Because up until now you dwelt in the darkness of your confused mind. Wracked by indecision and always unsure of yourself, you felt too pressured to function adequately. Then suddenly, you summon the courage from deep within your soul to make that small

step towards G-d, and you pierce the darkness. Think about it! Everything is G-d and G-d is in everything. So how did you overlook the obvious? Because G-d's invisible Presence lies hidden behind the deceptive façade of reality, which you perceived as independent of Him. It's up to you break through all the pretense and fiction, that can fool you in life and see the connection to G-d. Begin by working on positive traits within yourself. Start being good to yourself and to others. Stop being so uptight with yourself and over-controlling with others. Recognize these neurotic behaviors as a response to an irrational fear of losing control over your life. Failure to perceive G-d's control over everything, can make your existence seem very threatening and intimidating. In your mind, this justifies your license to lie, steal, cheat and exploit others to defend yourself from imagined fears and

alleged dangers. Stop running scared in life. Learn to let go, by working on acceptance. True freedom from life's dilemmas is when you take the pressure off yourself and give it to G-d, by recognizing that everything is in His hands. Go further. Why not carry the message to others who are in pain. Who is not under pressure today? If it's not one thing, it's another. First, your child is either having learning problems or is hanging out with the wrong crowd. Then, there are the piles of unpaid bills to contend with, and inevitable job burn-out. And of course, there is the ever-looming social pressure that has you posturing in all different directions to impress family, neighbors and friends. And so on. Is it any wonder that so many of us are depressed and want to give up? Now, imagine what you can accomplish by offering your friend support and stopping the pain. Remind him who is

really in control and cheer him up. Pull him out of the tyranny of narrow thinking so he gains perspective and can function again. There is no greater service in the eyes of G-d, that you can do for your fellow man than to open his eyes to G-d, so that he returns. And, what does returning mean? Simply put, it means starting a relationship with G-d by opening up a dialogue with Him. That's right, just talk to Him. Recall what the Sages say, "[Even] *Bilaam* the evil (gentile prophet) who was openly wicked knew that nothing can counteract tribulations, except repentance (*Bamidbar Rabbah* Chap. 20, Par. 15). [Meaning] anyone who sins and says I have sinned, [then] permission is not granted to the angel[s] to touch him". The minute a person presents himself before the Blessed One and says: Master of the Universe! I have sinned, I have perverted, I have acted wantonly, and

evil have I done in Your eyes – from here-on-in, I shall not return to my corrupt ways – he transcends his predicament in life, and experiences his own personal redemption, as stated in the *Torah*, “Draw near to my soul and redeem it” (*Tehillim*, Chap. 69, V. 19) Free your mind already from all its confusion and distortions, that have kept you in the dark all these years. So many people are suffering today, and they don’t know why. Fear plays on their imagination, inducing more and more anxiety. Sometimes, the tension level becomes so intolerable that a person begins to consider doing away with himself; in some extreme cases they actually do. Therefore, it is important that when you sense the tension escalating, train yourself to respond with affirmations such as, “Don’t put pressure on me! I believe in G-d. He will help me. My situation is not hopeless. I

am a valuable person”. No one has the authority to break you by robbing you of hope. Remember, your fate lies only in G-d’s hands, so let no one put you under undue pressure. Put an end to those feelings of helplessness and being out of control, by empowering yourself. Fortify your spirit by learning *Torah*, which will nourish your soul. Do G-d’s bidding by performing His commandments such as keeping the *Sabbath*, eating only *Kosher* food, donning *Tefillin* in the mornings, garbing yourself in *Tzitzis* etc. They will keep you grounded and prevent you from losing yourself out of panic and fear. Don’t keep it a secret. So many of us are feeling the heat, and many have just given up; we can surely use a way out. Remember, by helping others, you’re helping yourself.

2.

Some pressure may be good; too much pressure is destructive. Most of our hopes and dreams in life become dashed by acting rashly. The sheer stress of today's lifestyle has upset our sense of equilibrium and impaired our functioning. Don't you recall how years back, you had planned your future with such calm and collect? Step by step you were going to achieve your goals and secure a beautiful life for yourself. Then suddenly, the pressure was on and you were getting hit with problems from every side. Frustrated by all the obstacles in your way, and how long everything took, you sabotaged your gains by losing your cool. Now you are broken and feel like a failure. This oft' told tale applies to both our spiritual and material quests. Sometimes you are trying to reach too high, too fast. Instead of being realistic, you insist that you

must learn a particular amount, or perform some spiritually lofty feat to feel accomplished. Then when it doesn't go your way, you become disgusted and give-up. Rabbi Nachman was very opposed to what is termed, "forcing the moment" (*Likutei Moharan*, Vol. 1, Chaps. 20,196). There is nothing that you "must" or "have" to do, as the Sages said, "The school of Rabbi Shmuel taught, "The words of *Torah* should not [seem] to you as an obligation, [on the other hand] you are not permitted to exempt yourself from them" (*Menachos*, 99b). Rabbi Nachman offered us a practical piece of advice (*Sichos Haran*, Chap. 305): A person must always remember not to create added pressure, by making demands. The minute you stubbornly insist that it has to be your way, you become flustered and stop trying. When you feel forced, the battle is over; you readily capitulate and nothing

gets accomplished. In dealing with others too, force will not work. Whether in matters of faith or otherwise, a person's will always prevails. Mountains may be moved, but you will not budge an inch if your heart is saying "no". As a related idea, Rabbi Nachman (*Chayei Moharan*, Chap. 430), identified a person's impatience as the culprit behind his undoing, as the Sages warned, "Whoever forces time – times forces him back, and whoever is held back by time, time will be held back for him" (*Berachos*, 64a). Remember, the adage, "haste makes waste"! Many of your failures and disappointments in life occurred when you felt pressured by others or from yourself, and you jumped the gun. Go ahead, try to make yourself fall asleep when your body just won't, as Rabbi Nachman said, "In any matter that you force yourself, that it has to be exactly like this, it turns out completely

otherwise” (*Chayei Moharan*, Chap. 431). Don’t take this as a license to kick off your shoes, sit back and cruise through life. Alacrity does beat procrastination. Granted, life is a struggle and you have to keep moving day by day in order to succeed. But, if you see that something is not working out just as planned, don’t overstrain yourself. The added pressure you put on yourself to have things just right, is what is destroying you. Everyone wants to succeed and accomplish – and why not?, but does it make sense to become broken and give-up, the minute you taste a bit of frustration or disappointment. Stand your ground. Hold yourself strong, and let nobody, but nobody push you around. Train your tongue to respond, “Don’t pressure me!”. Treat your children also, in a style free from undue pressure so they don’t resent you. Setting unrealistic learning goals and placing

too many expectations on kids makes them nervous, so they fail. Remember, if you push people too far, you push them away and ruin them for life. So, take a deep breath and relax a moment. Take your mind off the hassles and grind of daily life. Look at the world around you. Study its sheer beauty and grandeur. Sense the peace of knowing that your small world is only part of a larger, continuously unfolding drama directed by G-d. He's in control, He's writing the script – not you, so take it easy. Don't you feel better – less frazzled and drained? Stop making life so complicated. Embrace a simple faith in G-d and feel empowered. The fear will be gone. You will be free to take risks, without all the pressure from others. So say “no’ to pressure and “yes” to life!

3.

Did you ever see the game called “Tug of war”? Did you notice that the more one side tugged, the other resisted? Many of us are blocked in life, because we are locked in a battle of wills with others – but don’t know it. We easily forget that, just as we don’t want others to tell us what to do, others don’t want to be dictated to either. When a person is punched, it’s only natural to punch back harder – his resistance has been aroused. So, if you feel as if you have been swimming upstream all these years, getting nowhere, stop seeking to control others. He reprimands his wife that she spent too much, so what is her response? Next time, she spends even more. And, when he demands an explanation for her opposition, she shoots back, “Stop pressuring me!”. The reverse is also true. As he exits the front door, she commands, “Don’t you dare be

late again!”. So what happens? He arrives home even later than ever before. Despite her cries of protest that he never listens to her, all he can bark back is, “Don’t pressure me!”. And in households around the globe, how many sighs are being emitted by parents at wits ends with their children, clueless as to why little Josh and Dina aren’t listening to them. Only echoes of, “Leave me alone; stop pressuring me already” is left ringing in their ears. And are they wrong? The art of persuasion requires effective communication and lots of patience – not bullying. If you’re forceful and too demanding you’ll lose your crowd. The secret to reaching out to others, is to reach inside of them and understand what’s bothering them. Not too harshly, however, and without forcing the issue. In dealing with other people’s feelings you’re walking a tight rope, so proceed with caution. If you

start imposing your will on your family and friends – because you’re under too much pressure – you will lose their love and respect. If you’re having a hard time and feeling small, needy and out of control give it over to G-d. Your destiny is in His hands anyway, so why get panicky and nervous with others. Imbibe the soothing and satisfying sensation of knowing that you can always turn to G-d for support. Faith restores the sense of balance when the tides of fear and alarm threaten to rock your boat out of control. Corruption abounds all over, and others will invariably try to cheat, lie and steal to undermine you, but your faith should remain sturdy and unwavering. Don’t run scared, run to G-d. Plead with Him. Implore Him to have compassion on you, and deliver you from the trap you fell into. Comfort yourself with the age old truth that, “everything G-d does is for the best” (*Berachos*, 60b). When you are

prepared to accept that everything that happens to you is for your benefit, you will have had a foretaste of the World-To-Come (*Likutei Moharan*, Vol. 1, Chap. 4). Is life getting you down? Are you worried about a friend who is ill? Is your business suffering a slump? Are the sparks of romance gone from your marriage? Does your child have learning disabilities and needs special ed.? Don't get hysterical. Instead of desperately trying to deny the pain, why not examine the cause. Nothing happens by itself, not even the pain inflicted by other people, exercising their power of choice. The challenges in life are deliberately designed by G-d with precise justice, to pull you out of your complacency and prompt you to a greater awareness of Him. Some pay with their pockets and some with their lives (*Tikkunei Zohar*, Pg. 143b), but all is calculated with your best interest in mind. So, don't fight it.

Your problems are not isolated events. It's up to you to uncover with your minds eye, Whose behind it all. The more you see G-d as an active force in your life, the more you will feel the warmth of His love and concern for all of creation. It will hug you from all sides, and the pain will stop. Gone will be all the invented needs, that were neurotically driving you mad in life. Isn't it time to say goodbye to all the imagined pressures that are hassling you – and, to say hello, to a more calmer and accepting you?

