



Forget About It!

1.

Staring out of the window of your room, you catch a glimpse of the familiar street scene below. Like most days, cars whizz by; some of them impatiently honking at the unhurried strides of pedestrians too lost in thought to care. Up above, the sound of rustling leaves suddenly halts as if unsure of which direction the undecided wind will take. As you reflect on your own life, you become lost in your thoughts. You've been standing still for too long and gone nowhere. You feel bad because you should have. But how, and where? What should you have done? What does this all mean? Dear friend, at some point in your life you will probably find yourself asking the same questions. We all know, the music eventually stops and the curtain falls, so why not pause and take stock of your life? Do you know where you're heading? Does any of it make sense? Are you happy with

yourself? Can you use some guidance? Why not be proactive, and reach-out to G-d? Sounds far out; can't relate? It's not, and you can! Just strike-up a conversation with Him in the comfort of your own language. Rabbi Nachman said, "The gate and portal of entry to G-d is through a person's mouth" (*Likutei Moharan, Vol. 2, Chap. 84*). We all entertain thoughts of turning over a new leaf and renewing our commitment to G-d. But, then we recall how far we strayed, all the problems it caused and how much trouble we're in, and we just freeze. Our biggest problem is that we tend to look backwards and focus on our failures until our will dissolves. Deeper and deeper into the forest we go until we're so lost, that we despair of ever finding our way back, as alluded in the verse, "And the men [of the city of Sodom] that surrounded the house were struck with blindness, and they vainly tried to find the entrance" (*Breishis, Chap. 19, V. 11*). Without direction, you can become so lost in life. And it's very bitter. So, don't wait. Start climbing out of the confusion by opening your mouth and speaking to G-d. Keep it up and observe how the gap between you and G-d starts to narrow; the awkwardness begins to fade. There really is nothing like it! Once you get hooked, it will be hard to stop. You won't feel compelled to kill time, chilling-out, mindlessly shmoozing with friends. This is not cheap talk – every word and syllable you utter has an impact on

Heaven. Rabbi Nachman described this as a new pathway to G-d. Let's face it, how much thought do you really devote to the words of daily prayer? You've repeated them so many times and the words are so familiar they flow out of your mouth automatically. But speaking to G-d impromptu requires conscious effort; the words you produce are totally original, delivered on demand and on the spot. Here's the difference; think of it this way: Imagine traveling in the wilderness in olden times and you have one of two paths to follow: You can either take the open highway, well-known to all, and run the risk of an ambush attack by thieves and bandits; or you can follow a private path that you forge on your own, totally unknown, and avoid danger. Comparably speaking, praying Shachris, Mincha, and Maariv, is analogous to major highway travel. A person is very fortunate if he makes it from start to finish without getting sidetracked by stray thoughts and a myriad of distractions. In today's society with all the pressures of survival, and our minds always focused on money – instead of G-d – it's no wonder we can't concentrate on the meaning of the prayers. Now, consider this: What if we take those same interrupting thoughts, worries, and fears and put them into words and say them to G-d. What a relief! You get the best of both worlds; besides saying to G-d what you *have* to say, you are telling

Him what you *want* to say, and that makes all the difference! This novel way of prayer is called “*Hisbodedus*”. Make no mistake, *Hisbodedus* is not a substitute for conventional prayer, rather it’s an enhancement. How so? Simple! By discussing your personal problems and issues with G-d, you clear the clutter from your mind so you can focus on the daily prayers with full concentration. Conventional prayer with *Hisbodedus* is the most efficient form of prayer. In fact, the *Tzaddikim* – Righteous Ones – reached their elevated spiritual levels only through this approach. They understood the value of conversing with G-d in removing barriers to self-awareness. By getting in touch with themselves, they got in touch with G-d and arrived at hidden truths. Sounds strange? It’s really not. Find some quiet time, in a private place so you can really think. Then start telling it to G-d. In these uncertain times, you are probably feeling very scattered and unfocused. Thoughts are probably running wildly in your head about your future and the future of your family. You need to get a grip and stop feeling so out of control. Telling it to G-d can do it and you need to do it. So get going!

2.

Have you ever heard the expression, “Smile, though your heart is broken”? Seems odd? Doesn’t it seem more logical that if you’re hurting, you should be sad and upset? Our Sages tell us

otherwise, “Whoever, is drawn to problems – problems are drawn to him” (*Berachos, 63a*). Simply put, thinking about problems magnifies them; giving no thought to them, shrinks them. So, you got a problem? Why not do the opposite; don’t think about it; **forget about it**, and be grateful! You heard me. Make a real and honest effort to focus on what you have, instead of what you don’t have. Of course it’s not easy. We typically whine and complain about how terrible our lives are; “This one has more, that one is so rich and glamorous, he is so popular, I have no luck”, and on and on. When are you going to stop? When it’s too late? Another bill you can’t pay, still not married, stuck in the same old job, your kid is not accepted into a school – it’s not the end of the world. Really, get over it. Stop the pity party and start singing a different tune. Turn to G-d, and be grateful for all that He’s given you. If you feel the need to grumble just stop and think of one thing to be grateful for. It could be anything: your health, a loving spouse, good-natured children, a steady income, the warmth of the sun, a billowy cloud hugging the sky, the aroma of fresh bread wafting through air. The possibilities are endless, the “thank you” never enough; that’s why Rabbi Nachman said, “When a person accustoms himself to offer thanks and gratitude to G-d, he experiences what is the pleasure of the World To

Come” (*Likutei Moharan, Vol. 2, Chap. 2*). Only when your demands are made smaller, and appreciation for G-d’s generosity larger, does your heart open to Him. Consider this: Have you ever taken a moment to thank G-d for the eyes that see, the teeth that chew, the hands that move, or the legs that walk? Yes, you heard it a million times; it goes in one ear and out the other. We are all guilty of an exaggerated sense of entitlement; after all it’s coming to us. But if the shutters were to close, and you couldn’t see anymore, how humble would you become. As the Sages said, “A blind person is considered dead” (*Nedarim, 64b*). Suddenly, you become enveloped in darkness and see nothing. You become needy and dependent, you taste, but are never satisfied, as the Sages commented, “the blind are never satiated” (*see Yoma, 74b*) – everything they eat tastes like straw. Eyesight is a sheer gift from G-d, yet you still have grievances against Him. O.K. Now try this. Switch gears and mouth these words, “Praise G-d, because He is good; because His goodness is forever”. Say it again, until you can hear it in your mind and feel it in your heart. Think about how grateful you are for the different parts of your body and their various functions. Start from the head and work yourself down, until your tippy toes, all while thanking the Almighty for His kindness. If you’re still not feeling anything, then picture in your mind a critically ill

patient lying in the hospital breathing through a respirator, hooked-up to monitors and nourished only by IV. Get the point? It doesn't take much to discover things to be grateful for, if not for our ingrained habit of taking everything for granted. But even more so, dear fellow Jew, consider how much gratitude you owe for the unique privilege of being born a believing Jew. Now you've come full circle; your only problem is that you think you have problems when, in reality you have so much to live, and be thankful for! Remember, it won't change until you change; in fact, it will only get worse because of the principle that, "Whoever is drawn to problems – the problems are drawn to him". Just observe how depressed some people are. Notice their glum expressions and how they keep to themselves. They don't talk to anyone; they are angry at the world and are full of pessimism and dark despair. Simply put, they've given up and surrendered. Why? Because they don't know how to be grateful. But you do and you can. The minute you sense the urge to whine and complain, push gratitude, instead. Are you hooked to IV? Can you breathe without a respirator? Do you walk on twos, or are you pushed in a wheelchair? Is the picture getting clearer? Health is not a given, it's a moment by moment, ongoing miracle to which we remain oblivious, because as the Sages remarked, "The recipient of a miracle, does not recognize his own

miracle” (*Niddah, 30a*). This is not hard to grasp considering that we attribute all phenomenon to nature. In fact, piercing through its deceptive veil is the key to solving the human predicament. As Rabbi Nachman indicated that, when the veil of nature will be lifted – meaning that we reject the erroneous notion of an independently evolving world, and stop feeling that we are automatically entitled to every privilege on earth; and, instead, we humbly submit that all of creation is an outright miracle from G-d, for which we are supremely grateful – then mankind will be redeemed. It all boils down to one thing; faith. There is no escaping the inevitable truth: There is no reality besides G-d; all of creation and every phenomenon that exists is merely the presence of G-d concealed in earthly garb. To the extent that you accept G-d and sense His presence in all that you see, hear and breathe allows you to penetrate the meaning of existence. Awareness of G-d is like putting corrective lenses on your eyes; suddenly, the obscure becomes obvious; only G-d exists and He is in full control. Notions of nature fly out the window, and perforce you recognize the miraculous hand of G-d in all that transpires. At that moment, how can you not be anything but sheer grateful? Problems, what problems? If G-d is in the cockpit, it can only be smooth sailing. You only veer off course when, you think you’re flying in a pilot-less

plane. Then it makes sense to be distressed by the ups and downs in your turbulent life; it's no wonder that you're depressed and angry at everyone and everything in life. Don't get knocked around. Smooth the bumps by accepting G-d in your life. How so? By counting your blessings and thanking Him for them, as the Sages said, "Whoever reconciles himself to his fate down here, clears his judgment up there" (*Taanis, 8a*). Oh, how desperately do we need this advice today? There is mayhem in the Houses of Israel and we can find no peace to our endless troubles. Cancer and other related diseases are at epidemic proportions. The economy has sunk to an all time low accompanied by rampant unemployment. Homes topple like dominoes under the threat of foreclosure. Husband and wives wage war with each other while their children slip into the arms of the deviant streets; and, the pool of unmarried, singles just grows larger and larger without relief in sight. Help! What can we do? Now, like never before, you have to take your mind off yourself and your problems, and focus on G-d. That's right, from the confines of narrow focus on just problems, and more problems, broaden your perspective to include things to be thankful for, as is taught in Rabbi Nachman's profound lesson on the verse in *Tehillim (Chap 4, V. 2)*, "In my narrow confines, You made it wide for me" (*Likutei*

Moharan, Vol. 1, Chap. 195). Who was pursued more by enemies, than King David? Who suffered more tragedy, privation and personal suffering in his life than King David? Yet, what was the secret of his survival? The answer penned centuries ago, is as relevant today as it was then: “in my narrowness, You widened it for me”. King David found solace in the midst of his suffering by looking for the blessing hiding from within. He found the proverbial silver lining in the cloud which gave him the strength to overcome all his problems. You’re in a hole, and your problems seem to be closing in on you? Don’t give up and bury yourself just yet. Look for meaning in your suffering and thank G-d for them. Your problems will paradoxically disappear and the opening will widen. What a powerful lesson! How redeeming! If you go with this advice, you can survive any situation. That’s exactly what King David did and witness what occurred: Out of the ordeal with Batsheva emerged King Solomon: by participating in the collective suffering of his people, Israel, the Beis Hamikdosh was eventually erected. King David lived with this teaching and so should you. No matter what, just keep thanking G-d for everything, and watch how everything will turn out for the best, as the saying goes, “A person should always accustom himself to say ‘Whatever G-d does is for the best’” (*Berachos, 60a*). What are you

waiting for? Work the program now, and see for yourself. Problems? **Forget about it!** G-d is great. I don't have problems. I only have blessings. Sounds too simplistic and Pollyannaish? Just keep at it and watch what happens. Persistence will pay off. Each stitch of gratitude reveals more of the emergent design of G-dly supervision, embedded in your life. Ordinary events, formerly ascribed to the happenstance, will now seem nothing short of miraculous. For instance, the Sages said, 'Come and see, how many miracles G-d performs for a person and he is unaware. For if he were to eat dry bread it would enter his gut and nick it. But G-d created a well in his throat that carries down the bread safely. Many people are unaware that their body contains digestive juices that allow the food to be broken down for nourishment. People can call it nature, but in reality it is G-d's wondrous design for food to nourish the body without harming it, reminiscent of the verse, "For not by the bread alone is a person sustained, but on everything that emanates from the mouth of G-d (*Devarim, Chap. 8, V. 3*).

To our eyes it happens automatically so we never think about it; in fact, we become desensitized to its wonder. That's living life thoughtlessly. It's not the way to go. Save yourself from mindless living, by pushing gratitude over and over again. You won't be sorry. Let it become second nature to you

until you recognize G-d in everything around you and in every situation. Then nothing will frighten you, because you have an effective method of dealing with it. You're haunted by your troubled past; you saw only problems in your life; **forget about it!** Stop looking for another shoulder to cry on about all your problems. It won't help. Do what will. Don't stop thanking G-d. Train your mouth to respond to problems by uttering, "Praise to G-d for He is good, forever is His kindness". Life will seem so sweet; you won't remember you ever had problems!

3.

I knew I should have spent more time with my kids; now they're grown and we're not so close. All she wanted was a little time together, a break from the household chores, why didn't I understand? They had my best interest in mind; they only wanted to see me settled with a career, but I thought I knew better than my parents; I had to do my own thing. He's got learning problems and comes from a divorced home, why did I pick on that child so much in class? All those dates, but no one was ever good enough; funny, I always thought I could do better; and now I'm older and all alone. Sounds familiar? These are just some of the variations on the same theme that play in your head all day long; guilt, regret and more guilt, until you feel totally broken, and can't move ahead. This

is why Rabbi Nachman said, “Most of the world considers forgetting a deficit, while I consider it an asset!” (*Sichos Haran, Chap. 26*). We are all master players at the game of blame. **Forget about it!** Everyone makes mistakes and we all have regrets. Don’t let that stop you from living. Simply turn the page, and close that painfully uncomfortable chapter in your life. It still bothers you? You need to talk about it? Then turn to G-d. Tell him in your own words what’s hurting you. Do this often on a regular basis. Initially it may feel strange, as you feel nothing at all. Gradually however, the door of awareness will slide open; an intimate connection will form; you will sense Him more acutely, and His presence will feel real. Indeed, with G-d so at hand, why would you want or need to cry to others? Face it, they really can’t understand and most of the times they don’t want to understand, so why bother? That’s why G-d says, “if a person is faced with a problem, he should not shout to the angels Michael, or Gabriel, rather he should cry out to Me [G-d], and I will answer him” (*Yerushalmi Berachos, Chap 9, V. 1*). But we don’t listen! The moment there’s a problem, we either rush to a therapist, seek a nutritionist’s advice, start inquiring about referrals to specialists, or sit hours on the phone with a friend. In short, we run around in circles chasing others who can’t even help themselves, so how can you expect them to help you? Recall what

King David warned thousands of years ago, “Do not put your trust in princes, in a mere mortal, who has no [power to] save” (*Tehillim*, Chap 146, V. 3); he can’t deal with his own problems; you want him to deal with yours? First things first; you’ve got a problem? **Forget about it!** Remember the rule: “Whoever sticks to a problem – the problem sticks to him” (*Berachos*, 63a). Who says that you have to focus on your problems and obsess about them all day? Consign them to the past. They’re history! Make yourself into a new you. How? Think about how much G-d loves everyone including you. He’s our loving Father in heaven. He really cares, so why let things bother you so much? Again, imagine the hospital scene. It could be worse. You could be languishing in pain, confined to a bed and miserable. But G-d is good. You can see vibrant colors, hear lush strains of music, dance the night away with friends; you’re blessed. Open yourself up already, to all that is good, and stop dwelling on the bad. There’s so much abundance in life, take advantage of it. Take the plunge. But this is bothering me, and that one made fun of me, and he didn’t say “hello”, and she insulted me, and I can’t afford this, and my back is hurting and my child failed a test. Stop all the whining and excuses. You’re just blowing your problems so out of proportion that you’re losing control. Ignore them! **Forget about it**, and magically they’ll

disappear. The mind is a very powerful tool. Follow Rabbi Nachman's advice (*Likutei Moharan, Vol. 1, Chap 195*) and work the program; look for what to be grateful for, within your problems, as is written, "In my narrow straits You widened it for me" (*Tehillim, Chap. 4 V. 2*). Furthermore, the Sages elaborate that King David admitted to G-d that, "every problem that I [fell] into, You provided me with relief; I encountered a problem with Batsheva, You gave me [a son] Shlomo, I involved myself in the problems of the Jewish People and You [rewarded] me with the Beis Hamikdosh" (*Yerushalmi Taanis, Chap 2, V. 9*). And who in actuality was King David? The Sages inform us that David was destined to have been a stillborn, but Adam, the first man, offered seventy years of his own life to save him (see *Yalkut Tehillim 843*). Adam foresaw King David's future contribution to the world – the soul-stirring book of *Tehillim* – and didn't want this opportunity to be lost to mankind. Therefore, he sacrificed years of his own life to the would-be author of *Tehillim*, so that any Jew, in time of need could turn to its heartfelt chapters and find succor. Down in the dumps? Can't pick yourself up? *Tehillim* can. Read chapter after chapter of David's immortal words, recounting the kindness that G-d displayed to him during his darkest and most desperate hours. How relevant they are today as they were then, in helping you

forget about your problems. How uncanny that, words centuries old can articulate so precisely and accurately, the hurt and pain you're feeling today. What does that tell you? Don't give up. From the midst of sorrow, songs of salvation were born then, as they can now. Up to here with problems, and no way out? That's precisely when the door of opportunity will open, as the Prophet declared to the People of Israel, "If you see that suffering is overwhelming you, immediately you will be redeemed" (*Yalkut Tehillim, 680*). Indeed, whenever a Jew faces calamity and sees no means of escape, all he must do is remind himself that G-d is with him by his side, and his salvation will be near at hand. The sheer inspiration of it will make you, **"forget about it"** – "even if I have problems, so what? If I know G-d is there, it's no big deal anymore". There's no practical value to clinging to the past and fretting about your problems. In fact, it's detrimental; you become so depressed and dysfunctional that you actually create more problems. Surrender yourself to G-d, by surrendering your problems to Him. Work on accepting your fate, and stop resisting so much. Allow your mind to absorb the message that everything emanates from G-d; it's exactly the way it's meant to be, so there really aren't any problems. This is not easy to swallow; pain is real and it hurts. Nevertheless, you have to be

tenacious in order to cope. Nobody is immune to pain and suffering in this world, but if you search hard and find G-d in it, you'll overcome it. Keep searching and searching for G-d in your suffering. Listen to the reassuring words of the Sages, "G-d says: In each and every painful ordeal of the Jews, I, so to speak, am there" (*Tanna Dvev Eliyahu Rabba, Chap. 18*). The tides of torment and suffering are approaching yonder. Don't waste any time. Grab your *Tehillim* and recite chapter after chapter. The words alone will help you float your boat and carry you safely to the shores of plenty.

4.

We all wish for a pain-free existence. So many of our waking hours – and even sleeping ones – center around avoiding, numbing or denying it. If it aches, you take a pill, if your body image is unflattering you crash diet, and workout at the gym; money is getting tight, you gamble, if you're uptight you turn to the bottle. This is the Western mindset; denial and avoidance; "*after all how can this be happening to me, I don't deserve this?*" But then, what is true freedom? Is it having enough money, power and influence to indulge in all the pleasures life has to offer, as dictated by the almighty media? Let's examine what the Torah has to say about the notion of freedom. The Sages expounded, (*Berachos, 5a*) "A tooth and eye, which constitutes only one limb of a person, – if damaged

by the master, grants automatic freedom to a slave – then it stands to reason that certainly, if the entire body is afflicted by G-d with pain and injury – the victim should be freed from his sins”. Pain serves a purpose, and when you understand this, you become free. “But, how can I find meaning in my pain?” you ask wisely, “Where do I look?” Very simple; look no further than the Torah, as the Sages said, “There is no free person, except one who immerses himself in Torah” (*Avos, Chap. 6*). That puts a new spin on our concept of ‘this world’, for as Rabbi Nachman clarified, “There is really no such thing as the good life; a life free of problems; that’s only in the next world. Here we have to struggle to make it paradise, or else it remains a veritable hell” (*Likutei Moharan II, Chap. 119*). It’s really a matter of perspective. Look around you. How many of us beat ourselves up with self-defeating messages such as; “*I’m so stupid, I’ll never succeed*”, “*Uch! I’m so fat and homely, which boy is going to want me?*”, “*Everyone snubs me; I must be such a nerd, such a loser*”. Sounds familiar? Wait, there’s more. What about, how your spouse, children, family, neighbors and friends treat you? Maybe they’ve taken swipes at you with these cutting remarks: “*Hon, you never made a living, and you never will?*”, “*Mom, you never understood me, you’re the worst mother a daughter can have*”, “*We can’t invite him and his whole brood*

to the family wedding, it's embarrassing", "Kids, don't play with those children, they're not our type" or, "Check out the weirdo coming our way, quick! turn the corner before he sees us". Insults that dice you and slice you right to the core; but, that's not all. How about the incessant phone call from credit card companies harassing you for payment, and the steady stream of notices from utility companies threatening cut-off of service?; there's literally no peace! Your life is a living hell. Or so you think! Did you ever consider that, maybe you are hurt because you need to feel hurt. Stop playing the part of the victim drowning in sorrow, and start learning Torah. Why? Because only Torah has the mind-altering power to transform toxic thinking into healthy thinking. Torah gently shocks you back into reality. It's no longer your view on things that matter, but rather what is the truth. The deeper you plunge into the knowledge of G-d, the more unimportant do callous remarks, hurtful comments and damaging opinions of others become. Who cares anymore what he said, how she glared, what they thought. Life is so, so fleetingly short, does it really matter? Toughen up with Torah. Regain perspective. Gain control, by remembering Who is really in control, as the Sages commented on the verse (*Iyov, 2, V.7*), "Man was born to toil", Fortunate is the one who toils in Torah" (*see Bereishis Rabbah, Chap. 92, V. 1*). Let's

not fool ourselves. There is no easy path to get across the Great Divide; we all struggle to get to the other side, some a little more, some a little less. Poverty, illness, death, shame and disgrace come hurling at everyone at some point in their lives. Not even a bailout with big bucks will help, because no one is exempt. There exists only one escape route; only one island of sane refuge when the torrents of insanity come rushing in on you: Torah. Designate routine times during the day, and at night to learn Torah, and stick to it, as the Sages commented, “Whoever immerses himself in Torah – suffering departs from him” (*Berachos, 5a*). It’s only logical. The liberating theology of Torah thought yanks your mind out of the vicious cycle of negative thinking inexorably leading to despair. It refreshes the souls of the dispirited by reminding them of the axiom: *think about problems, and you’ll only have them; forget about them, and they’ll disappear*. True, easier said than done, as the Sages relate (*Ibid, 5b*) “Rabbi Yochanan had ten children which died in his lifetime. He kept a bone of the tenth child in his pocket, so that when he saw a Jew at the point of despair, he could console them. He would tell him, “*Look at what happened to me. I had ten children and lost them all*”. When you have a serious problem, it seems like it’s the end of the world; you’re finished; you’re lost; you won’t survive it. It’s only normal. Who can withstand the

torture of suffering and not break? It's perhaps the hardest hurdle in life – to hold on to your sanity when tragedy strikes and not lose yourself. As difficult as it is to accept, brace yourself with the knowledge that there is cosmic purpose behind all tragic events and suffering. G-d knows what He's doing and has your best interest in mind. If the veil could be lifted and the truth shown, you would happily embrace your fate for all the benefit that it accomplishes, as the Sages said, "Whoever rejoices in the suffering that comes to him, brings salvation to the world" (*Taanis, 8b*). Tell the truth; are these the kinds of ideas you're hearing in your synagogues and study halls these days? What impresses the modern mind today? Polished speeches of the well-groomed, well-fed and highly educated, delivered on the lecture circuit in swanky hotel suites or on cruise boats? Notice how their mouths drivel words of faith to the less fortunate, while their avaricious gaze looks to catch the notice of the more well-to-do in the audience. You want to see real faith in action? Find an ordinary Jew who is drowning in a sea of problems, about to go under financially. Watch in amazement how this clobbered soul continues to stubbornly hang in there; why, he even encourages others and cheers them-up! Why? Because, faith doesn't mean just sticking around during the good times; no, it means clinging to G-d even during the

hard times. Today, in the bodybuilding world, personal trainers are in great demand. Well, in the soul-building arena, you also need professional help to handle the heavy-weighted problems in life. And, now like never before, do we need it! Could you ever imagine that you would hear of so many cases of terminally ill parents undergoing chemotherapy treatment at the same time as their children? How about the proliferation of posters, leaflets and flyers, circulating around the synagogues and study halls publicizing yet, another ten, eleven, twelve etc...children that have been left orphaned by the tragic, premature death of a parent. Oh, the sorrow of it all; when will it end; it's too much to bear; how do you deal with all this? You need a professional. You need the play by play coaching of a Torah trainer to scrimmage through the tackles in life. This is the job of the *Tzaddikim*; they lasso us to safety, before we teeter to close to the edge and fall. They gently prod us back to G-d, by assuring us of the relief and comfort we will experience if we return to Him. After all, He controls everything – not us. To shed some light on the subject, hear what the Sages have to say: “When ordeals of suffering are sent to a person, they are sworn not to terminate until so-and-so date, at so-and-so hour, and at so-and-so minute” (*Avodah Zarah, 55a*). “*But, I’m beyond that*” you protest. “*My patience is gone, my nerves*

are shot, and my energies are zapped. I'm so broken and I just can't keep this up, anymore, so how does that help me?" you object. Correct! No one is denying the validity of your pain. And, you are in good company, because this is the current mindset of the Jewish People. If you can't muster hope anymore from within, and you feel spent, then get help. Turn to the pros. You need to be heard. You need to be understood. The *Tzaddikim* are patient; they will hear your pain. They will help you put your problems in perspective so you can get a grip. You may not know it, but they do; how much your soul is longing to make sense out of its ordeal. Again, and again you must hear the message that there is method behind all the maddening and tragically painful events occurring in your life. Nothing is arbitrary and no event occurs on its own. Veritably there is profound and deep purpose to every pinch of pain G-d inflicts. How can you possibly know what transpired in your previous life? Sometimes, we are put down here to pay off a guilt debt from another age, so how dare you readily question G-d's justice? Remember, "Just as the olive doesn't release its oil until it's beaten, so too suffering does not subside until it runs its course" (*Menachos, 53b*). If you really think about it you may even laugh at your own foolishness; *"my mouth yaps gossip about others all day; I get into all that cynical humor,*

poking fun at religion and serious matters; and yet, I think I can get away with it scot-free"; then when the problems start and you have regrets, you make a whole fuss about how unfair it is! That's why the Sages warned, "fortunate is the one who is always afraid" (*Mishlei, Chap. 28, V. 14*) – afraid in a good sense, meaning that he hesitates out of fear, to have the audacity to make light of serious matters or belittle the *Tzaddikim*. The bottom line is that you have problems and you need help. There is nothing and nobody like the *Tzaddikim* who can stop the addictive cycle of obsessing about problems. Once they give you a taste of what it means to be close to G-d, and you begin to sense His love and care for you, problems will be unthinkable; why, you'll just toss your hand in the air and say, "**Forget about it**". Whereas before you were neurotically focused on problems now, you can direct them to the Source; you can discuss them with G-d. You will steadily grow calmer as your awareness of G-d increases, and your worries vanish. It should be patently clear that obsessive concern with problems is counterproductive. Torah study is also an excellent antidote to obsessive worry, as the Sages said, (*Bereishis Rabbah, Chap 92, V. 1*) "There is not a [single] person who [isn't afflicted] with suffering, fortunate is he, the one whose pain emanates from the Torah" – meaning that as a result of much toiling in Torah study, you

work through your problems; it's easier then to choose acceptance over resistance. How positively refreshing; in fact the Sages said, "A person has to be grateful when he encounters suffering. Why? Because it draws a person close to G-d" (*Tanchumah, Chap. 491, V. 2*). We all know this in our heads, – but honestly, it hurts and it's wickedly hard. In Judaism, however, we don't look for the easy way out. We don't do avoidance and denial, because they simply don't work. Instead, we take our cues from our forefathers who were paradigms of acceptance. Moving through the annals of time, we encounter in every age – biblical and onward – the common motif of heroic individuals triumphing over adversity. They understood the potential for growth and development inherent in suffering; therefore, they made it their business to mold a nation of hardy believers willing to embrace hardship instead of rejecting it, as the Sages said, "Fortunate is the person who afflicted by pain, suppresses his [natural] inclination, and doesn't rile [against heaven]" (*Pesikta Rabasi, Chap. 48*). Unlike pop culture, Jewish leaders, *Tzaddikim*, are not pampered public icons; they don't conveniently excuse themselves from the struggles of the common folk. On the contrary, many lead extraordinarily painful existences that can't even be fathomed, yet they dare not utter a word of

protest or insult. Enduring pain in silence and out of public view, they have many believing that because of their status, they're off the hook. Nothing can be further from the truth, in fact, the *Tzaddik* is the very personification of suffering borne in silent acceptance. This sharply divergent view is endorsed by the Sages who said, "So beloved is afflictions before G-d, that His Name ...is associated with the one who is afflicted" (*Shocheh Tov, Tehillim, Chap. 94*). Furthermore, the greater the stature, the more unimaginable are the ordeals that a *Tzaddik* must undergo. From within and without, opponents appear to drag their reputations through the mud in order to ruin their credibility. Without warning or sense, they can suddenly find themselves the victim of shocking betrayals by supposed loyalists, or framed by conspirators seeking their downfall. Despite it all, they remain determined and strong. They possess the true grit of a genuine leader. Are you inspired? Are you ready to jump the hurdles in life? Don't make excuses that you would have more faith or be more religious if you didn't have so many problems to deal with. No, take the *Tzaddik's* advice and find G-d precisely in those problems. There is more to it than meets the eye, so stop feeling so upset and resentful. You're stronger than you think; you won't break so fast. Go even further; take your mind off problems and **just**

forget about it by helping out somebody else. Cheer them up and you'll feel better. Lend them a hand and you'll find support. Encourage them and watch your confidence soar. By helping others you're helping yourself. This powerful message is similarly tweaked out of the words of Tehillim "*Ashrei maskil el dol*" – by Rabbi Nachman who taught, "Fortunate is the one who puts some sense (*maskil*) into the poor man (*dol*)" (*Chap. 41, V. 2*) – because essentially poverty is not so much a lack of money, as it is a lack of awareness. Make this person aware of his inner strength by making him aware of G-d, and you've helped this mendicant out of his woeful predicament in a way that no money could buy. After all is said and done, how long is your fleeting existence anyway? Seventy years? And how many of those have been spent already – twenty five percent, fifty percent, more? So, what's left? You're one foot out the door, and one step into the next world; doesn't it make sense to get to know G-d now – while you're still here? You reach for another tissue to wipe the tears. Sniffle, sniffle. Shaking your head you still can't believe it. You're so depressed. Hey, wait a minute. Is this only about you? Maybe someone else in the family is hurting and could use your support? Why are you locking yourself inside your room, and not lending a hand to others? Why not reach-out to them like your forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchok, and

Yaacov did? They also had their share of miserable moments – personal, family-related, political and otherwise – but, that didn't stop them from bringing others close to G-d. That's what made them great! Don't make the same mistake as Iyov. He took his pain too personally and questioned the justice of it all. If not for the fact that he complained, his name would have been included along with the Patriarchs, in the Jewish liturgy (*Yalkut Iyov, Chap. 908*). But Iyov was weak and lacked breadth of vision, so he missed his chance. He forfeited his opportunity to a more worthy candidate, who better understood the impact his actions would have on future generations. Despite a life of torment and a host of implacable foes, King David, remained steadfast and never complained. An object of continual scorn and derision, David revived himself, and the crushed spirit of those around him, by turning to G-d. It was in this spirit that he penned the poignant prose of Tehillim which continue to inspire us to this very day. You're not helpless. King David paved the way with the immortal words of Tehillim. Mix in some Torah study and you have the most potent formula on the market for combating life's frustrations and difficulties, as the Sages suggested, "If you see that affliction is immanently approaching, flee to the four walls of Torah, and the problems will flee from you, instantly" (*Tanna D' Vey Eliyahu Rabbah,*

Chap 6). It's a tried and tested method; the moment you feel a twinge of pain and want to **forget about it**, lose yourself in learning. Learning puts you in touch with G-d, by teaching you that pain is not random; rather it comes from Him. It may hurt and you don't like it, but at least you're not lost; you can turn to G-d. You'll stop feeling so bad and broken. Awareness of G-d, through learning, changes your entire take on life. If you got a problem, remember G-d's address, and deposit it there. Tell Him in Hebrew, English, Spanish or French etc.... Doesn't matter; the language of pain is universal and so is G-d's love. Just watch how magically you will forget about your problems. Why? Because, "whoever is drawn after problems, the problems follow him, and whoever runs away from problems, the problems flee from him" (*Berachos, 63a*). Practice, practice, practice; nothing happens overnight. If you want to master this technique and really learn to switch-off your problem radar – and **forget about it**, then work on your relationship with G-d. It's a process; if you stick to it, you'll gradually sense more of Him in your life. Your life will have a different feel. Everything will seem intimately connected to G-d, so that naturally you will sense everything is really for the best. You will no longer be offended by the ordinary hassles in life. After all, they're part of G-d's masterful design to make you a better

person, as the Sages said, “A person should rejoice with suffering more than with good, because if a person has it good it’s indicative that his sins are not forgiven, but suffering indicates that he’s being pardoned” (*Sifri V”Eschanan, Chap 32*). There you have it; all the steps to climbing out of your hole. Your life is in a tailspin? Having a bad day? Everything is going wrong? Don’t panic. Work the plan. Ask yourself, “*How would those Tzaddikim handle this?*” Tell yourself “*O.K. I got the message; I just have to follow the steps. I have to remember G-d and talk to Him. I have to tell Him what’s going on*”. Keep going. Getting a little emotional? O.K. Tell yourself, “*It’s good to cry and pour my heart out to Him. In fact, that’s the point. That’s a positive thing! Hey. This really works, I’m feeling better already.*” Somewhere in the back of your head you’re probably thinking, “*This is too easy*”. Well, that’s just one of the ironies of life: Here’s a method whose secret lies in its simplicity, yet the rest of the world chooses to ignore it. Don’t make the same mistake! They prefer not think about G-d, so they’ll stay mired in problems. You, however, will reach out to G-d; and when you do, your problems will be gone and forgotten!

