

BS”D

My Soul Will Sing
*4 Steps to Embrace Difficult Yissurim
with Strength and Joy*

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~Introduction~

The Jewish response to *yissurim* extends well beyond the pages of *Sefer Iyov*. Knowing how to handle life's struggles with strength, clarity and *simcha* is the biggest, and most fundamental challenge we face today-- a time when depression, anxiety, apathy and lack of *shalom bais* are running rampant, not only in our communities, but in the world at large.

Not surprisingly, over the past few years countless articles, books, courses, therapies and support groups have all been dedicated to this topic. Many times a public spotlight is placed on the accounts of regular Jews who seem to have responded to particularly challenging situations with their *emuna* intact-- the hope being that their stories will become a source of inspiration and *chizuk*.

In our digitally connected world, much of this information, support and inspiration is literally at our fingertips.

Yet, even with all of this knowledge and even with all of this *chizuk*, for many of us there seems to be a very big gap between what we are “supposed” to be doing and actually being in that place.

This is especially true when the *yissurim* are exceptionally painful and stretch out over the long term. You can be armed with all the best *hashgafos* and all the best intentions in the world, but in the face of prolonged financial hardship, serious [struggles in shalom bais](#), *chinuch bonim*, and health, the unexpected loss of a loved one, or your own shortcomings, everything just seems to fall away.

When you find yourself in this place, there are many questions:

How do you find the strength to carry on?

How do you truly move past (not just bury) any feelings of anger,

frustration, depression, anxiety, and confusion- especially if the *yissurim* you are experiencing are not something the people around you openly talk about?

How do you find *Hashem* (let alone yourself) when you feel that you can hardly catch your breath?

How do you remain within a difficult situation, yet grow from it in a healthy way?

And it goes deeper than this... *Chazal* tell us that *Hashem* doesn't give a test to someone that he or she can't handle. But, does that mean if you feel like you *aren't* handling it properly that something is wrong with you? Even if you are technically “surviving,” does it mean you are condemned to just remain in “survival mode” for some indefinite amount of time?

Such internal questions are typically an inseparable part of the *nisayon* and having to resolve them can sometimes be as painful as the *nisayon* itself. Getting out of this mental and emotional place requires not only having the right mindset, it also involves systematically making the choices that will actually [cause Hashem to help you](#) out of it.

This last point is a critical one. Because even if you feel like your thoughts, feelings, and accomplishments are your own, the truth is that no person can move either up or down, emotionally or spiritually, without the *Ribbono Shel Olam* so willing it.

In the next few chapters, we will go over four fundamental steps you can take to help you recover your sense of balance, gain strength and clarity, and tap into an inner wellspring of inspiration and Divine Light in even the most challenging situations.

You'll be able to reach personal heights that you never even knew were

possible, and in the process, bring those around you along along for the journey.

A Summary of the Four Steps

Being able to embrace suffering with strength and joy involves a process that can be broken down into four main steps. If you make a sincere effort to go through this process, it will help you to look at yourself and your situation in a more healthy way. It will also allow you draw closer to Hashem and open the door to the Heavenly assistance that will ultimately bring you closer to realizing your unique spiritual potential. This applies to both men and women, young and old, those who have always been Torah observant and those who did *teshuva* later in life.

The goal is to recognize these four stages and to get yourself accustomed to going through them repeatedly and continuously. By doing so, if you find yourself being overwhelmed by difficult *yissurim*, you will instinctively know how to respond.

A hint to this four-step process can be found in [*Sefer Tehillim*](#)¹:

זָבַח לֵאלֹהִים תּוֹדָה ; וְשִׁלַּם לְעֹלְיוֹן נְדָרָיִךְ
וּקְרָאתֵנִי, בְּיוֹם צָרָה ; אַחֲלֶצְךָ, וּתְכַבְּדֵנִי

Offer to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving;
and pay your vows to the Most High
And call out to Me on the day of trouble;
I will free you, and you will glorify Me

The basic process is this...

זָבַח לֵאלֹהִים תּוֹדָה...

¹ Chapter 50: 14-15

The first important step is to make a conscious effort to recognize and be thankful for the good in your life. Even in the most difficult and darkest situations, it is still possible to see *chasdei Hashem*-- as long as you are [actively looking for it](#).

Through constantly training yourself to thank *Hashem* for the apparent “good” in your life, you will eventually be able to thank Hashem even for the apparently “bad.” In the process, you will be opening the door to inner peace, as well as emotional and physical health.

וְשִׁלְמִים לְעֵלְיוֹן נִדְרֵיךָ...

At the most pure and basic level, a *nedar* represents a Jew's pledge to do something that will bring him or her closer to Hashem. The truth is we make “*nedarim*” all the time. We all go through moments in life where we resolve to better ourselves, to improve our relationship with *Hashem* and those around us. Even if such vows are not binding according to *halacha*, they stem from the same [strong desire to come closer to our Creator](#), to express our gratitude, and to ultimately enhance our relationship with Him.

According to *Chazal*, when an unborn child is in his mother's womb, an angel teaches him the entire Torah. Just before birth, the child is shown a vision of both *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom*, and the angel implores him "Become a *tzaddik*! Do not become a *rasha*!" As he is about to enter the world, the angel then strikes the child's lips, causing all the Torah knowledge previously taught to him to be forgotten.²

The soul's desire is to find and reclaim the Torah it once learned. According to Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, this Torah represents “all that [the person] needs to do, labor at, and achieve in this world,” and a person must continuously “search and seek that which he lost” at the

² Niddah 30b

time of birth.³

The soul constantly wants to return to its Source and be the *tzaddik* not the *rasha*. If you are in the habit of thanking *Hashem* for the good in your life and feeling gratitude for it, then the next natural step is make a commitment to “repay” it.

How can you repay *Hashem*? The answer is by revealing *Hashem's* Presence in the world by doing actions that bring you and those around you closer to Him.

So, whenever you find yourself struggling through a *nisayon*, you should make a special effort to not only act on such impulses if they come up, but also celebrate the fact that they are even there in the first place. Even if the resulting thoughts or actions seem to you small and insignificant, from *Hashem's* perspective they are big and precious indeed.

וּקְרָאֵנִי בְיוֹם צָרָה...

The next step is to get into the habit of asking *Hashem* for help along the way. Being “happy with your lot,”⁴ means having *emuna* in the fact that the situation you are currently in is exactly where you need to be at the moment- regardless of whether you are feeling “up” or “down”.

Everything you are experiencing is there to help you ultimately come closer to yourself, *Hashem* and your unique *tafkid* in the world. But this acceptance does not mean you shouldn't daven to *Hashem* that the circumstances in your life be made easier or more clear.

Whether you want *Sciata D'Shamaya* in the “little things,” those small, daily annoyances along the way, or for something bigger, *Hashem* always wants to hear from you.

³ Likutey Moharan #188

⁴ Pirkei Avos 4:1

אֲחֻלָּהּ, וְתִכְבְּדֶנּוּ...

In the first three steps what you are really doing is building a vessel. This vessel allows you to experience moments along the way where there is a clear revelation of Hashem's Guiding Hand-- a revelation that can sometimes happen in the darkest of places. You will call out to Hashem, your prayer will be answered, and you will feel Hashem's *hashgacha* and love. With it you will often receive sudden burst of clarity and renewed strength.

Most of us have experienced such moments in our lives at some point. Sometimes these moments of “freedom” will be small, other times big. But, they will always be a clear revelation of the *Ribbono Shel Olam*.

Such moments of revelation have a purpose. Much like the mystical text of *Perek Shira*, where the elements of creation each have their own song of praise to the One Who made them, you can use these revelations of Hashem in your life to “sing” praises to your Creator.

In the process, you will be building and nurturing a conversation with God, that *causes* Him to do even more for you. This, in turn, makes you even more receptive to His *hashgacha*.

It's a constant, repetitive cycle.

By acknowledging and thanking Hashem not just in the good times, but also in the dark ones, and by striving to refine yourself bit by bit, you will reveal Hashem's Glory into the world.

Furthermore, as you help yourself, you will be helping others, too. Just as one string on a guitar, when strummed, pulls along the strings next to it, causing them to also vibrate, as you move upward, you will positively affect those around you. Throughout your personal journey, you will give energy and spiritual strength to your loved ones, while inspiring those who are going through similar struggles.

Resolving the Difficult Questions

Now that we've outlined the general process, let's acknowledge some of the tough questions and issues that can bubble up along the way:

“How can I feel gratitude when I'm so overwhelmed? I have a hard time feeling thankful for anything. In fact, I can't see any good in this situation... or in myself.”

“Whenever I say to myself that I'm going to do something, I don't end up sticking to it.”

“What good is a small act when I'm failing in so many other areas of my Yiddishkeit?”

“I've tried looking for Hashem in my life, but I just don't see Him.”

“Nothing I'm doing is working out. I don't know what Hashem wants from me!!!”

“I try to daven, but I can only just barely say the words without feeling.”

or

“I've cried so many tears, why isn't Hashem hearing me?!”

If you find yourself relating to any of the above questions, don't worry. As we go through each step in more detail we'll answer these questions and others like it.

Step 1: Seeing and Being Thankful for the Good in Your Life

The Body Block

A Jew's essence and strength is to be thankful. This is hinted to in the fact that we are called *Yehudim* after Yehuda. The Torah recounts that when Leah gave birth to her fourth son, she realized that she would be the mother of one third of the shevatim. Not only was this more than her rightful share⁵, it stood in stark contrast to the life she would have had if she had become Eisav's wife as intended.⁶

For the first time Leah pushed away all her sadness and expressed her full gratitude to Hashem:

וַתֵּהָר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר הַפַּעַם אוֹדָה אֶת־יְהוָה
עַל כֵּן קָרָאתָה שְׁמוֹ יְהוּדָה

*And she conceived again and bore a son,
and she said, "This time, I will thank Hashem!
Therefore, she named him Yehuda...*

Bereishis 29:35

The Sforno points out that the name Yehuda (יהודה) contains both Hashem's Name (י-ה-ו-ה) as well as the root for "gratitude" (הודה).

On the words, "Then Yehuda approached him..."⁷ the Sefas Emes explains the connection even further:

The idea of gratitude is a trait found in every Jew. My grandfather the Chiddushei HaRim explained that we are called Yehudim because we are grateful to and acknowledge Hashem's

⁵ Rashi 29:35

⁶ Bava Basra 123a

⁷ Bereishis 44:18

involvement and kindness in every aspect of our lives. And it is through this acknowledgment that we are able to approach every challenge in our lives.

Since being thankful for the good in our lives is our innate spiritual nature and the foundation of our strength, when we move away from this nature, we make handling a difficult *nisayon* all the more difficult.

By not appreciating our unique qualities, strengths and talents, and by not being thankful for the people around us, the possessions that we own, as well as the experiences and opportunities that surround us, we can come to not appreciate the One Who gave us all of these things. By disconnecting ourselves from the Source of all Goodness, we can then end up losing the good that He has already bestowed to us.

If everyone would constantly give thanks and praise to Hashem, whether under good circumstances or not, as is written: 'In Hashem (expressing G-d's attribute of loving-kindness) I will praise His word, in Elokim (expressing G-d's attribute of judgment) I will praise His word,' surely all the troubles and all the exiles would be completely nullified and the complete redemption would take place!

-Rabbe Natan of Breslov
Likutei Halachos; Unloading and Loading: 4

But, when we are caught in a difficult *nisayon*, being able to see the all the *brocha* that surrounds us and even more, being able to truly feel thankful for that goodness can be a challenge. It is much more “natural” and easy to get caught up in feelings of anger, frustration, despair, or self-pity.

No matter how spiritual we'd like to be, our bodies just get in the way.

Perhaps this is the reason why even the biggest *tzaddikim* are still

obligated to recount *yetzias Mitzrayim* on sedar night:

וְאַפִּילוּ כָּלֵנוּ חֲכָמִים, כָּלֵנוּ נְבוֹנִים, כָּלֵנוּ זִקְנִים,
כָּלֵנוּ יוֹדְעִים אֶת הַתּוֹרָה, מְצֹוּה עָלֵינוּ לְסַפֵּר בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם

“And even if we all were wise, all were understanding, all experienced [old], all knowledgeable in the Torah, we would still be obligated to recount the Exodus from Egypt.”

Even the holiest among us are still of this world and possess a “shadow” of materialism.⁸ They all have some point where their bodies blind them to *Hashem's* Presence and get in the way with their connection to Him. How much more so for the rest of us who are still caught in the struggle to “choose life”?

When the Curtain Gets Pulled Back

A well-known and fundamental idea in Judaism is that *Hashem* does not make excessive or unreasonable demands of His creations.⁹ He expects a person to act according to his ability.¹⁰

Given that *Hashem* won't demand of someone something he can't accomplish, how then are we supposed to come to the point of feeling and expressing our gratitude for all the good that *Hashem* constantly sends our way if we are too caught up in our *yissurim* to see it?

The answer is that even in the most difficult situations, there *will* be moments when *Hashem* will pull back the curtain so to speak to reveal His Guiding Hand, and it's at *those* moments that you should make the effort to feel and express your gratitude. **But, these experiences will only affect those who have made themselves receptive to them.** As it says,¹¹

8 Rav Dessler, *Strive for Truth*, Vol2 pg 209

9 Avoda Zara 3a

10 Shemos Rabbah 34

11 Tehillim 91:1

יֵשֵׁב בְּסִתְרֵי עֲלִיוֹן

One who dwells in the hiddenness of the One Above...

The person who recognizes (even if it just intellectually) that everything in the world goes according to *Hashem's hashgacha*- even if it seems to be hidden by nature... the person who realizes that in all our sorrows *Hashem* is right there with us and feels our distress, and that the *nisyonos* themselves are meant to bring us closer to our potential...

בְּצִלְ שֹׁדֵי

in the protection of Shakai...

This Name of *Hashem* is a conjunction of *י-ש*, which means “Who is Sufficient or Enough.” It alludes to the fact that *Hashem* sets proper limits, not only in creation, but also to a person's suffering as well as the physical, emotional, and spiritual resources he will have at his disposal.¹²

יְתַלֶּוֹן

will he temporarily lodge.

יְתַלֶּוֹן comes from the word *לון* which means to lodge for the night.

The point is even in the most difficult situations, when we are fighting waves of confusion and despair, there will be temporary moments along the way when *Hashem* will reveal Himself and the sting of our troubles will seem to abate for a bit. The experience feels like being in the eye of a storm. Suddenly, it will seem like *Hashem* is waving at us; other times it may feel like a wink, or even a hug. It is at *these* times

¹² Rashi Bereshis 17:1

that we can and should feel gratitude and make an effort to express it—whether it happens in a personal *tefilla*, a *perek Tehillim*, or some other *mitzvah* or an act of kindness.

Do this enough times, and you will begin to see even more good, and slowly, but surely be able to thank *Hashem* even for the difficulties themselves. Being able to believe in the good that lies at the root of the seemingly bad is actually a *halacha* clearly mentioned in the *Shulchan Aruch*,¹³ and is one of our fundamental the goals in this world, as it says:¹⁴

רַבִּים מְכַאוֹבִים, לְרָשָׁע: וְהַבּוֹטֵחַ בַּיהוָה--חֶסֶד יְסוּבֶבְנוּ

*Many are the sorrows of the wicked;
but the one who trusts in Hashem,
chesed surrounds him!*

This means two people could be going through the exact same experience. Yet, the person who is disconnected from *Hashem* will just see sorrow, pain and difficulty. The person who is constantly working on and renewing his connection to Hashem, however, will be focused, instead on the *chasdei Hashem*.

Giving Hashem Entry

But, what if you feel like you just can't see *Hashem* in your life?:

“These experiences happen to everyone else, not me. Nothing in my life ever goes right...”

There are several sources that point to the fact that *Hashem* can be found by anyone who makes a sincere effort to seek Him no matter

¹³ Orach Chaim, Chapter 15

¹⁴ Tehillim 32:10

how far away the person is:

וּבְקִשְׁתֶּם מֵשֵׁם אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ, וּמָצְאתֶם
כִּי תִדְרְשׁוּנוּ, בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ

And from there [the depths of galus] you will seek Hashem your God; and you will find Him, if you search for Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

Dvarim 4:29

וּקְרַאתֶם אֹתִי וְהִלַכְתֶּם, וְהִתְפַּלַּלְתֶּם אֵלַי ; וְשָׁמַעְתִּי, אֲלֵיכֶם
וּבְקִשְׁתֶּם אֹתִי, וּמָצְאתֶם : כִּי תִדְרְשׁוּנִי, בְּכָל-לִבְבְּכֶם

And you will call out to Me, and go, and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, if you will search for Me with all your heart.

Yermiyahu 29:13

קְרוֹב יְהוָה, לְכָל-קֹרְאָיו
לְכָל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָאֵהוּ בְאֱמֶת

Hashem is close to all that call upon Him,
to all that call upon Him in truth.

Tehillim 145: 18

If you are having difficulty finding *Hashem*, then pick one area where you feel like you are struggling. It could be with something big or something small. Then, take a *small* step back, let go of one little thing, and ask *Hashem* for help. Ask that *Hashem* show His Guiding

Hand in a way that you will see it, and *then wait to see what happens*.

Do not worry that you are testing *Hashem*. If your goal really is to see *Hashem*, then this will be the first step in a dialogue, a relationship between you and your Creator. This dialogue lies at the foundation of your [*emuna in Hashem*](#). Without taking this step, without making an effort to let *Hashem* into your life in a palpable way, it can be very easy to miss the constant signals and messages that He is sending to you.

As Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotsk once said: “Where is God to be found? In the place where He is given entry.”

Step 2: Striving to Achieve Your Potential

Believing in the Big Picture

Immediately after the Jewish nation fell in the incident of Chait HaEgel, Moshe Rabbeinu began davening to *Hashem* that He spare His people. Seeing that his prayers were successful and sensing that it was an *ais ratzon*, a time of favor, Moshe then requested that he be shown a greater revelation of Godliness: “Make Your ways known to me...”¹⁵ According to Rashi, Moshe was really asking the age-old question: why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper in this world?¹⁶

Hashem ultimately responded that it is not possible for a human being to fully absorb or understand God's ways and still live. Instead, He agreed to show Moshe His “back.” According to the *Chasam Sofer*, *Hashem* showed Moshe a vision of His Divine *hashgacha*, but only in retrospect.

As things are happening, we are often at a loss to understand the “why” behind them. Only after time has passed and other parts of the puzzle are in place, can we get a sense of the big picture.

One of the fundamentals of *emuna* is living with the certainty that everything *Hashem* does is for the good even if at the time we are unable to fully see that big picture or understand how our experiences are fitting into it.

צָדִיק יְהוָה, בְּכֹל-דַּרְכָּיו ; וְחַסִּיד , בְּכֹל-מַעֲשָׂיו

Hashem is righteous in all His ways,

¹⁵ Shemos 33:13

¹⁶ Berachos 7a

and gracious in all His works.

Tehillim 145: 17

When *Hashem* sends someone *yissurim*, the real goal is to help the person reach his or her spiritual potential, to unlock a hidden inner light that could not come out otherwise. This inner light is our חלק אֱלֹהִים מִמַּעַל (*Chelek Elokah Mimal*) the aspect of *Hashem's* Glory that we are meant to reveal to the world. **Every single situation that a person finds himself in with all of its details at any given moment is perfectly designed to help a person on this journey.**

The closer a person is to this spiritual potential, the more he or she reveals *Hashem's* Glory and becomes a vessel to receive *Hashem's* goodness- both in this world and in the next. While we may not always know why we have to go through a specific painful experience (though, if you are tune with *Hashem*, you will often be given some insight), that ultimate goal is *always* there.

But when we are caught in the middle of a difficult *nisayon*, recognizing this *and* feeling that *Hashem* is chastising us like “a Father to His child,” and allowing ourselves to accept the situation with love and joy, instead of anger, depression and anxiety, can be extremely challenging. Realize, this struggle happens even to those who feel connected to *Hashem*.

Letting the Fall Happen... and Learning From it

We learn in the Talmud,¹⁷ that a person is not held responsible for what he says when in distress. It's okay to say that a particular situation or experience is painful-- even if your words are temporarily clothed in anger. Where the *yissurim* are exceptionally difficult or spread out over the long term, it is also quite normal if you fall in some areas of your *Yiddishkeit*.

¹⁷ Baba Basra 16B

Real growth is a continuous journey that is full of ups and downs, highs and lows. There are times when we feel clear, confident, open, connected to ourselves, to those around us, and to *Hashem*. Then, there are those times when we feel lost, out of control, closed, confused, hopeless, and scared.

This is the innate nature of the world that *Hashem* created. While this pattern can be seen in many different facets of creation, such as night and day, and the waning and waxing of the moon, it is perhaps most strongly reflected in the yearly seasonal and agricultural cycles. Seeds are planted in the ground right before the onset of winter, where they immediately begin to disintegrate and break down. The trees shed their leaves, and many animals either migrate to warmer climates or go into hibernation. In the winter months, from the surface, the world looks dead.

But we know that springtime will come, and with it a sudden revival and renewal of life. If you live in an area where there are distinct seasonal changes, then you are witnessing this *techiyas hamesim* first hand every single year.

While the “winters” and “downs” may not be so pleasant to experience, they are nevertheless an essential part of growth, and how we handle those quieter, colder periods is just as important (if not more important) as what we do during the “ups.”

But, many people spend all of their energy fighting or even denying outright that the fall even exists. They are so busy trying to be happy with their lot... trying not to complain or feel angry at *Hashem*.. trying to maintain the status quo, that they end up missing the very messages *Hashem* is trying to send their way.

Sometimes it is best to let the fall happen! Perhaps this statement may sound scary. After all, you've got a house to run, or *parnassa* to earn,

people are depending on you; and maybe you've been told not to complain, it's your *yetzer hara*, and if you're not constantly growing spiritually you're going down...

But, the fall itself has a purpose.

Of course, this fall will look different for different people and situations. Maybe it means having a hard time concentrating in *davening*, having difficulty getting out of bed, or running the house even though you've done it successfully for years. Maybe you feel anger bubbling up inside, but you keep pushing it down. Maybe some of the questions mentioned in the introduction are swirling around in your head, but you just keep ignoring them.

The goal is to take some time to try to get in touch with what is happening-- either by yourself or with a trusted friend or advisor.

This doesn't mean that you are meant to stay in this place, as I'll explain below. But, there is something you need to get from the experience. *Hashem* is trying to bring you somewhere, and if you let Him take you there, you will walk away not only closer to Him, but also closer to yourself and those around you.

Realize that the test of real growth almost always comes **after the *nisayon* has passed**. Don't mistake a fall *during* a *nisayon* for a lack of spiritual growth. Those who engage in physical exercise know that muscles must first be torn a bit before they can get stronger (It's why your muscles may feel sore after a workout). Spiritual muscles work the same way.

The goal is to experience the fall and everything that comes with it, to catch yourself from falling even further, then hunker down and wait until it passes.

If instead one spends all of his time and energy fighting the fall as mentioned above, and misses the messages that *Hashem* is sending,

then he could end up missing out on the growth as well and not even know it. Even if he felt closer to *Hashem* during the *nisayon*, the instant the *yissurim* either abate or pass, he will go back to his original place.

Chazal say that by *Crias Yam Suf*, *Hashem's* presence was so manifest that even a Jewish maidservant who witnessed this miracle said, "Behold, this is my God I will glorify him!"¹⁸ *Chazal* further tell us that the maidservant experienced a level of revelation at the sea that was greater than any revelation every experienced by the prophet *Yechezkel*.

But as the Torah later recounts,¹⁹ *Klal Yisrael* failed to fully internalize the experience. Amazingly, their clear vision of such an open miracle hadn't sufficiently affected their level of *emuna* in *Hashem's* unwavering *hashgacha*.

Growing Spiritually When You Feel Like You're Going Nowhere

That said, even in the midst of difficult *yissurim*, we need to make a special effort to maintain our connection to *Hashem*. This helps us to create the necessary *cailim* that allows *Hashem* to bring us to where ever we need to go.

This means several things in a practical sense...

First, once you've acknowledged the negative feelings, such as anger and despair, that will naturally bubble up, you then need to do the actions that will help you to handle them in a healthy way. Not only will this help to ease the pain, but it will allow you to get some perspective and make healthy choices.

¹⁸ Shemos 15:2

¹⁹ Shemos 15: 23-24

So, talk things out with a good friend or an advisor, such as a *Rov*, *Rebbetzin*, or therapist. Speaking things out with another will not only help you to release the negative energy, but this person could be a source of chizuk and advice and can help you to see the situation in a different light.

You also should make a special effort to take care of yourself physically. Going into detail about the physical factors that can affect your mood is beyond the scope of this book. But it is well known that your diet as well as how much you sleep and exercise can all significantly affect your mood and thus your resilience in the face of difficulty.

Once you are making an effort to give your body what it needs, you can further push away negative feelings by doing the following actions for 30 seconds straight. Just give them a try, and see how you feel after:

- Smile. If you *really* don't feel like smiling, then hold a pen or a pencil between your teeth for 30 seconds.
- Stand straight, with your chest up, your legs at shoulder width, and your hands on your hips.
- Look up. When people are experiencing strong, negative emotions, they tend to look down. It's harder to be so negative when you are looking up.
- Make yourself laugh. Read or look at something funny or spend time with a friend who has a good sense of humor.
- Go for a walk. Even very moderate exercise, such as a 20 minute walk a couple times a week, can make a big difference.
- Take several deep, slow breaths. Learn how to breathe from your gut like a baby.

The *Ramchal* mentions in *Mesilas Yesharim*²⁰ that our external actions will have an effect on our internal reality. Since we tend to have more control over what we do externally versus what is happening inside, it makes sense to do the physical actions that will bring about a positive inner reality.

By making the effort to take care of yourself physically and emotionally, and by being thankful for the good in your life when you are able to see it, you will be putting yourself in the best position to truly grow from the experience.

But, this is just half the battle. It keeps the negativity at a minimum so that you will have more strength and mental clarity to do the things that will draw you closer to *Hashem*. You can think of it as סִוּר מִרָע.

Now, it's time for עֲשֵׂה טוֹב...

This starts with something called *hisbodedus*-- setting aside a little time each day outside of your formal davening to talk to *Hashem* as a person would speak to a good friend. This private prayer or meditation should be said in your own words and in your own language.

Most importantly, you are having a conversation with *Hashem*. So, speak out whatever is in your heart-- even if your words seem harsh, bitter, or inadequate, and even if you feel that you can only get a few words out of your mouth. Rebbe Nachman of Breslov taught that *hisbodedus* is a powerful tool for clarity, inner strength and spiritual growth that has the ability to bring *geula* of any kind closer.

Above all, *hisbodedus* is a real lifeline because it creates an open running dialogue between you and *Hashem*, and as you go about your day, you will then be more receptive to the messages that *Hashem* sends you.

20 Chapter 7

You can also make an effort to do the *mitzvas* that come your way—both big and small. Even if you feel like you are just going through the motions, every *mitzvah* you do creates a positive influence that will build on itself and give you more strength to continue your life's journey. As Chazal say, “One mitzvah leads to another...”²¹

Moreover, according to the Holy Zohar,²² when *Hashem* wants to show us compassion, He first sends to us an individual who, himself is in need of compassion. When we have compassion on this person, then *Hashem* has compassion on us, as it says, “Whoever has compassion on God's creatures, receives compassion from heaven.”²³

Our actions down here can unlock a flow of Divine assistance, compassion and blessing from Above that can change our *mazel*:

Rabbi Akiva had a daughter, and Chaldean astrologers told him that on the same day that she enters the wedding canopy, a snake will bite her and she will die. She was very worried about this. On that day, her wedding day, she took the ornamental pin from her hair and stuck it into a hole in the wall for safekeeping, and it happened that it entered directly into the eye of the snake. In the morning, when she took the pin, the snake was pulled and came out with it.

Her father Rabbi Akiva said to her: What did you do to merit being saved from the snake? She told him: In the evening a poor person came and knocked on the door, and everyone was preoccupied with the feast and nobody heard him. I stood and took the portion that you had given me and gave it to him. Rabbi Akiva said to her: You performed a mitzvah, and you were saved in its merit. Rabbi Akiva went out and taught based on this incident that even though it is written: “And charity will save from death” (Proverbs 10:2), it does not mean that it will save a person only from an unusual death, but even from death itself.

21 Pirkei Avos 4:2

22 1:104a

23 Shabbos 151b

Hashem Wants the Best You

As you go through the first two steps mentioned above, it's normal to feel like your actions are very dry and robotic. You may even feel like you are being fake.

If this is happening to you, don't worry. It could be the reason why the *possuk*:

וְזָבַח לֵאלֹהִים תִּזְבֹּחַ ; וְשָׁלַם לְעֹלִיוֹן נְדָרָיִךְ

Offer to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving;
and pay your vows to the Most High

is in the third person, even though *Hashem* is speaking directly to us, in the first person, in the *possukim* immediately before and after it.

This *possuk* contains the name *Elokim*, a name that is connected to *Hashem's* attribute of judgment. A child may instinctively know that his mother and father love him, but when he has just received a punishment from his parents, he may feel miles away from them.

When you are standing in the middle of difficult *yissurim*, you may feel very distant from *Hashem*, and you may not feel *Hashem's* love so easily even if you know it intellectually- just like a child who has been punished by his parents.

The bottom line is that *Hashem* wants you to make an effort to draw closer to Him even when He appears to be distant. As long as your *ratzon* is in the right place, you can be assured that *Hashem* will help you through all the difficulties that lie ahead.

דַּרְשֵׁתִי אֶת-יְהוָה וְעָנְנִי וּמָכַל-מִגּוּרֹתַי הַצִּילָנִי

I sought Hashem, and He answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.

Just remember... your experience is specifically and perfectly designed to help *you* improve yourself, to open your eyes and teach you and to fix any spiritual impediments that are preventing you from bringing out your unique light into the world. So, try to resist the urge to compare yourself to those around you:

*“Look how well she's coping with her situation;
why can't I do the same!?”*

No, you *can't* do the same, because you are not the same person!

You can certainly look to others for inspiration. But, you should ultimately work to do the best that you personally can and never stop asking *Hashem* for help. Once you begin to focus inward, once you concentrate on your own personal strengths and resources, your own set of limitations and challenges, and your personal connection to *Hashem*, you may be amazed at just how far it will get you.

Step 3: Calling Out to Hashem

Requesting Repeatedly

According to the *Midrash* on *Megillas Esther*, before *Esther HaMalka* went in uninvited to *Achasveirosh*, she spent three days fasting, wearing sack-cloth, and praying by way of the window (toward *Yerushalyim*). She pleaded and cried for *Hashem's* mercy, moving from window to window in the house of *Achasveirosh*.²⁴

Why did Esther feel the need to move “from window to window”? Wasn't one window enough, and why not just *daven* from within the palace?

Perhaps her behavior was hinting to the fact that just as each window offered a different view on the grounds surrounding the palace, the prayers that she uttered took on various angles and forms. This is one of the fundamental principles of *tefilla*. *Hashem* never gets tired of hearing from us- even if we keep making the same requests over and over again, and even if we spend an abundant amount of time going over details that He already knows.

The Torah recounts that after the incident at the waters of *Merivah*, *Hashem* made a vow restricting Moshe Rabbeinu from entering *Eretz Yisrael*.²⁵ Yet, the *parsha* of *Va'eschanan* begins with Moshe davening to Hashem that he be allowed to enter the Land:

וְאֶתְחַנֵּן אֶל־יְהוָה בְּעֵת הַהוּא לֵאמֹר... אָעֲבֹר־הַנָּחַל
וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן

I entreated the Lord at that time, saying...
let me cross over and see the good land

²⁴ Esther Rabba 8:7

²⁵ Shemos 17: 1-7

that is on the other side of the Jordan...²⁶

According to Rashi, Moshe had thought that the vow was annulled because he was allowed to conquer and enter the land of *Sichon* and *Og*, which were annexed to *Eretz Yisrael* and divided among the *shevatim* of Reuven, Gad and part of Menashe.²⁷

The truth is from the moment Moshe learned about the decree, he never stopped davening for it to be overturned. Not only did he do this daily, but whenever a new *ais ratzon* presented itself (such as following the conquest of *Sichon* and *Og*), he used the opportunity to pray anew as if he had never prayed before.

Moshe's prayers were so powerful and effective that *Hashem* had to actually step in and stop his supplication. The *Midrash* recounts that had Moshe davened one more *tefilla*, he would have forced *Hashem*, so to speak, to annul the decree.²⁸

The *Midrash* further comments on the word “saying,” that Moshe meant this as a statement to all Jews throughout time, saying to them that just as he never despaired and continued to pray to enter *Eretz Yisroel*, even though *Hashem* had decreed that he could not, so too, we should never give up hope that *Hashem* will send us a *yeshua*-- even when it seems like all hope is lost.

Praying continually means not only standing in formal *tefilla* or saying *tehillim*. It also means making spontaneous, informal *tefillas* to *Hashem* as you go about your day: beseeching *Hashem* at a *bris*... at the *chupah* of a wedding... at a *levaya*... at a *kever of a tzaddik*... during the *yartzeit* if a *tzaddik*... or, while performing any *mitzvah*, such as taking *challah*, giving *tzedakah*, or honoring your parents.

The *Midrash* also notes that Moshe davened a form of *tefilla* called

26 Devarim 3:23-25

27 Rashi Devarim 3:23

28 Devarim Rabbah 11:10

“*chanina*” which means the person davening makes requests he feels he does not deserve. Moshe put his own merits aside and asked that *Hashem* treat him with compassion. We learn from this that just as Moshe never despaired and continued to pray for God's compassion, so too, we should never give up hope on our own requests even if we feel we do not deserve them.²⁹

Every Yeshua Has It's Time

Every difficult experience Hashem send sends us in life is perfectly designed and timed to bring us closer to our spiritual potential-- so too is every experience of *yeshua*. Sometimes you can *daven* to *Hashem* for help and your *tefilla* is answered right away. Other times, you may need to wait a while, even a long while. There are any number of factors that may need to come together to affect how and when that *yeshua* will come.

On one hand, we need to have emuna in the fact that Hashem's abilities are unlimited. He can save us in an instant even after a negative decree has been issued against us:

Chizkiyahu was sick and close to death. And Yeshaya the prophet, son of Amoz, came to him and said... 'Thus says the Lord... you shall die and not live.' [Chizkiyahu asked] 'What is the meaning of 'you shall die and not live'?' [And Yeshaya answered] You shall die in this world and not live in the world to come... because you did not try to have children.

[Chizkiyahu then] said: The reason was because I saw by the holy spirit that the children issuing from me would not be virtuous. Said [Yeshaya] to him: What have you to do with the secrets of the All-Merciful? You should have done what you were commanded, and let the Holy One, blessed be He, do that which pleases Him.

²⁹ Ibid

Then give me now your daughter; perhaps through your merit and mine combined virtuous children will issue from me. [But Yeshaya] replied: The doom has already been decreed.

[Chizkiyahu responded to Yeshaya] “I have a tradition passed down from the house of my father’s father [Dovid Hamelech] that “Even if a sharp sword is resting on your neck, don’t hold yourself back from rachamim.” Right then Chizkiyahu turned his face towards the wall and davened... What was the “wall?” Rebbe Shimon ben Lakish says that he prayed from the inner most chambers of his heart.³⁰

It's written that “Chizkiyahu wept an intense weeping,” and *Hashem*, responded right away: “I have heard your prayer and I have seen your tears. Behold, I am going to add fifteen years to your life.”³¹

On the other hand, we need to keep in mind always that even the *yeshua* itself has its time. A hint to this can be found in *tehillim*:

עֵינֵי-כָל אֱלֹהִים

The eyes of all are to You

יִשְׁבְּרוּ

“they break” (yisaberi can also be read *yishaberi*). In other words, they break [the spiritual blocks that prevent them from connecting to You]

וְאַתָּה נוֹתֵן-לָהֶם אֶת-אֲכָלָם בְּעֵתוֹ

and You give them food in *its* time

Tehillim 145:15

Even if it seems that *Hashem* is not responding to our repeated

³⁰ Brachos 10a

³¹ Yeshaya 38:5

tefillas, we should never give up hope. A *yeshua* may yet come; it may just not be the right time to receive it.

An Ax at the Gate

Our Sages teach us that since the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, all the gates of *tefilla* have been closed to us except for one- the gates of tears. The gates of tears are never locked.³²

When we are in pain, we instinctively cry out. Where the pain is exceptionally great and prolonged, we can also be left feeling broken and humbled. It forces us to stop along the way and ask questions-- how did we get here? And why?

Being in such a place may be uncomfortable, but at the same time it can be turned into a tremendous *ais ratzon*.

קָרוֹב יְהוָה, לְנִשְׁבָּרֵי-לֵב; וְאֶת-דֹּכְאֵי-רוּחַ יוֹשִׁיעַ

Hashem is close to the broken hearted,
and those of crushed spirit He saves

Tehillim 34:19

It says in *Mishlei*, “before every break there is arrogance” (לִפְנֵי שֶׁבַר גָּאוֹן)³³ At it's most basic level, arrogance is a denial of the fact that *Hashem* is truly in control of all matters- big and small- in this world. This attitude stands in the way of our connection to *Hashem*. When *yissurim* help us to break down this barrier, we have the opportunity to reach heights that were not possible before.

The Baal Shem Tov taught that a broken heart can propel a Jew's *tefillas* to the highest realms in Heaven. “In the king's palace there are many doors and portals, each one with a key of its own. There is,

³² Brochos 32b

³³ *Mishlei* 16:18

however, one tool that can open all of them, that is an ax. *Kavonos* are the keys which open the gates of Heaven, each gate having its own particular *kavona*. But, a broken heart is a tool that can penetrate all the gates of Heaven.”³⁴

If we can direct our tears and the emotions attached to them towards *Hashem* with all of our hearts then, אַדְלָג שׁוּר, we can scale even the highest, most slippery walls.³⁵

Open Your Mouth Wide

The truth is when you are standing in the middle of a difficult *nisayon*, it is a special opportunity to ask *Hashem* for *Sciata D'Shamaya* in all areas of your life, not just those involving the *nisayon* itself.

In *Sefer Tehillim*, Dovid HaMelech beseeches *Hashem*:³⁶

בְּקִרְאִי, עֲנֵנִי אֱלֹהֵי צְדָקָי

Answer me when I call,
O God of my righteousness

קריאה is a form of *tefilla* in which the person specifically calls out to *Hashem* confident that *Hashem* is listening and knowing that *Hashem* will answer his *tefillas* ³⁷. Given this, we can understand the above *possuk* in a different way:

בְּקִרְאִי, עֲנֵנִי אֱלֹהֵי צְדָקָי

With *my calling out*,
O God of my righteousness, answer me

34 From the Stories of the Baal Shem Tov, Vol 3 p22

35 Tehillim 18:30

36 Tehillim 4:2

37 Rav Shimshon Pinchus, *Shaarim BeTefilla*, pg75

In other words, may the very fact that I call out be the answer to my prayers. Because if I am able to call out to You, *Hashem*, then I know that You'll be listening and You will respond to me.

Dovid HaMelech then goes on to proclaim:

בְּצָר, הִרְחַבְתָּ לִּי

In distress (literally, in narrowness),
You set me free (literally, You widened me)

If we can confidently ask *Hashem* for help in the middle of a *nisayon*, even for little things, then *Hashem* guarantees us that He will both listen and help us to ask for even more:

הִרְחַב-פִּיךָ, וְאַמְלֵאָהּ

Open your mouth wide and I will fill it
[i.e. not only fill your desires, but
help you fill your mouth with other requests]

Tehillim 81:11

Sit Alone and Be Still

The main goal of the first two steps mentioned in the above chapters is to build a connection to *Hashem*. As that connection strengthens, you will have greater confidence in *Hashem's* ability and willingness to help you in times of distress, and you will be able to fulfill the verse:

יֵשֵׁב בְּדָד וַיִּזְדַּם, כִּי נֹטַל עָלָיו

Sit alone and be still,
because it depends on Him

Eicha 3:28

Even if you are surrounded by supportive friends, family, and advisors, no one will be able to fully understand or appreciate your personal *nisyonos*. This is what it means to “sit alone.” As you strengthen your connection to *Hashem*, you will begin to feel an increasing calmness or stillness bubbling up inside of you even in the face of difficult *yissurim*.

Why? Because you'll understand and know that “it depends on Him.” *Hashem* determines how, when, or *if* your *yeshua* will come as well as what you need to get out of the experience. He alone knows the big picture and how all the elements within come together for the ultimate good, because He created it.

By davening repeatedly to *Hashem* and focusing on different aspects of the request, by approaching Him through various “windows” with a range of emotions and within different situations, we open the door to countless *yeshuas* and *brochos* that could not have come to us otherwise.

Even if the answer is not ultimately the one that we wanted, if the lines of communication are open, then we stand a better chance of not only making peace with the outcome, but becoming a better Jew *because* of it.

Step 4: Revealing Hashem's Glory in the World

Confinement of the Soul

According to *Chazal*, the Egyptian exile (*galus Mitzrayim*) is the prototype and the root of all the exiles that we, as a nation, have experienced.³⁸ But, it sits at the root of our personal exile, as well.

The Baal HaTanya explains that the main aspect of *galus* is *galus hanefesh*-- when a Jew's unique *Chelek Eloka Mimal* is in confinement and hidden from him. Without a connection to our Divine essence and to *Hashem*, we are no different to the animals that roam around the world.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, further explains that the concept of מִצְרַיִם "Mitzrayim" is a state of being where you can not see the *hashgacha pratis* in your life. It is really "m'tzarim," a narrow place of constriction and distress, darkness and slavery. It's a place where the forces of nature seem so real and overpowering that you can witness wondrous miracles, but not be moved by them. You can see the sea split before your very eyes and attribute it all to "nature"-- hey, there must have been a *really* strong wind that day.

Perhaps the biggest and most detrimental illusion of all is that we feel that we can't do anything, that the gates of *teshuva* are closed to us... we can't learn, we can't *daven*, we can't really fulfill *Hashem's mitzvas*. We're are just too broken... too weak... too far away...

Hashem implores us:

שׁוּבוּ אֵלַי וְאֶשׁוּבָה אֵלֵיכֶם

Return to Me and I'll return to you...

³⁸ Bereshis Rabbah 16:4

And how do we respond?

וְאָמַרְתֶּם בְּמַה נִשְׁוֵב

...[B]ut you said, “With what shall we return?”³⁹

With what strength... with what clarity... with what conviction that we will actually succeed... with what guarantee that *Hashem* will accept our *teshuva*?

The only way to get out of this place is with *emuna*, and the only way to come to *emuna* is through gratitude and yearning.

Leaving Mitzrayim

When the Jewish people were being redeemed from Egypt, they passed through four stages of emotion: gratitude, indebtedness, simcha, and finally *shira*.⁴⁰ According to the *Midrash*, when Pharaoh told Moshe, “Get up and go from my nation!,” his proclamation was amplified throughout Egypt, reaching the ears of the Jewish people who sat huddled in their homes partaking of the first ever *korban pesach*.

As the realization sunk in that the long-awaited *geula* had finally come, the Jews immediately felt an intense gratitude to *Hashem* which then turned into feelings of indebtedness. How could they “repay” *Hashem* for all the kindness that He had done for them?

This overpowering desire to serve *Hashem* gave them the strength and *emuna* to follow *Hashem* “into the desert, in a land unsown”⁴¹ as a

³⁹ Malachi 3:7

⁴⁰ Based on a shiur from Rebbetzin Nechama Karlinsky

⁴¹ Yirmiyahu 2:2

nation “without making provisions for themselves.”⁴² They did not say, “How will we go into the desert without provisions?” There were no second thoughts and no doubt, only action:

האמינו והלכו

“They believed and left”⁴³

As Jews try to serve *Hashem* by fulfilling the *mitzvas* and breaking down the emotional barriers that stand in the way, they come to *simcha*. *Simcha* is an inner joy, contentment, and peace of mind that is the direct result of spiritual growth, movement, and connection *Hashem* and to our unique *Chelek Elokah Mimal*. The more *simcha* we have, the more space we create for our personal *shira* to burst forth.

When *Bnei Yisroel* came to the *Yam Suf*, and it was parted for them, they spontaneously sang to God the verses of *Shiras HaYam*. Chazal state that the song at the splitting of the sea was the first real *shira* ever uttered in the world.⁴⁴

But, *shira* does not mean merely singing a song. It’s a deep emotive expression of gratitude and praise that happens when we see the Hand of *Hashem* clearly present in our lives. According to the *Midrash*, the revelation of *Hashem* at the splitting of the sea was so great that every Jew who was present pointed with his finger, as it were, and declared, “This is my God and I will glorify Him.”⁴⁵

Though the revelation of *Hashem* in our lives may not reach the level of *krias yam suf*, some experiences can affect us so profoundly that words of gratitude and praise practically come out of our mouths on their own. *Hashem* can become so “real” or “palpable” to us in those

42 Shemos 12:39

43 Rashi Shemos 12:39

44 Shemos Rabbah 23:4

45 Shemos Rabbah 23:15

moments, that it's as if we can point to Him. “*This* is my God and I will glorify Him.”

Perhaps this is what the Ibn Ezra meant when he said on the words, “And they said, saying,” that “each person [at the yam] said this, or ***in each generation*** [there are people who say it].⁴⁶

Whenever we beg *Hashem* for a personal yeshua and that yeshua comes, it can naturally lead us through the same series of emotions that the Jews who were redeemed from *Mitzrayim* experienced.

Singing Your Song

According to the Baal Shem Tov, every one must go through five stages in life:

1. Experiencing suffering
2. Accepting the suffering in love as an atonement
3. Praying that the suffering or difficult experience should end
4. Experiencing a *yeshua*
5. Thanking and praising *Hashem*

Three of these steps we have control over, two of them not. We can't choose which painful situations will be sent to us or how long they will last, but we can certainly decide how to respond to them.

Accepting the suffering with love, means we make the choice to recognize the Source of our situation instead of merely focusing on the players within it. We hear *Hashem* calling to us, telling us through the experience: “Return to Me!”

Then we pray to *Hashem* that all the pain and difficulty, all the negative thoughts and desires that rise up within us, should be removed-- even if we feel like we can't change a thing, even if we feel

⁴⁶ Ibn Ezra on Shemos 15:1:2

like we will right away fall back into the same deep, dark pit we now find ourselves in.

Hashem then responds by sending a *yeshua*-- whether big or small-- and as our *yeshua* unfolds, a great light is revealed. We begin to see *Hashem's* Hand in the circumstances that surround us. We come to understand some new aspect of *Hashem* and our relationship to Him... and, we naturally have gratitude and sing praises to Him on account of it:

לְמַעַן, יִזְמְרֶךָ כְּבוֹד-- וְלֹא יִדָּם
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי, לְעוֹלָם אֲוָדָךָ

In order that my soul may sing to You,
and not be silent; Hashem my God,
forever will I thank You

Tehillim 30: 13

According to Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz, the *nesHEMA* is called “*cavod*,” which means glory, because it's purpose is to give glory to *Hashem*.

How do we give Glory to *Hashem*? We do so by thanking and praising Him.

As we strengthen our connection to *Hashem* and allow the difficulties to refine us spiritually giving us greater wisdom and understanding, we come closer to who we truly are. In the process, we sing our personal *shira*, one that gets more clear and harmonious with time, and *this* gives Glory to Hashem

We were brought into this world in order to find *Hashem* within it and to then express our knowledge of His Presence to others. This

knowledge is no small thing. As our Sages say, “Anyone one who has knowledge of *Hashem*, it's as if the *Beis HaMikdash* is built in his day.”⁴⁷

Believing in Your Worth

Hashem wants us to seek Him and find Him; He wants our gratitude and praises.

But realize, that this can only happen in the fullest sense after we've experienced a personal yeshua.

אוֹדֶה, כִּי עָנִיתָנִי ; וַתְּהִי-לִי, לְיִשׁוּעָה.

I give Thanks to You *because* You afflicted me
and You were for me a salvation

Tehillim 118:21

Hashem is there in the darkness waiting to bring us out of whatever personal *galus* we are in. But, we have to believe that we are good enough and important enough for this to happen. We have to believe that Hashem בָּי חָפֵץ, Hashem desires something in me, and only I, and I alone, have the ability to bring it out and shine it into the world. We have to also believe that the circumstances we now find ourselves in are there to help us do just that.

To truly believe this, we have to daven-- that Hashem opens our eyes and helps us to see not only see the [light in the darkness](#), but the light of the darkness. In fact, the word "אֶחֱזַקְךָ" can also mean, “I will strengthen you.”

Rav Yitzchak Kolodetsky, the rosh kollel of Pardes Katz, once spoke to a group of girls who needed chizuk in the area of shidduchim as he is

⁴⁷ Berachos 33

known to do, and he shared the following powerful story:

During the Holocaust, there were two men who attempted to escape from the terrible concentration camp they were in. The protocol of that camp was that when anyone was missing at roll call, the whole camp would be on a lock-down and everyone would search for the missing people for 24 hours. At the conclusion of that time, a siren would sound indicating that the search was over.

These two men, found a strong wooden box and built for themselves a three-layer hideout, covering themselves as best as they could until they could escape.

As soon as the Nazis realized they were missing, the search was on, with glaring lights, barking dogs, and endless soldiers furiously combing the area for the renegade prisoners. With the hours ticking by, the two men waited anxiously in their hiding spot for the search to end. Suddenly, they heard voices. Two Nazis were standing outside their box discussing the likelihood that the prisoners were hiding inside.

The first soldier dismissed the notion, claiming that if indeed there were people inside, their well-trained dogs surely would have sniffed them out. But the second soldier persisted, suggesting that perhaps the Jews had covered themselves with dirt, or many layers to hide their scent. And so, the two soldiers began removing the first layer of wooden planks covering the box...then the second layer....and they were about to uncover the third layer... when the ear-splitting siren rang throughout the camp, effectively ending the search.

The Nazis abandoned the box, and returned to their previous duties, leaving the two Jewish men shaking and shivering at their near encounter with death.

As they waited for nightfall to descend so they could make their

escape, the men began to wonder why *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, had made them suffer those last few minutes of uncertainty, not knowing if the Nazis would discover them or not. It just seemed purposeless. If *Hashem* was going to save them anyway, then why did they need those few minutes of sheer terror?

By now, the sky was dark, the soldiers had retreated to their night-time activities, and the two Jews attempted to move the planks off the top of the box so they could escape. But, they were extremely weak from their prior exhaustion and living conditions, as well as the past 24 hours during which they had not a morsel of food. With super-human effort, they managed to gather every last bit of energy and move the two planks covering the third level of the box.

It was then that they clearly understood that not only was the terror they just experienced not purposeless, it was precisely orchestrated to save their very lives. Had the first two layers not been taken off, they would not have managed to remove the planks, and likely, not survived.

So too, Rav Kolodetsky explained, many times the darkness itself is the light: not just that it's hiding in the darkness, not just that it heralds the light, but rather what we perceive as darkness is the very light we've been waiting for.

In Closing

Thanking Hashem for the good in your life, getting in touch with your potential and being committed to growth, davening to *Hashem*, and praising Him for the *yeshuas* that come your way... These four steps are a never ending cycle. There will always be higher levels to attain, greater strength and clarity to unlock and new notes and nuances of your soul's song to discover.

Above all, this process represents a journey to ourselves and our

Maker that can carry us through even the most challenging of times.

May we be *zoche* to not only sing our own song, but join in the song of *Moshiach*, the ultimate *geula*, speedily in our days.

Glossary

Ais ratzon	A time of favor
Beis HaMikdash	The Temple in Jerusalem
Brocha	Blessing
Cailim	Vessels
Chait HaEgel	Sin of the golden calf
Chasdei Hashem	God's kindness
Chazal	Torah Sages
Chelek Elokah Mimal	Portion of God from Above
Chinuch bonim	The education of children
Chizuk	Encouragement, empowerment
Crias Yam Suf	The splitting of the sea
Daven	Pray
Emuna	Faith
Eretz Yisrael	The Land of Israel
Galus	Exile
Galus Hanefesh	Exile of the soul
Gan Eden	The Garden of Eden
Gehinnom	Hell
Geula	Redemption
Halacha	Torah-based laws
Hashgacha Pratis	Divine Providence
Hashgafah	Outlook, perspective
Hisbodedus	Informal private prayer
Kavona	Intention, thought
Klal Yisrael	The Jewish people

Korban Pesach	Passover offering
Krias Yam Suf	The splitting of the sea
Mazel	Destiny
Midrash	A collection of halachic and aggadic commentary on the Torah
Mitzrayim	Egypt
Mitzvah	Commandment of the Torah
Moshiach	Messiah
Nedar	Oath
Nisayon	Test, challenge
Parsha	A chapter of the Torah
Possuk	Sentence
Rasha	Wicked person
Ratzon	Will
Rebbetzin	A rabbi's wife, or a "female Rabbi"
Ribbono Shel Olam	Master of the World
Rov	Rabbi
Sciata D'Shamaya	Divine Assistance
Sefer Iyov	The Book of Job
Sefer Tehillim	The Book of Psalms
Shalom bais	Peace in the home
Shira	Song
Shiras HaYam	The Song of the sea
Simcha	Joy
Techiyas Hamesim	Ressurrection of the dead
Tefilla	Prayer
Teshuva	Repentance, returning to a Torah

Tzaddik	lifestyle
Yam Suf	Righteous person
Yetzer hara	The Sea of Reeds
Yetzias Mitzrayim	Evil inclination
Yiddishkeit	Exodus from Egypt
Yissurim	Judaism
	Adversity, challenges, difficulties