



HOW
JEWS
DEAL
WITH

FOURTH IN A FOUR-PART
SERIES ON ANXIETY BY

RABBI MANIS FRIEDMAN

THE FIRST THREE PARTS MAY BE READ AT
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THERE IS A PERVASIVE MISUNDERSTANDING ABOUT

G-d.

We're told that G-d is perfect, and we assume perfect means that He never gets hurt. He isn't vulnerable. Why should anything we do affect Him, or hurt Him, or make Him happy? This picture of an unmoving, unfeeling G-d is completely inaccurate.

Every pain that we feel, G-d feels infinitely. Every anxiety that we suffer from, He suffers from infinitely. Our relationship with Hashem is a two-way street. Hashem says: *Nasati matar artzechem. I will give the rain for your land.*

Rashi explains that Hashem is saying: *Now that you did what was incumbent on you to do, I will do what is incumbent on Me to do. I will give you the rain, I will give you success, etc.*

In other words, G-d is not sitting there doing His own thing, ignoring our pain and suffering. He responds to what we do, and He's in this relationship with us. We need to do our share and He does His share. Just like in any real relationship, with somebody who is precious to you, there will be heartache. Sometimes you will ask, "Why did you do this to me?" That doesn't mean the relationship is over. You will get past the separation, and come even closer.

Tehillim expresses this well. All throughout, Dovid HaMelech says, "I don't understand what's going on. Why do righteous people suffer? Why do the wicked prosper? Why is there so much evil in the world?" But the conclusion is always, "We are in this together. Our bond is forever." And that is the eternal story of G-d and the Jewish people.

QUESTIONS ANSWERS

WOMAN: I suffer from anxiety, fearfulness, perfectionism, and slight OCD. Any tips on how to deal with all this on a daily basis?

RMF: Humor is a powerful antidote. If you can make a joke about your OCD, then you will have the upper hand. If you're afraid to laugh at it, then it's stronger than you.

Always remember that you are the human being who happens to have an OCD habit. You are not OCD. You're bigger than it, stronger than it, and more important than it. If you can laugh about it, you can make it more reasonable, and maybe even get rid of it.

MAN: Maybe it's because the world has become so internet-based, but it seems like everyone has social anxiety these days. What advice can you offer to a person who gets anxious about going to parties, talking to strangers, going on dates and social things like that?

RMF: Stop calling it anxiety. You're bashful, you're a little timid, you're not a social butterfly, and there is nothing to apologize for. Don't make a big issue out of it. If you're going to an event and you're a little nervous, that's okay. If you avoid being the center of attention because that's not your thing, that's okay. By calling it social anxiety you are diagnosing yourself with a condition. Instead of saying, "I have social anxiety," say, "I'm a private person." That's a beautiful *middah*, and a sign of *eidelkeit*. Don't condemn yourself unnecessarily.

MAN: But what happens when it limits you? Because of my social anxiety, I can't do certain things...

RMF: So your shyness limits you in the same way that loud people are limited by their loudness. They can't go to certain places because they're too loud and nobody will put up with them. Every personality type has limits. You wouldn't want to exchange your limits for somebody else's.

WOMAN: We're currently waiting for children for over seven years. Our *emunah* and *bitachon* are constantly challenged. Although we try to tell ourselves that Hashem is with us, it is hard to prevent the fear from setting in. Do you have any tips for staying strong?

RMF: I strongly recommend that you go to the Ohel, the Lubavitcher Rebbe's resting place, and write a note asking for *gezunte kinder*, in plural. Then you can go home absolutely confident that you will have children, because almost everybody who has ever asked the Rebbe for that blessing has gotten it. When he gave a *brachah* for children, you could take it to the bank.

WOMAN: I have an adult son who is off the *derech*. I tell myself I have made peace with the situation. But then I can't get rid of the knot in my stomach when I watch him destroy himself, sometimes *b'gashmius* and primarily *b'ruchnius*. What can I do, for him, for myself?

RMF: There are three partners in the birth of a child. Not just the birth, but everything that comes after that. G-d is the third partner, and His responsibility to a Jewish child is greater than yours. He wants your son on track much more than you do, because it's His track, not yours. When you have done all you can, it's time to let the third partner take over.

In the meantime, don't be critical of your child. Don't love him any less, or be any less his mother. He has an issue with the Aibershter, not with you. And the best way you can help him strengthen his relationship with Hashem is to strengthen his relationship with you.

You might feel like that is giving up on your son, and his future. But you're not giving up on your child. You're just giving up on the responsibility that you thought you had, to make sure that he's a *yirei Shamayim*. That's G-d's responsibility, and He will take care of it.

MAN: In *B'gadlut Ha'emunah*, a famous Breslov sefer, the Breslover Rebbe suggests that you must ingrain in yourself the idea that Hashem is good, does only good, and wants the best for you. That way, when something painful happens, you will only continue to thank Him for doing good for you. On the other hand, in *Tehillim*, I am always amazed by *Kapitel Pei Tes* (89). Dovid Hamelech starts by saying, "I know the kindness of Hashem," but then he continues by saying everything that Hashem promised him that He didn't end up doing. So are we supposed to feel that everything is good? Or should we express our sorrow when things are difficult?

RMF: To actually *feel* that everything is good is a very

high level that very few people can reach. A more realistic approach, for most people, is just knowing that it's coming from Hashem and that is enough. I don't need explanations. I don't need to rationalize why this difficult thing is happening, that it's for a reason. I just need to know that it's coming from Hashem, and that makes it acceptable to me.

The holy Berditchever composed a *niggun* called "A Dudela." In English, "A Song About You." It goes, "Mizrach Du, Maariv Du, Tzafon Du..." Meaning, "North Is You, South Is You, East Is You, West Is You, it's all You, it's You, You, You."

When things are good, that's You. When things are not so good, that's also You. And as long as it's You, it's good. ❄️

This four-part series on anxiety is based on an interview by Menachem Bernfeld of Rabbi Manis Friedman on 24 Av (August 2, 2021), which was followed by callers' questions. The podcast is called "Let's Get Real With Coach Menachem," and it may be found online.

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