Joy and Sadness



**Caveat:** We are dealing here only with sadness, mild depression, or “the blues.” It is critical that a seriously or clinically depressed person go for professional help.

**#1**

**TODAY’S LEARNING MATERIAL**

**Torah Bereishis 4: 3-8**

*After a period of time, Cain brought an offering to G-d of the fruit of the ground.*

*And as for Hevel, he also brought of the firstborn of his flock and their [choicest] fat parts.*

*And G-d turned to Hevel and his offering.*

*But to Cain and his offering He did not turn.*

*And Cain was very angry and depressed.*

*And G-d said to Cain: “Why are you angry and why are you depressed? Surely, If you improve yourself, you will be forgiven. But if you do not improve yourself, sin rests at the door. Its desire is toward you, yet you can conquer it.”*

*Cain spoke with his brother Hevel. And it happened when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against his brother Hevel and killed him.*

**Rabbi Samson R. Hirsch**

*‘And G-d said to Cain: ‘Why are you angry and why are you depressed?’*

*Thus G-d’s question relates to two separate emotions: Why are you angry about the past, and why are you despaired of the future?*

**Questions:**

* **What was G-d’s recommendation to Cain about how to deal with his emotions?**
* **What could be the reason that Cain did not listen to G-d’s advice?**
* **How can sadness bring one to sin?**

**#2**

**Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi (Spain, 1075-1141), Kuzari 3:11**

*It is not in accordance with the spirit of the Torah to worry and feel anguish throughout one’s life; one who does so transgresses the Almighty’s commandment to be content with what he has been given, as it says you shall rejoice with every good thing which the Lord your G-d has given you (****Torah Devarim 26:11****).*

**Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Likutei Moharan, part 2, ch. 24**

*It is a great mitzvah to be perpetually happy, and to overcome and reject feelings of sorrow and melancholy.*

**Question: In truth, the Torah promises punishment for "not serving G-d your Lord with happiness and a glad heart." (Torah Devarim 28:47) How is it possible for the Torah to make us accountable for our moods?**

**#3**

**I Shmuel 16:23**

*And it happened when the spirit of melancholy was upon Saul, David would play the harp and Saul would feel relieved.*

**Talmud Taanis 22a**

*While walking in the marketplace, Rabbi Berokah asked Elijah the prophet if anyone in this marketplace deserves entry into the next world. Elijah pointed out two men who were worthy. Intrigued, Rabbi Berokah approached the men to find out what their secret was. He asked them, “What is your work?” They answered, “We are jesters…whenever we see people who are sad, we entertain them and cheer them up.”*

**Question: What are some ways to relieve our own sadness and to help others?**

**#4**

**Baal Shem Tov**

*Rearranging the letters of the word for "thought" (machshava) results in the word "happiness" (bsimcha).*

**Question: As effective as external methods may be, they often serve as a relief more than a cure. The most effective way to overcome depression, then, is to address the source of our sorrow by changing the way we think. What are some possible and realistic ways to change the way we think?**

**#5**

**Talmud Taanis 29a**

*Just as we decrease joy when the month of Av begins, so too we increase joy when the month of Adar begins.*

**Jewish law and custom**

*Shiva is the Jewish period of mourning observed the first week after the funeral of a parent, spouse, sibling, or child. From the time of death until the conclusion of the funeral, the primary focus and concern is on the care of the deceased and the burial preparations. Once shiva begins, the focus shifts to the mourners. Shiva is a time of reflection, meditation, contemplation, and spiritual healing. The difficult process of mourning begins when pain, loss, and sadness are expressed.*

**Question:**

**What is the purpose of sadness?**

**Can sadness be positive?**

**Why does Jewish law obligate someone who is mourning to be actively involved in the mourning, instead of distracting oneself from it?**

**#6**

**Question: What’s your takeaway from today’s discussion?**