

CHABAD LUBAVITCH OF CHAUTAUQUA

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Jewish Psychology – Depression - Week 4 – 2020

1. *Depression is not a sin; but what depression does, no sin can do.* (Chassidic saying)
2. One soul originates in the kelipah and *sitra achra*. [the side of creation that is the antithesis of holiness and purity. (The two terms are generally synonymous.)] From [this *nefesh*] stem all the evil characteristics, deriving from the four evil elements within it... and laziness and melancholy [emanate] from the element of Earth. (Tanya Ch. 1)
3. "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 L-rd your G-d has given you." (*Deuteronomy 26:11*)...and it will lead to: ...not serving G-d your L-rd with happiness and a glad heart, and you will serve your enemies..." (ibid 28:47)." (*Kuzari 3:11*. Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi (Spain, 1075-1141))
4. "Although there is a beneficial aspect to sadness it prevents people from becoming overly joyous over the pleasures of this world nevertheless one should not pursue the state of sadness, since it is a physical disease. When a person is despondent, he is not able to serve his Creator properly."
(Rabbeinu Yonah, Berachot, Rif p. 30. (Spain, 1200-1263))
5. ...'Then I commended joy' (Ecclesiastes 8:15): this refers to the joy of a precept. This teaches you that the Divine Presence rests [upon man] neither through depression, nor through sloth... only through a matter of joy in connection with a precept, as it is said, But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the L-rd came upon him. (Kings II, 3:15).
 - a. **Maharsha:** The verse is quoted merely to show that the Divine Presence does not rest on a man plunged in gloom, Elisha requiring the minstrel to dissipate the gloom occasioned by Jehoram's visit. (Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 30b)
6. "Serve G-d with joy." (Psalms 100:2)
7. Sadness is a repugnant character-trait, a barrier to the service of G-d. It is a typical objective of the *yetzer hara* who pretends to seek man's religious self-improvement by harping on one's real or imagined shortcomings and failures in order to generate a sense of worthlessness and hopelessness. Thus one must be extremely cautious to recognize this ruse of the *yetzer hara* and not fall into his trap. Man must be disturbed and upset by wrong-doing and defects. The need of penitence, however, must be in context of correcting these deficiencies and enhancing attachment to God and observance of Torah and *mitzvot*. Self-improvement and self-correction may even necessitate fasting and self-mortification, with care that it be without ulterior motives, notwithstanding the fact that, generally speaking, fasting and self-affliction should be avoided because they cause feelings of sadness and depression. True *teshuvah* (return to God) and authentic worship focus on God and not oneself. This implies a joyful pursuit of the service of prayer and the observance of the *mitzvot*. (The Testament of the Baal Shem Tov, Introduction)
8. ...a major principle in the service of the Creator, blessed be He: avoid depression as much as possible. (44)
9. *Atzvut* (depression; melancholy) is a nasty, harmful and objectionable character-trait that is a hindrance to the service of G-d, (see *Sha'arei Kedushah* I: 2 and 5; II: 4; III: 4; *Sha'ar Ru'ach Hakodesh*, p. 33b)
10. "In every sadness/depression there will be profit/advantage," (Proverbs 14:23)

11. The wording (“*there will be profit*”) implies that, on the contrary, the sadness itself has no virtue, except that some profit will ultimately be derived from it.
This *profit* is the true joy in G-d which follows the true *i.e., justified* sadness over one’s sins, with bitterness of soul and a broken heart, which must come at specific, suitable times. For thereby (*through one’s sadness*) the spirit of impurity and of the *sitra achra* is broken, and so too the “iron wall” that separates him from his Father in heaven, (Tanya, Ch. 26)
12. ...not serving G-d your L-rd with happiness and a glad heart... you will serve your enemies" (Deuteronomy 28:47)
13. ...the explanation of the *AriZal* on this verse (Quoted in *Shelah, Asarah Maamarot, Maamar 3:4.*), [the verse continues]: “...from an abundance of everything [good]”. The simple meaning is: “When you had an abundance of everything you did not serve G-d (with joy)”. But the *AriZal* interprets it thus: “You did not serve G-d with a joy *greater than* that caused by an abundance of everything.” *i.e.* you served G-d, but your service was lacking proper joy. (Tanya, Ch. 26)
14. Of this *sadness resulting from contemplation of one’s spiritual state* it is written, “In every sadness there will be profit.” The profit lies in the joy which follows the sadness... In truth, however, the state of being contrite of heart and bitter of soul *i.e., remorseful* over one’s remoteness from G-d, and over the fact that one’s soul is clothed in the *sitra achra*, — this state can by no means be described in the Holy Tongue (Hebrew) by the term “*atzvut*”.
The word *atzvut*, meaning “melancholy”, stems from a root which means “constricted”. In this context, it refers to a numbing depression that constricts one’s heart, blocking out all feeling, For “*atzvut*” means that one’s heart is as dull as a stone, and that there is no vitality — *arousal of feeling* — in his heart.
But “bitterness” (merirut) and contrition are just the opposite, since the very fact that one is moved to be embittered is itself a sign of life, except that this vitality derives from the holy attributes of severity (gevurot) and it therefore expresses itself as bitterness, whereas joy derives from the holy attributes of kindness (chasadim), for the heart contains both these attributes — kindness and severity.
At any rate, we see that the dejection accompanying one’s disappointment with his spiritual situation stems from the realm of holiness, unlike *atzvut*, which derives from *kelipat nogah*. (Tanya, Ch. 31)
15. Even one who is occupied in business and worldly affairs, should there descend upon him any sadness or anxiety about heavenly matters during his business affairs, it is certainly a trick of the Evil Inclination *which saddens him, ostensibly for spiritual reasons*, in order to lure him afterwards into lusts, G-d forbid, as is well known.
It is man’s nature to seek pleasure and not to remain depressed. If his feeling of spiritual failure distresses him, he will seek his pleasure in physical gratification. The Evil Inclination therefore wishes that one be depressed, be it even over spiritual matters, so that he will later succumb to temptation.
For if it were not so, *that this depression is the doing of the Yetzer Hara*, whence would a genuine sadness, one that is derived from love or fear of G-d, come to him in the midst of his business affairs? (Tanya Ch. 26)

Cognitive Therapy:

Thought		ה	ב	ש	ח	ג
With Joy		ה	ח	ג	ש	ב

16. ...Such sadness is due to conceit. For he does not know his place, and that is why he is distressed because he has not attained the level of a *tzaddik*, to whom such foolish thoughts surely do not occur.
For were he to recognize his station, that he is very far from the rank of *tzaddik*... then surely, this is the due measure of the *Beinonim* and their task: To subdue the evil impulse and the thought that rises from the heart to the mind, and to completely avert his mind from it, repulsing it *as it were* with both hands...
Therefore one should not feel depressed or very troubled at heart (— *he ought to be somewhat troubled by the occurrence of these thoughts, otherwise he may become indifferent to them and will cease to wage war against them; but he ought not to be sorely troubled by them*), even if he be engaged all his days in this conflict *with the thoughts which will always enter his mind*.

Though he may never rise to the level which precludes their occurrence, yet he should not be depressed. For perhaps this is what he was created for, and this is the service demanded of him, to subdue the sitra achra constantly. (ibid, ch. 27)

17. Sadness has elements of idolatry since ones depression proclaims that he gives priority to his own desires over G-d's. (*Zohar, Yitro, 87a. Tanya Igeret HaKodesh 11*)
18. "We must bless G-d when something good happens, and in the same way, we should bless G-d when something negative happens" (Mishnah, Tractate Berachot 9:5)
19. **2:13** *Rabbi Shimon would say: ...And do not be wicked in your own eyes.*
20. **4:1** *Ben Zoma would say: ...Who is rich? One who is satisfied with his lot. As is stated (Psalms 128:2): "If you eat of toil of your hands, fortunate are you, and good is to you"; "fortunate are you" in this world, "and good is to you" in the World to Come.*
21. **4:21** *Rabbi Elazar HaKapor would say: Envy, lust and honor drive a man from the world.* (Ethics of our Fathers)
22. "A person must never think to himself 'I am a sinner and committed many transgressions; thus of what avail is it for me to perform *mitzvot*?' On the contrary: if he has committed many sins, he should countermand that with the performance of *mitzvot*. Thus it is stated in *Vayikra Rabba* [21:5]: 'For with *tachbulot* (wise advice) you shall wage your war' (Proverbs 24:6); i.e., if you have committed bundles (*chabilot*) upon bundles of transgressions, countermand them by bundles upon bundles of *mitzvot*."
(*Menorat Hama'or, Perek Hamitzvot*, p. 394f.; Me'iri, *Chibur Hateshuvah* I:ch. 12)
23. "If one has eaten garlic so that his breath smells, should he eat more garlic so that his breath should go on smelling?" (*Shabbat* 31a) We do not say to a wicked person, "Be still more wicked and abstain from *mitzvot*." (Maimonides, *Tefilah* 15:6).

Behavioral Therapy:

24. So what is a remedy for sicknesses of the soul? Go next to wise people, for they are healers of the soul, healing it by means of temperaments which they teach until they have returned the soul to the good ways. Concerning those who recognize in themselves bad temperaments but do not go to the wise to heal them, Solomon said, "Fools despise wisdom and instruction". (Proverbs 1:17)
How do they cure? ... Other temperaments should be treated in this manner - if one was far over to one extreme, one should move oneself to the other extreme and accustom oneself to it for a long time, until one has returned to the good way, which is the intermediate characteristic that each and every temperament has. (Maimonides, *Hilchot Deot* 2:1-2)
25. And the spirit of the L-rd departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the L-rd frightened him. ... And it would be, that when the spirit of G-d was upon Saul, that David would take the harp, and would play with his hand, and Saul would be relieved, and it would be good for him, the spirit of evil would depart from him. (*Samuel I* 16:14-23)
26. "Turn away from evil and do good." When it comes to the service of G-d, you must put aside all other thoughts, such as thoughts of self-reproach for past misdeeds or personal worthlessness, for these are but the device of the *yetzer hara* to prevent you from your present obligation. Thus "turn away from (real or imagined) evil," i.e., forget now these thoughts, "and do good," i.e., carry out your obligations in proper manner with joy and eagerness. (*Or Hame'ir, Shabbat Teshuvah*)
27. *The following is a freely-translated excerpt from a letter by the Lubavitcher Rebbe dated 24 Adar II, 5711 (March 8, 1951):*
... I was extremely happy to read that you are working with your artistic talents, are preparing to hold an exhibition, and that you have already received favorable reviews in the press. Surely you will progress in the utilization of the talent that G-d has granted you toward the strengthening of Yiddishkeit and G-d-fearing behavior.

As to the main point of your letter, in which you complain about your circumstances, your depression, your despair, etc... You do not write of the causes which bring you to this state of mind, so I cannot go into their details to show you how these "causes" are but imaginary and stem from the evil inclination--that is, that even if there is some substance to them, the fact that they lead to despair and depression is folly...

I must therefore confine myself to a general comment with which I hope to illuminate your particular situation. My comment is based on the saying by the Baal Shem Tov--which my father-in-law, the Rebbe, would often repeat--that a person can derive a lesson in the service of G-d from everything he sees or hears about.

As you are surely aware, the primary talent of an artist is his ability to step away from the externalities of the thing and, disregarding its outer form, gaze into its innerness and perceive its essence, and to be able to convey this in his painting. Thus, the object is revealed as it has never before been seen, since its inner content was obscured by secondary things. The artist exposes the essence of the thing he portrays, causing the one who looks at the painting to perceive it in another, truer light, and to realize that his prior perception was deficient.

And this is one of the foundations of man's service of his Creator.

As we know from the Torah--and particularly from the teaching of Chassidism--the entirety of creation stems from the word of G-d, and the word of G-d is what brings it into existence and sustains it in every moment of time. It is only that the divine power of tzimtzum (constriction) holds the divine life-force in a state of concealment and obscurity, and we perceive only its outer form (i.e., the physical reality).

Our mission in life--based on the simple faith that "there is none else beside Him" --is that we should approach everything in life from this perspective. That we should each strive to reveal, as much as possible, the divine essence in every-thing, and minimize, to the extent that we are able, its concealment by the externalities of creation...

So one must take great care that secondary and external matters should not obscure the essentials of life and its ultimate purpose.

A person might experience difficulties, trials and challenges in separating the good from the bad. But these are but the means by which to achieve the purpose of life--that his soul should elevate itself through its positive deeds in this world... So one must never allow the difficulties in overcoming one's trials, or even the fact that one might occasionally fail and stumble, to overwhelm the joy that one must feel as a child of G-d..

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