



Parashat Ki Tisa - Parah 5770

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On the Parashah

Spiritual Repair

[Tal Chermon p. 181]

After the sin of the Golden Calf came the spiritual repair. It is true that there are crises in the world. The world is not a plain. There are mountains and valleys. We cannot deny it. We know that there are crises, but there is no need to panic on account of them. We can overcome the crises and spiritually repair ourselves through the Divine treatment found in the world of the Torah given to us by Moshe Rabbenu. The Torah can only be properly fulfilled after first stumbling in it (Gittin 43a), and by overcoming difficulties one attains a great possession. We received a second set of the Ten Commandments and repaired our relationship with Hashem. Out of the crisis of the sin of the Golden Calf, we clarified our proper relationship to Torah and to the Divine Presence which dwells among us.

Rav Aviner on...

"I am Depressed"

["Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah" – Tetzaveh 5770 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Question: I am depressed, and I am depressed by the fact that I am depressed. Will I ever get out of it? People tell me, "Move on! Get a grip! Take control! Stop babying yourself! You can break out of it if you want." And this depresses me all the more. Is it really enough for me to WANT to get out of it for me to succeed? I am suffering so much. My mood is so terrible. I am sunken in despair. Nothing interests me. Nothing is fun for me. I feel worthless. I feel like no one loves me, like no one wants me near them. I've become a rag, depressed and in pain. Can I get out of this? Will I ever see the light of day? Will my smile ever return?

Answer: You've got a lot of reasons to be optimistic. There's no reason to suffer, and mental anguish is no less real than physical pain. Most of the time, the problem can be solved or alleviated. You'll break out of it, because you haven't resigned yourself to your plight. You want light. That's a sign that inside you are strong. Within an ocean of pain there is a powerful island of health that can slowly be expanded. But first of all, don't blame yourself. It's not your fault. The causes of your depression are complex: chemical changes in the brain, heredity, a response to difficult occurrences from childhood or from the recent past, severe economic crises, a broken home and low social status.

You are not guilty. You are not interested in being depressed. You do not enjoy being depressed. You would pay all the money in the world to break out of it. Hush up the people who chastise you, and don't chastise yourself. Don't fall into deep ruminations, prying too deeply into yourself. You're not alone with this problem. 5.5% of this country is like you, consisting of 7% of all women and 4% of all men. Obviously, other people's suffering is no consolation to you, but you should still be aware that you've got many people in the same boat, and they're not guilty either. Not everyone is the same. Depression finds expression in many different forms: having no appetite, or too much appetite, sleeping too little or too much, losing or gaining weight, diarrhea or constipation, aggressiveness or passiveness, anger or sadness, low self-image and self-hatred, loss of ability to concentrate and memory loss, negatively judging others and being overly self-critical, and a lost list of many other forms of pain and suffering. What they all have in common is that the people with these problems are not guilty.

I do believe you that you have tried everything to get out of it, and that you are still trying by your own efforts, just you haven't succeeded. People don't always succeed at this on their own, so go for professional help. Don't be embarrassed. You didn't choose this for yourself, and you're allowed to get help. Afterwards you'll get better and you'll help others. Tell the professional everything that is happening to you, even if it seems stupid to you. He won't make fun of you. He won't castigate you. He certainly won't behave like the Puritans in America who placed hard work on a high pedestal – which was obviously justified – and severely punished the depressed people for the crime of sloth, as the most severe crime.

First go to a family doctor skilled at providing depressed individuals with their initial treatment, so he can locate physical causes and diagnose physical symptoms. Then go to a clinical psychologist, and even if that doesn't help, go to a psychiatrist so he can prescribe medications. Don't be embarrassed to take medications. They don't stigmatize you as being insane. When there is a chemical imbalance in the brain, anti-depressants restore that balance. Today there are really excellent medicines, wonder drugs that reveal the divine image within science. There is no reason to fear side effects. Obviously, don't take these medications on your own without a doctor's recommending them. By the way, even a family physician is entitled to prescribe anti-depressants, or a psychiatric social worker.

Don't be afraid of psychologists, either. The cognitive approach helps you to think positively, to melt away your depressed thoughts logically, to get used to seeing the present and the future in an optimistic light, and to stop blaming yourself for your failings.

You might wonder: "What do I need a psychologist for? All this thinking I can do on my own!" Indeed, even working with a psychologist, you do it by yourself. He only helps you to do it by yourself, his being experienced and objective. By the way, alternative treatments have not proven effective in psychological research. Yet bio-feedback treatment, despite its sounding "alternative", is totally scientific and produces good results in numerous psychological realms.

Moreover, if you see that your friend is sunken in depression or anxiety, please be so kind as to convince him to go for professional treatment. As stated, however, don't chastise him, but provide him with support, love and friendship. That's what friends are for.

We rabbis are not doctors, psychologists, or social workers. All the same, we can give you some advice on good things to do that don't require professional knowledge.

1. Activities. Stay busy with as many activities as possible. That way you'll take your mind off you situation.

- a. Physical activity. Obviously, this is good for one's physical health, but it also causes the release of endorphins, which kill pain and improve one's mood. Run, swim, ride a bicycle.
- b. Creativity. Draw and write. Churchill, who suffered from depression even though he seemed the opposite, began painting when he was forty years old after a very severe political setback.
- c. Volunteer. Help others who suffer from depression or other problems. When you concentrate on the problems of others, you will forget your own problems. You will also have self-satisfaction from doing good, and you will feel content.

In his medical writings (translated from the Arabic by Dr. Sussman Muntar), Rambam wrote to the King of Egypt regarding his son, the prince, who was deep in depression, that he should study moral treatises and fulfill what they said.

2. Sociality. Spend time with friends. Once more, don't spend time with friends who chastise you, but friends who offer you support and love and encouragement. That way you'll break out of your loneliness, which, itself, can put a person into depression. And if you can't find friends, then adopt the sort of pet that becomes friendly with people, like a dog or cat.

3. Happiness. Rambam writes that depressed people should sing, play musical instruments and go on trips to beautiful places (Shemoneh Perakim, Chapter 5). As is known, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov taught that one should do anything one can to chase away black depression, even engage in silly talk.

4. Soothing activities. There's no need to go to India for this. One can find all one needs by regular activities much more cheaply.

5. Sleep. Try to get regular sleep. That regulates life.

6. Study. Read up on depression. Sometimes that itself is depressing, but there are people who find solace in the very act of knowing.

This was some advice. Everyone should pick whatever is appropriate for him. As for you, dear reader, if you have any things that you've tried yourself, please write me.

You might now ask: “Maybe with the help of all this advice I’ll get out of my depression by myself and not need professional help?” It’s possible. But with professional help, it will go faster. As we say in our prayers, “Cure us SPEEDILY”. But you will break out of it. Yes you will.

Stories of Rabbenu – Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

Our Rabbi as an Educator

Our Rabbi did not try to imprint his personality on his students, but opened the personality of each and every student. He would therefore talk to each student in a different way based on their strengths and weaknesses. Our Rabbi refused to create photocopies of students, although many of the students desired this. Rather he wanted to bring out the blessing contained in each of them.

In order to instill within the students the fundamental ideas of the holiness of the Torah, the Nation of Israel and the Land of Israel, our Rabbi would repeat the same thoughts hundreds of times until the students knew them by heart. He would use the same story, same expression and even the same facial expression. He did not repeat these ideas because he thought the students did not know them, but he decided that there was an educational need to do so (see Rashi on Shemot 6:30). These ideas thus became an inseparable part of the students. In times of crisis, especially in communal matters, these ideas find expression.

Our Rabbi once told one student one thing and another student the exact opposite. When asked why he did this, he answered that in the past there were both Hillel and Shammai. Shammai was able to chase away with the builder's measuring stick because there was Hillel and Hillel was able to teach the entire Torah while standing on one foot because there was Shammai. But what can I do since I have to be both Hillel and Shammai. (Gadol Shimusha of Rav Avraham Remer, p. 51)

Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for

the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

A Match in Heaven

Q: I heard that Hashem decides who one will marry. Why then should I worry? I will marry the first woman who agrees to marry me. After all, it is impossible that this would go against Hashem's will.

A: It is correct that Hashem decided before you were born who you will marry, and she is the right woman for you and you are the right woman for her. This is a wonderful Divine gift, but it is possible to lose the gift, just as Adam and Chava lost the Garden of Eden on account of their sin. A person receives an amazing body but he can destroy it with improper behavior. The Book of Mishlei (19:14) says: "But an understanding wife is from Hashem," but the Zohar (Vayechi 229, 1) says that a man's behavior can cause him to lose it. For example, a man can lose a woman with sterling character traits on account of his stupidity in searching for a beautiful woman. He forgets: "Grace is deceptive, and beauty is vain" (Mishlei 31:30). She certainly needs to be pleasant in his eyes, but the essence is not to forget: Never judge a book by its cover...

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