

# FINDING CLARITY IN DEPRESSION

**Depression** is classified as a mood disorder, described as feelings of sadness, loss or anger, all of which can affect such major patterns in one's life as eating and sleep schedules. It is also increasingly common.

Throughout time, depression has been a silent player in major events, with some of the most impactful people in history living with it. Politicians like Abraham Lincoln and John Quincy Adams, entertainers like Jim Carrey and Robin Williams, and spiritual and social revolutionaries like Rabbi Nachmun of Breslov and Martin Luther King Jr. all experienced depression.

Recent studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate

**18.5%** of American adults had symptoms of depression in any given 2-week period in 2019.

(Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7040e3.htm>)

It isn't always easy to recognize depression in yourself or a loved one. Overarching signs include, but are not limited to, feelings of emptiness and consistent sadness, hopelessness, nihilistic thoughts and irritability. The experience of depression can also include feelings of helplessness, unexplained guilt, exhaustion, or moving or walking more slowly than usual.



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Sadly, there is a precedent for Jewish communities to be concerned about depression. A study done by the National Institute of Mental Health found that "Compared with Catholics and Protestants, Jews had significantly higher rates of major depression and dysthymia...(and) were more likely ... to seek treatment with mental health specialists.



\*(Source: <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/judaism-and-mental-illness/>)

Even one of the most well-known Jewish leaders in history, the great Hasidic storyteller [Rabbi Nachman](#), who lived in the 18th century, is speculated to have lived with depression and bipolar disorder. His behavior betrayed his state of mental wellness, as he would often experience an intense need for isolation and lock himself in his room for weeks at a time. His feelings and struggles with depression also appear in his teachings:

**Strengthen yourself to push aside all depression and sadness. Everyone has lots of problems, and the nature of man is to be attracted to sadness. To escape these difficulties, constantly bring joy into your life – even if you have to resort to silliness.**

**(Rabbi Nachman, Likutey Moharan II, 24)**



Notwithstanding his teachings and biblical commentary, Rabbi Nachman is most famous for his folktales and parables. One story, in particular, is considered to be an allegory for how he thought about his own happiness and mental wellbeing in relation to G-d.

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*There was once a righteous person who always tried their best to be happy but couldn't shake an intense feeling of hopelessness in everything they did. They saw themselves as failing at everything from minor activities to following mitzvot (commandments), especially the ideal to be happy as often as possible (as taught by Rabbi Nachmun), and they felt like a failure.*

*But one morning, this person woke up and began thinking about how grateful they were to be Jewish and how cared for by G-d they felt. They then compared their relationship with G-d to the relationship between a parent and a child, rather than a ruler and their subject, as some imagine their relationship with G-d to be. This realization filled the person with joy, and they were elated for the entire day. But eventually, they reached the peak of their happiness, and as it began to decrease, they wondered if G-d would be upset with their regression from happiness.. But they had a second epiphany: even though it felt like they were just returning to where they started, they weren't, and if they can notice that, G-d must surely notice his growth as well.*



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This story carries an important message: Achieving happiness isn't easy; it can be very challenging. [And those who struggle with depression need to know they aren't alone; others can see their efforts to make their lives better. Whether it be by G-d or one's loved ones or both.](#) Those who aren't experiencing depression themselves but have a loved one who is can understand the importance of simply acknowledging the hard work that person is doing to change and grow.

For those affected by depression, whether personally or through a loved one, it is helpful to engage in exercises focusing on gratitude and finding the good in their own lives or in the lives of those loved ones. These exercises can and should be positive and fun tasks and should be understood as productive activities to improve one's mental health. One great example is a word search, where you are literally searching for clarity. [Try finding clarity in the word search below.](#)

H C V W W F H D G A  
A A S C E R E T R M  
P Z P A L I A S A E  
P R I R L E L U T N  
I F R E N N T P I T  
N A I D E D H P T A  
E M T L S S L O U L  
S I U O S J I R D Z  
S L A V F O F T E D  
K Y L E T Y E S X P

## Word Key

Happiness	Gratitude
Family	Happiness
Love	Health
Spiritual	Family
Friends	Support
Care	Joy
Wellness	Life
Mental	