



Jewish Wisdom on Help, Despair, and Hope

The following texts represent varying ways in which our Jewish tradition responds to crises of spirit. You may see yourself or others you know in these words. These texts are not meant to give you direction—though you may find inspiration or comfort. In studying you will see that there is not one right way to react or respond when faced with challenges.

Asking for Help

<p>Exodus 18:17-18</p> <p>(17) But Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing you are doing is not right; (18) you will surely wear yourself out, and these people as well. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.</p>	<p>שמות יחי:זי-ח</p> <p>וַיֹּאמֶר חִתָּן מֹשֶׁה אֵלָיו לֹא־טוֹב הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה: נָבֵל תִּבֶּל גַּם־אַתָּה גַּם־ הָעָם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר עִמָּךְ כִּי־כָבֵד מְמֹךְ הַדָּבָר לֹא־תוּכַל עֲשׂוֹה לְבַדְּךָ:</p>
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- In this text Moses' father-in-law, Yitro, suggests that Moses cannot judge the entire people of Israel by himself and must get help. How do you feel about asking for help? Does it make a difference whether the need is about something concrete, like help with homework, or something emotional, like help with sadness or anxiety?
- Is there something in your life that you think might be better if you asked for help? (You can answer out loud if you want or keep this answer to yourself if you would prefer.)
- It's easy to understand why not asking for help might wear a person out. How does it wear out the people around you?

How Does it Feel to Despair?

<p>Psalms 6: 2-7</p> <p>(2) ADONAI, do not punish me in anger, do not chastise me in fury. (3) Have mercy on me, ADONAI, for I languish; heal me, ADONAI, for my bones shake with terror. (4) My whole being is stricken with terror, while You, ADONAI—O, how long! (5) ADONAI, turn! Rescue me! Deliver me as befits Your faithfulness. (6) For there is no praise of You among the dead; in Sheol, who can acclaim You? (7) I am weary with groaning; every night I drench my bed, I melt my couch in tears.</p>	<p>תהילים ו: ב-ז</p> <p>יְקוֹק אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתַי תּוֹכִיחַנִי וְאַל־בְּחַמְתֶּךָ תִּיַסְרֵנִי: חֲנִנִי יְקוֹק כִּי אִמְלַל אֲנִי רַפְּאֵנִי יְקוֹק כִּי נִבְהַלּוּ עֲצָמָי: וּנְפֹשִׁי נִבְהַלָּה מְאֹד וְאַתָּה [וְאַתָּה] יְקוֹק עַד־מָתַי: שׁוּבָה יְקוֹק חֲלָצָה נַפְשִׁי הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי לְמַעַן חֲסִדְּךָ: כִּי אֵין בַּמָּוֹת זִכְרְךָ בְּשֵׂאוֹל מִי יוֹדֶה־לָּךְ: יִגְעַתִּי בְּאַנְחֹתַי אֲשַׁחַּה בְּכָל־לַיְלָה מִטַּתִּי בְּדִמְעָתִי עֵרְשִׁי אֲמַסָּה:</p>
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- The speaker thinks that God has punished them in anger. Do you think that God gets angry and punishes people?
- What evidence is given about how the speaker is feeling?
- What tactic does the speaker use to convince God to stop punishing them? Does the God of your understanding need praise?



Feeling Ignored

<p>Psalms 10:1 (1) Why, ADONAI, do You stand aloof, heedless in times of trouble?</p> <p>Psalms 13:2-4 (2) How long, ADONAI; will You ignore me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? (3) How long will I have cares on my mind, grief in my heart all day? How long will my enemy have the upper hand? (4) Look at me, answer me, ADONAI, my God! Restore the luster to my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death;</p>	<p>תהילים י:א לָמָּה יִקְוֶה תַעֲמֹד בְּרָחוֹק תַעֲלִים לְעֵתוֹת בְּצָרָה:</p> <p>תהילים יג:ב-ד עַד־אָנָּה יִקְוֶה תִשְׁכַּחֲנִי נֶצַח עַד־אָנָּה תִסְתִּיר אֶת־פְּנֵיךָ מִמּוֹנִי: עַד־אָנָּה אֲשִׁית עֲצוֹת בְּנַפְשִׁי יָגוֹן בְּלִבִּי יוֹמָם עַד־אָנָּה יָרוּם אֵיבִי עָלַי: הַבִּיטָה עֲנֵנִי יִקְוֶה אֱלֹהֵי הָאֵירָה עֵינַי פְּרֹאֲשׁוֹן הַמּוֹת:</p>
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- How does it feel to be ignored?
- In your opinion, which is worse: being ignored in general by a specific person or having a specific request ignored?
- In this text, the author complains of not being seen. What is does it feel like to seem invisible?
- What is the difference between not feeling seen and not feeling heard?
- What does the speaker imply might happen if God doesn't intervene?
- Imagine feeling that God is not paying attention to you, or hasn't heard your prayers? How might you speak to someone who is feeling that way?

God as a Source of Security

In the following psalms, the speaker sees God as their protector and refuge:

<p>Psalms 16:1-2, 8-11 (1) A <i>michtam</i> of David. Protect me, O God, for I seek refuge in You. (2) I say to ADONAI, "You are my Adonai, my benefactor; there is none above You." (8) I am ever mindful of ADONAI's presence; He is at my right hand; I shall</p>	<p>תהילים טז:א-ב, ח-יא מִכְתָּם לְדָוִד שְׁמֵרֵנִי אֵל כִּי־חָסִיתִי בְךָ: אֲמַרְתָּ לִיקְוֶה אֲדַנִּי אֶתָּה טוֹבָתִי בִלְעָלְיָךְ: שְׁוִיתִי יִקְוֶה לְגִגְדִי תָמִיד כִּי מִיְמִינִי בִלְאָמוּט:</p>
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<p>never be shaken. (9) So my heart rejoices, my whole being exults, and my body rests secure. (10) For You will not abandon me to Sheol or let Your faithful one see the Pit. (11) You will teach me the path of life. In Your presence is perfect joy; delights are ever in Your right hand.</p>	<p>לְכוּן שְׂמֵחַ לְבִי וַיִּגַּל כְּבוֹדִי אֶף־בְּשָׂרִי שְׂפֹן לְבַטָּח: כִּי לֹא־תַעְזֹב נַפְשִׁי לְשָׂאוֹל לֹא־תִתֶּן חֶסֶדְךָ לְרָאוֹת שְׁחַת: תוֹדִיעֵנִי אֲרַח חַיִּים שְׁבַע שְׂמֵחוֹת אֶת־ פְּנֵיךָ נְעֻמוֹת בְּיַמִּינְךָ נֶצַח:</p>
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<p>Psalms 23</p> <p>(1) A psalm of David. ADONAI is my shepherd; I lack nothing. (2) He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me to water in places of repose; (3) He renews my life; He guides me in right paths as befits His name. (4) Though I walk through a valley of deepest darkness, I fear no harm, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff—they comfort me. (5) You spread a table for me in full view of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my drink is abundant. (6) Only goodness and steadfast love shall pursue me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of ADONAI for many long years.</p>	<p>תהילים כג</p> <p>מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד יְקֹוֹק רַעִי לֹא אֶחְסָר: בְּנֵאוֹת דְּשָׂא יְרֻבִיצֵנִי עַל־מֵי מְנוּחֹת יְנַהֲלֵנִי: נַפְשִׁי יִשׁוּבֵב יְנַחֲנִי בְּמַעְגְּלֵי־צֶדֶק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ: גַּם כִּי־אֵלֶךְ בְּגִיא צַלְמוֹת לֹא־אִירָא רָע כִּי־אִתְּךָ עִמָּדִי שִׁבְטְךָ וּמִשְׁעֲנֵתְךָ הִמָּה יְנַחֲמֵנִי: תַּעֲרֹךְ לִפְנֵי שְׁלֹחַן נֶגֶד צַרְרֵי דְשִׁנֵּת בְּשִׁמּוֹן רֹאשִׁי כּוֹסֵי רוּיָה: אֵף טוֹב וְחֶסֶד יְרַדְפוּנִי כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי וְשִׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית־יְקֹוֹק לְאָרְךָ יָמִים:</p>
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- In these psalms, what does the speaker say that God does for them? How does this make them feel?
- The author suggests that they are secure because they know God is at their right hand, or near to them. What makes you feel secure?
- The author suggests that God is with them even in “a valley of deepest darkness.” Do you feel as though God is with you when you are in a dark emotional space? Who else might you turn to if you are in despair?



Holding Two Feelings at Once

<p>Psalms 27: 1-4, 7-14</p> <p>(1) Of David. ADONAI is my light and my help; whom should I fear? ADONAI is the stronghold of my life, whom should I dread? (2) When evil men assail me to devour my flesh— it is they, my foes and my enemies, who stumble and fall. (3) Should an army besiege me, my heart would have no fear; should war beset me, still would I be confident. (4) One thing I ask of ADONAI, only that do I seek: to live in the house of ADONAI all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of ADONAI, to frequent God’s temple.</p> <p>(7) Hear, ADONAI, when I cry aloud; have mercy on me, answer me. (8) In Your behalf my heart says: “Seek My face!” ADONAI, I seek Your face. (9) Do not hide Your face from me; do not thrust aside Your servant in anger; You have ever been my help. Do not forsake me, do not abandon me, O God, my deliverer. (10) Though my father and mother abandon me, ADONAI will take me in. (11) Show me Your way, ADONAI, and lead me on a level path because of my watchful foes. (12) Do not subject me to the will of my foes, for false witnesses and unjust accusers have appeared against me. (13) Had I not the assurance that I would enjoy the goodness of ADONAI in the land of the living... (14) Look to ADONAI; be strong and of good courage! O look to ADONAI!</p>	<p>תהילים כז: א-ד, ז-יג</p> <p>לְדָוִד יְקֹוֹק אֹרֵי וַיִּשְׁעֵי מִמִּי אֵירָא יְקֹוֹק מְעוֹז־חַיִּי מִמִּי אֶפְחָד: בְּקָרֵב עָלַי מִרְעִים לֶאֱכֹל אֶת־בְּשָׂרִי צָרִי וְאֵיבֵי לִי הֵמָּה כְּשִׁלּוֹ וְנָפְלוּ: אִם־תִּחְנָה עָלַי מִחְנָה לֹא־יִירָא לְבִי אִם־ תִּקְוִים עָלַי מִלְחָמָה בְּזֹאת אֲנִי בּוֹטֵחַ: אֶחַת שְׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת־יְקֹוֹק אוֹתָהּ אֶבְקֹשׁ שְׁבֹתֵי בְּבֵית־יְקֹוֹק כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי לַחַזוֹת בְּנֹעַם־יְקֹוֹק וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהֵיכָלוֹ: שְׁמַע־יְקֹוֹק קוֹלִי אֶקְרָא וְחַנּוּנִי וְעֲנֵנִי: לֵךְ אָמַר לְבִי בְּקִשׁוֹ פָּנָי אֶת־פָּנֶיךָ יְקֹוֹק אֲבַקֵּשׁ: אֶל־תִּסְתֵּר פְּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי אֶל־תִּטְּבֹאֲךָ עַבְדְּךָ עֲזַרְתִּי הֵייתָ אֶל־תִּטְּשֵׁנִי וְאֶל־ תַּעֲזֹבֵנִי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁרָאֵל: כִּי־אָבִי וְאִמִּי עֲזָבוּנִי וַיִּקְוֶה יֶאֱסֹפְנִי: הוֹרֵנִי יְקֹוֹק דֶּרֶךְךָ וַיִּנְחֵנִי בְּאֶרֶחַ מִישׁוֹר לְמַעַן שׁוֹרְרָי: אֶל־תִּתְּנֵנִי בְּיַד צָרִי כִּי קָמוּבִי עַד־י שָׁקַר וַיִּפַּח חָמָס: לוֹיֵלָא הָאִמְנַתִּי לְרֹאוֹת בְּטוֹב־יְקֹוֹק בְּאֶרֶץ חַיִּים: קוּהָ אֶל־יְקֹוֹק חֲזֹק וַיִּאֲמַץ לְבָבִי וְקוּהָ אֶל־יְקֹוֹק:</p>
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- In the beginning of this psalm, the speaker suggests that God is their protector and that, with this knowledge, nothing can phase them. In the second part of the psalm, the speaker worries that God might abandon them. How might it feel to have both of these emotions about God at the same time? How might it feel to hold both of these emotions about a person?
- What might make someone feel that someone whom they trust has abandoned them?



God as Healer

<p>Numbers 12:13</p> <p>(13) So Moses cried out to ADONAI, saying, "O God, pray heal her!"</p> <p>Siddur Ashkenaz, Weekday, Shacharit, Amidah, Healing</p> <p>(1) Heal us, Adonai, and we shall be healed, save us and we shall be saved, for You are our praise. Bring complete healing to all our wounds,</p> <p>(2) (Prayer for a sick person: May it be Your will in front of You, Adonai, my God and the God of my forefathers, that You quickly send a complete recovery from the Heavens - a recovery of the soul and a recovery of the body - to the sick person, insert name, the son/daughter of insert mother's name, among the other sick ones of Israel.)</p> <p>(3) for You are God and King, the faithful and merciful healer. Blessed are You, Adonai, Who heals the sick of his people Israel.</p>	<p>במדבר יב:ג</p> <p>וַיִּצְעַק מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוָה לֵאמֹר אֵל נָא רַפֵּא נָא לָהּ:</p> <p>סידור אשכנז, ימי חול, תפילת שחרית, עמידה, רפואה</p> <p>(א) רַפְּאוּנוּ ה' וְנִרְפָּא. הוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ וְנִשְׁעָה כִּי תִהְלָתֵנוּ אֲתָהּ. וְהַעֲלֵה רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה לְכֹל מִפּוֹתֵינוּ.</p> <p>(ב) תפילה בעד החולה: יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵי וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי. שְׁתַּשְׁלַח מְהֵרָה רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם. רְפוּאַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ וְרְפוּאַת הַגּוּף לְחֹלֶה פִּבֵּי"פ בְּתוֹךְ שְׁאֵר חוּלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:</p> <p>(ג) כִּי אֵל מְלֹךְ רוֹפֵא נְאֻמָּן וְרַחֲמָן אֲתָהּ. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', רוֹפֵא חוּלֵי עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל:</p>
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- Have you ever recited a *misheberach* prayer or turned to God to ask for healing for you or someone you know? Do you believe that God can heal someone or be a partner in healing?
- Moses' prayer comes after his sister Miriam has been stricken with white scales commonly translated as leprosy. Why do you think his prayer is so short and direct?
- How is the prayer for healing found in the prayer-book different than Moses' prayer?
- We often think of praying for someone who is physically ill. The prayer also asks for the healing of someone whose soul needs to recover. How do you feel about praying for someone who is having a spiritual or emotional crisis?
- How does the psalmist describe being healed or getting better? How do they feel? Have you ever felt as though your sadness has turned to joy?



Forgiveness

<p>Psalms 32:1-5</p> <p>(1) Of David. A <i>maskil</i>. Happy is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered over. (2) Happy the man whom the ADONAI does not hold guilty, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. (3) As long as I said nothing, my limbs wasted away from my anguished roaring all day long. (4) For night and day Your hand lay heavy on me; my vigor waned as in the summer drought. Selah. (5) Then I acknowledged my sin to You; I did not cover up my guilt; I resolved, "I will confess my transgressions to the ADONAI," and You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.</p>	<p>תהילים לב:א-ה</p> <p>לְדוֹד מִשְׁכִּיל אֲשֶׁרִי נְשׁוּי־פֶשַׁע כְּסוּי־חַטָּאָה:</p> <p>אֲשֶׁרִי אָדָם לֹא יַחֲשֵׁב יִקְוֶה לוֹ עוֹן וְאֵין בְּרוּחוֹ רָמְיָה:</p> <p>כִּי־הִחַרְשֵׁתִי בְּלוֹ עֲצָמֵי בִשְׂאֲגוֹתֵי כָּל־הַיּוֹם:</p> <p>כִּי יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה תִכְבֵּד עָלַי יָדָךְ נְהַפְּךָ לְשִׁדִּי בְּחַרְבֵּנִי קִיץ סָלָה:</p> <p>חֲטָאתִי אוֹדִיעָךְ וְעוֹנֵי לֹא־כִסִּיתִי אֶמְרָתִי אוֹדָה עָלַי פֶּשַׁעִי לִיקוֹק וְאַתָּה נָשְׂאתָ עוֹן חֲטָאתִי סָלָה:</p>
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- How does the psalmist describe feeling when they know God is angry at them?
- What emotions do you feel when you know someone is angry at you? Do you think it feels worse to think a person is angry with you or that God is angry with you?
- How does the psalmist describe being forgiven? Do you feel similarly or differently?

God as Help

<p>Psalms 121</p> <p>(1) A song for ascents. I turn my eyes to the mountains; from where will my help come? (2) My help comes from the ADONAI, maker of heaven and earth. (3) He will not let your foot give way; your guardian will not slumber; (4) See, the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps! (5) The ADONAI is your guardian; the ADONAI is your protection at your right hand. (6) By day the sun will not strike you, nor the moon by night. (7) The ADONAI will guard you from all harm; He will guard your life. (8) The ADONAI will guard your going and coming now and forever.</p>	<p>תהילים קכא</p> <p>שִׁיר לַמַּעֲלוֹת אֲשָׁא עֵינַי אֶל־הַהָרִים מֵאֵין יָבֹא עֲזָרִי:</p> <p>עֲזָרִי מֵעַם יִקְוֶה עֲשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ:</p> <p>אֲלֵי־תֵינן לַמּוֹט רַגְלֶךָ אֲלֵי־נֹגֵם שְׁמֶרְךָ:</p> <p>הִנֵּה לֹא־יִנּוּם וְלֹא יִישָׁן שׁוֹמֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל:</p> <p>יִקְוֶה שְׁמֶרְךָ יִקְוֶה צִלְּךָ עַל־יַד יְמִינֶךָ:</p> <p>יוֹמָם הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לֹא־יַכְּכָה וַיָּרֶחַ בַּלַּיְלָה:</p> <p>יִקְוֶה יִשְׁמְרֶךָ מִכָּל־רָע יִשְׁמֹר אֶת־נַפְשְׁךָ:</p> <p>יִקְוֶה יִשְׁמֹר־צֵאתְךָ וּבֹאֶךָ מֵעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם:</p>
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- If you needed help, would you consider turning to God? Why or why not? If you wouldn't turn to God, can you imagine why it might seem appealing?
- What does the psalmist suggest God will do for those who turn to God for help?
- If you don't turn to God when you need help, who, or where, in your life do you turn to?