

# Sparks

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Rosh Yeshiva, Orayta*

## Does G-d Feel Sadness?

Many years ago, when I returned from a trip to Israel, my parents picked me up at the airport and sadly told me that we were going to the funeral of my cousin, who had been killed in a car accident. At the funeral, the rabbi said something that angered me very much and challenged my faith in G-d. In his eulogy, the rabbi quoted a Yiddish saying: “What do we know? People try to figure it out, and G-d is laughing.”

The rabbi seemed to be saying that it's only from our perspective that terrible accidents look terrible. We see the back of the tapestry of life, and it looks to us like random strands of knotted wool. G-d, however, sees the whole beautiful picture on the right side of the tapestry, and He's laughing because everything is in order, everything makes sense.

But the rabbi's words really upset me. Bully for G-d that He knows it all. But what about us? I felt like we were stupid little mice scurrying around in pain and fear, trying to find our way through a maze, while G-d was laughing. I didn't like that image of G-d at all. It only confirmed my childhood ideas, which I had been working so hard to get rid of.

But I completely misunderstood. It seemed to me as if the rabbi was saying that G-d is transcendent and completely removed from our pain and sadness in this world. But that's not true. Yes, the Torah and Kabbalah teach that G-d is transcendent, “outside” the world, a perfect *being*. But the Torah and Kabbalah also teach that G-d is imminent, “inside” this world, and manifest as a perfect *becoming*—the very soul of humanity, completely immersed in our ups and downs, our happy times and our sad times.

A story is told about a businessman whose company purchased a coal mine. However, shortly after the sale, the price of coal began to drop in response to the fluctuation in fossil fuels. Distressed by the financial loss, the man went to get advice from a Kabbalist. The sage told him, “The Talmud says that when a person is in distress this causes the Shekhinah, G-d's Presence in the world, also to feel anguish. If you are in pain over your financial loss, this causes G-d to suffer along with you. So what do you think? Is it worthwhile causing G-d to be saddened over a few pieces of coal?”

Life is difficult. But then again, it depends on how you look at it. I once watched my kids take hundreds of pieces of a puzzle and spend long, hard hours putting it together. I had planned to frame it once it was finished, but they had a different idea. They celebrated its completion by destroying it. Why? Because they were not interested in the puzzle's being completed! They were interested in the excitement of doing the puzzle, the challenge and adventure of making it. That's what they enjoyed about it.

They understood what we should all understand. There's so much life and value in the process, so much growth and awareness in the journey, as difficult as it may sometimes be.

Kabbalah teaches us that G-d takes the journey with us. G-d is intimately involved in our daily challenges and struggles, in our ups and downs. G-d shares our pains and troubles as well as our pleasures and successes. Knowing this makes difficult experiences more manageable and more meaningful. Knowing this also makes the good times even better. I have heard it said that when you share your sadness with another person it is halved, and when you share your joy it is doubled. This all the more so when you realize that G-d shares in your sadness and joys.

We are all here for the journey. However, we get the most out of our journey when we turn it into a holy journey by acknowledging that G-d is with us.

[excerpt from *The Secret Life of G-d*]

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