



From the desk of
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1

Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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TORAT

Parashat Vayechi

HAMELECH

The Deficits of Anger

In this week's *parashah*, Yaakov has parting words for each of his children. When it comes to Shimon and Levi, he admonishes them for their inability to control their anger.

Now, Shimon and Levi had very noble motives. An atrocity had been done. Their sister was assaulted and violated. They felt compelled to take action, to avenge a wrong, to make it clear that such an act of indecency would not be tolerated.

They attacked an entire city and rescued their young sister from the clutches of an evil villain.

Nonetheless, before his passing, Yaakov saw fit to draw their attention to the anger which they had displayed. Yaakov wanted to point out the anger, in essence, is a terrible flaw, a poor character trait. In a moment of wrath, one loses control and is no longer driven by common sense. A person who allows anger to get the better of him has no brakes. There is no knowing what he may do.

The Arizal told Reb Chayim Vital never to anger, even when assuming a teaching position. Other *aveirot*, said the Arizal, each brings a blemish to one specific element of man. Anger, on the other hand, affects one's *neshamah*, his entire being.

When a person angers, his holy soul departs, and an impure spirit resides upon him instead. That is why angering is akin to idol worship. In one moment of rage, a person can forfeit so many spiritual accomplishments. What a shame!

The "Benefits" of Anger

What does a person gain from anger? Well, it depends who you are! If you're smart, you lose your wits! If you are a prophet, you are demoted. Anyone who angers loses his right to be in a position of authority. (Pesachim 66b)

One who angers will have to suffer all forms of punishment which are available in Gehenom. [You know, in the Inquisition Dungeons there were Torture Rooms which housed various contraptions, each delivering a different type of torture. It seems that Gehenom is also not just one big blazing fire. Rather it features various forms of torture, each suited to particular sins. Wanna get 'em all? Just let anger overtake you! That's a free ticket to go on all the "rides" in the Gehenom Anti-amusement Park!]

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani teaches that anger is one of the leading causes of painful hemorrhoids. Rabba bar Rav Huna would say: Someone who gets angry cares not about Hashem's Honor. R' Yirmiya of Difti would proclaim: Anger has a



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person forget what he learned and become thick-headed. Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak lamented: If you see an angry person, you can be assured that he has more *aveirot* than *mitzvot*. (Nedarim 22b)

Even someone as great as Moshe Rabbeinu is affected negatively by anger. Moshe got upset at officers of the Jewish army when they returned from fighting Midyan and left survivors. Due to this display of anger, Moshe forgot the *Halachot* of *Hagaolat* & *Tevilat Keilim*. Instead, Elazar ben Aharon taught them to Bnei Yisrael.

Criterion for *Shaliach Tzibur*

The *mekubal* Rav Mordechai Sharabi once spoke about anger and said that one of the criteria for being eligible to study *Kabbalah* is not to anger. Someone present said that he knew of those who angered and also learned *Kabbalah*. Rav Mordechai explained: Such people are fooling themselves. They only *think* they know *Kabbalah*.

One morning, a certain man approached the *amud* to lead the services. Rav Mordechai motioned that he should defer to someone else. After the prayers, the man asked for an explanation. Rav Mordechai told him: I saw on your face that before you left home this morning you got into a dispute with your wife and got angry. Someone who just got angry is not a suitable candidate to lead the services.

A Sad Story About a Hot Plate

Gittin 6b teaches: Do not instill unreasonable fear in your home. It can bring people to grave sins! Such as manslaughter, immorality and desecration of Shabbat!

A woman once took a nap on Friday afternoon and woke up when Shabbat had already begun. Since her husband was the scary type, she feared arousing his wrath, so she quickly plugged in the hot plate, not realizing that by doing so, she was igniting her own hot plate in the afterlife. Really, her husband was at fault, for getting heated up just because he wanted something hot on his plate.

Be Patient and Live

Rambam (Dei'ot 2:4) teaches: Although regarding most character traits, a middle-of-the-road approach is appropriate, when it comes to anger, one should run to the other extreme.

Rav Preida (Eiruvim 54b) taught a certain student 400 times each lesson until he understood. One day, the student was restless and it took 800 times. Asks Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz: Wasn't that *bitul Torah* to give up so much time to teach a student with such learning difficulties? He answers: Since it helped Rav Preida work on his patience, it was worth it!



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Rav Ada bar Ahava was asked how he merited longevity. He replied: Because I never got upset at home. (Taanit 20b)

In the end, Hashem rewarded Rav Preida for his perseverance. He granted him an extra 400 years of life. So he did not lose any time after all!

Tips for Avoiding Anger

Eliyahu HaNavi taught: The best teachers of Torah are those who do not anger easily. (Kallah Rabati 4:31)

How can we avoid anger? Here are a few tips: a) Sleep on it. If something upsets you, make a conscious decision not to get upset about it until tomorrow (Sefer Hassidim 655). Without going into details, this conduct once saved a person from killing his wife and child.

b) When you know you will have dealings and interaction with others, prepare yourself for delays and inconveniences and insults, etc.

c) You could designate a certain garment to wear for getting angry. That's what the Horki Rebbe would do. The fact that you have to go to a different room and get dressed often helps you think twice if it's really worth getting angry about this inconvenience.

d) Picture in your head the spelling out in full of Hashem's Name Alef and Hei and Yud and Hei. Also spell out each of those letters – Alef is Alef-

Lamed-Fei, etc. Add all the letters together plus one more and you get the *gematria* of *kaas* – anger.

e) Take a good long stare at the corner of a garment which has *tzitzit* strings. *Kanaf* has the same *gematria* as *kaas*.

f) Going to the *mikveh* also helps, as *mikveh* equals *kaas* plus one.

The Tefillin and the Etrog

Rav Yechiel Michel of Zlochev had a valuable pair of *tefillin* which he received as a *yerushah* from his father, Reb Yitzchak, the Maggid of Duravitz. He valued this pair greatly. He had a different pair of *tefillin* which he wore regularly.

Many wealthy *chassidim* offered him handsome prices for the *tefillin*, but he refused to sell them. Due to their dire straits, his wife encouraged the sale, but to no avail.

One year, before Sukkot, *Arba Minim* were not available in the city of Zlochev. Finally, on Erev Sukkot, a man came to town with an *etrog* for sale, but he was charging an exorbitant fee. Reb Yechiel Michel, in his zest for *mitzvot*, sold his extra pair of *tefillin* and purchased the *etrog*.

Jubilant, he returned home with his prize *etrog*. His wife heard that he sold the *tefillin* and bought the *etrog*, and she gave him an earful. In shock,



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4

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he dropped the *etrog*, rendering it *pasul*. Nonetheless, he remained calm.

When asked how he managed to stay calm, he responded, "My tefillin I no longer have; the *etrog* I no longer have. All I have left is *shalom bayit*. Should I destroy that, too?"

That night, his father came to him in a dream and revealed to him that in Heaven they were very impressed that he kept calm.

An Angry Face Only

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter noticed that his *talmidim* were not learning as well as they should have. Now the Rambam says that the Rabbi's job is to set them straight, even if it involves speaking strongly. So Reb Yisrael came into the Beit Medrash and spoke strongly. In the middle of his speech, he turned to face the wall and whispered something. A *talmid* who was nearby bent over to hear. He heard Reb Yisrael davening, "Hashem, please help this only be an outward expression of disapproval. Help me not get angry for real."

Reb Yisrael continued his speech full of reprimand, but calmly.

If You Are Wrong...

People came to Reb Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld for a *din Torah*. He heard out the two sides and issued his ruling. The guilty party had some nasty things to say about the rabbi. Rabbi Sonnenfeld

sat silently listening to the harsh tirade. But when the volume increased and neighbors were alarmed, Rabbi Sonnenfeld stood up and said, "Listen, now. If you are correct that I and my Beit Din erred, then you have already asked Heaven to intervene. A judge can only rule based on information presented to him. But if you are wrong [here he raised his voice] if you are wrong [he repeated] and the *din* is true [he paused and the listeners paled] I want you know that I totally forgive you for all the torment you caused me and my family."

Yaakov Avinu was careful not to curse Shimon and Levi themselves; only their wrath he cursed.

Let us learn from this *parashah* how terrible it is to get angry. It does not matter if in the essence of the matter at hand you are right or wrong. If you got angry over it, then you're wrong! You're wrong for getting angry!

It is very hard to fix a mistake made when anger was in control. The best medicine is preventative. Most people do not even listen when spoken to angrily. People like to be spoken to calmly. One who screams at others by definition is not being *mechanech* them. Usually he is doing the opposite. Speak calmly and the words will sink in. Be calm and live long.

Shabbat Shalom,
Mordechai Malka