
CONTROLLING ANGER

To enjoy harmonious relationships with one's spouse, family, friends, and professional associates is a universal human goal. Anger, however, is a character trait that can undermine this basic aspiration. Anger can destroy years of investment in a relationship in a matter of minutes. So why is it that many people are quite content to live with the tendency to become angry?

The answer is that many people go through life without ever thinking how destructive anger really is, and conversely, how constructive patience is. And even if someone has this understanding, he may lack practical techniques to control anger. This class will analyze why anger is so destructive and provide insights and tools to help us gain control in the most trying moments.

This class will address the following questions:

- What makes an angry person so frightening to other people?
- What does an angry person stand to lose and a patient person stand to gain?
- How does one replace anger with patience?
- Isn't it appropriate to be angry sometimes?
- Is it really possible to overcome a tendency toward anger?

Class Outline

Section I. What We Stand to Lose

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SECTION I. WHAT WE STAND TO LOSE

Anger and frustration – not so common, you say? Just consider the following:

A large, international retail corporation is now proudly offering its customers “Frustration-free packaging – no dreaded wire ties, no impenetrable plastic clamshells.” This special wrapping is designed to protect valued customers from becoming victims of “wrap rage,” the fury that sets in when it takes a customer more than a nanosecond to get to his new purchase.

Wrap rage, also called package rage – the common name for anger and frustration resulting from the inability to open hard-to-remove packaging – is so common, that the American Dialect Society voted “wrap rage” as one of the most useful new words of 2007.

I discovered that “wrap” isn’t the only “rage” out there. “Rage,” unfortunately, is all the rage these days.

“Computer rage” is anger and frustration resulting from using a computer. It may result in verbal or physical abuse toward the innocent computer.

“Trolley rage” is anger and frustration in a supermarket resulting from out of stock items, and is characterized by such actions as ramming another shopper’s cart.

The word “rage” (c. 1300) comes from the Latin rabies, meaning madness, rage or fury and is related to rabere, to be mad and rabid.

Yikes. (Sima Steinbaum, Mishpacha Jewish Family Weekly, December 16, 2009, p. 86.)

Does this mean that “anger” is normal and acceptable? Is it something that is just a part of the human condition, whether we like it or not?

Judaism says that anger can be completely transcended, even in the most extreme circumstances. And indeed, every once in a while, the act of an individual is so outstanding that it serves as an example of what we can all achieve. A person should be in control of his character traits, and not let his character traits control him, as illustrated by the following story:

In Jerusalem long ago, an incredible incident took place in the office of a gemach (Jewish free loan fund, acronym of gemilut chasadim, acts of kindness). Customarily, the various gemachs in Jerusalem were all open on Thursdays, to be available to people who needed to borrow money for food for Shabbat. By Thursday night, all the gemach offices would be closed, mainly because money that had been available for the week was already gone.

One gemach, however, remained open on Friday mornings. The compassionate and sympathetic Reuven kept his gemach open, just in case someone needed him at the last minute. True, there was not so much money left by Friday, but he felt that one never knew who might be in desperate need. One Friday, when all the gemachs were closed except for Reuven’s, a young married man came in and asked for money for his family’s Shabbat food. Reuven recognized the man for he had just been at the gemach the day before, and said, “If I remember correctly, you were here just yesterday.”

The young man’s face became flushed with anger. “Are you trying to tell me that I don’t need the money?” he fumed.

“No, we are not saying that at all ...” explained Reuven.

“Well, then lend me the money that I need! I already have cosigners for surety.”

Reuven looked at the young man compassionately and explained that it was the policy of the gemach not to lend twice within such a short period. The young man was enraged. Yelling, he stormed toward Reuven and slapped him across the face! The gentle Reuven stood there in shock and disbelief. No one had ever had the audacity to scream at him, let alone slap him. Reuven’s assistant stepped forward to retaliate, but Reuven held him back.

“Wait a moment,” Reuven said to the young man, “I’ll be back with the money right away.” He gave the bills to the young man and wished him well. The young man thanked him and left. Because of the noise and commotion a few neighbors had gathered in the office to see what had happened. “If I were in your shoes,” one man shouted, “after such humiliation I would have demanded that he give back the money you had lent him yesterday, and pushed him out the door!”

Reuven, whose face still stung from the slap, explained. “I know this fellow. Under normal circumstances he would never have acted this way. He must be having such terrible problems that he lost himself completely. It’s because he did behave in such an unnatural way that I realized how desperate his position is. Now, more than ever, is the time to help him, and not be angry at him. So I went out of my way for him.” (Rabbi Paysach Krohn, *The Maggid Speaks*, pp. 86-87)

From a Jewish perspective not only can anger be transcended, but it is considered foolish to remain an angry person.

Any thinking person will quickly realize how much he stands to lose from the trait of anger: his self-control, his health, his friends, his spiritual level, his social standing – in short, everything.

In this section we will see that the negative aspects of anger can be divided into three categories: (1) personal damage, (2) social damage, and (3) spiritual damage.

PART A. PERSONAL DAMAGE

1. Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 7:9 – Anger is the way of the foolish.

Be not hasty in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the laps of fools.

אל תבהל ברוחך לכעוס כי כעס בחיק כסילים ינוח:

2. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Pesachim 66b – Anger causes a person to lose his ability to reason and think clearly.

Any man who becomes enraged, if he is wise he loses his wisdom, and if he is a prophet he loses his prophecy.

ריש לקיש אמר כל אדם שכועס אם חכם הוא חכמתו מסתלקת ממנו אם נביא הוא נבואתו מסתלקת ממנו.

3. Rambam (Maimonides), Hilchot De’ot (Laws of Conduct) 2:3 – Anger diminishes a person’s overall quality of life.

Those who frequently become angry have no quality of life; therefore, [the Sages] instructed us to distance ourselves from anger to the farthest degree, until a person acts as though he does not sense even those things that would justifiably anger a person.

ובעלי כעס אין חייהם חיים לפיכך צוו להתרחק מן הכעס עד שינהיג עצמו שלא ירגיש אפילו לדברים המכעיסים.

4. **Orchot Tzaddikim (The Ways of the Righteous), Gate 12 – Anger causes a person to be stubborn and deny the truth.**

Anger causes a person to be stubborn, and because of his anger a person will not make concessions, and he will not admit the truth.

הכעס גורם עזות לאדם, ומחמת הכעס לא ייכנע וגם לא יודה על האמת.

As the next source shows, many people seem polite and kind when calm; the way to find out what they are really like is to observe their behavior when they become angry. The way a person responds to anger-inducing situations is a barometer of his overall nature.

5. **Talmud Bavli, Eiruvין 65b with Rashi– The true nature of a person is revealed by how easily he is angered.**

You can recognize a person's true nature by three things: his drink [how controlled his mind is when he drinks – Rashi], his pocket [his integrity in business – Rashi], and his anger [that he is not extremely demanding, and is not upset by things that anger most other people – Rashi.]

בשלושה דברים אדם ניכר בכוסו ובכיסו ובכעס.
 רש"י
 בכוסו - אם דעתו מיושבת עליו ביינו.
 בכיסו - כשנושא ונותן עם בני אדם, אם באמונה הוא עושה.
 בכעסו - שאינו קפדן יותר מדאי.

Conversely, if a person is sensitive to even the slightest trace of anger within himself and keeps it under control, it indicates his high level of self-refinement, as in the following story:

Rav Yisrael Salanter, the founder of the Mussar Movement, was especially aware of anger as an undermining trait. Once, while he was living in Berlin, a visitor found Rav Yisrael uncharacteristically upset. The visitor inquired as to the source of his troubles. Rav Yisrael answered that two Jews from Kovno had just come to visit, and had reported to him on potentially troublesome changes that were about to be made in the local Beit Medrash (study hall), where Rav Yisrael used to study.

“Are the changes that bad?” asked the visitor.

“No,” answered Rav Yisrael, “but nevertheless, I felt some anger when I was told of them.”

“Did you speak to them in a way that could have contained an element of insult?”

“No, not at all,” answered Rav Yisrael. “No one but myself knew of it. But you know just as I do, that when a person gets angry it is as if he were worshipping idols. About this I am upset.” (Rabbi Avrohom Feuer, A Letter for the Ages, p. 37.)

PART B. SOCIAL DAMAGE

It is no secret that anger damages our personal relationships. It is difficult for others to love an angry person. An angry person may also be very lonely, as the following story illustrates:

In the yeshivah of Novardak, there were no dormitory facilities for the students. Instead, they were responsible to find their own accommodations, and most rented rooms nearby from owners who were happy to have them as tenants. There was one exception.

One building, where more than twenty rooms were occupied by students, was owned by a bitter woman who was a widow. She ridiculed and criticized every one of the students who rented from her. Her anger even led her to sometimes turn off the water and electricity on Friday afternoons. Soon her harassment became too much to tolerate, and the students moved out, one by one.

Only one student remained, Yosef Geffen. One morning as he was coming home from shul, the woman yelled at him, “You must be crazy! How can you still stay in my building? You see that all the other boys have moved out – why do you insist on staying?”

Yosef paused for a moment and then said softly to the woman, “I stay here for your sake. I realize that you live alone and I fear one night you might fall or become ill and call out for help and there will be no one to hear your cries. I understand that when you yell at us you are merely letting out your frustrations and anger about being widowed and struggling. I therefore felt that it was proper for me to stay, just in case you might ever need help.”

The woman’s face changed. This was not at all what she had expected to hear. She was so surprised by the unexpected concern that she literally pleaded with the student, “Forgive me! Forgive me, young man! It never dawned on me that was the reason you were staying. How kind and gracious of you.”

For days afterwards she never said anything but kind words to the students she met. Slowly word got around that she was no longer as bitter and angry as she had been, and the students started moving back into the building until all the rooms were filled. (Rabbi Paysach Krohn, *Around the Maggid’s Table*, p. 76.)

Consider how the widow’s anger was the cause of her isolation from all the students. And note how all the students moved back into the building when her anger subsided. The following sources illustrate other ways in which anger can ruin a person’s relationships.

1. **Orchot Tzaddikim, Gate 12 – An angry person cannot control his actions, and causes disputes and quarrels.**

People who are angry, and who reinforce their rage, are unaware of what they do, and they do many things in their anger that they would not do when calm. For anger causes one to think irrationally and speak out of anger, thus triggering disputes and quarrels.

בני אדם, כשהם כועסים ומחזיקים בכעסם, אינם משימים לבם על מה שעושים, ועושים הרבה ענינים בכעסם מה שלא היו עושים בלא הכעס, כי הכעס מוציא שכלו של אדם מקרבו עד שמרבה דברי הכעס, ונכנס במחלוקת וקנטורים.

Unable to think clearly, a person who is lost in anger loses perspective. The crooked path appears straight; the forbidden seems permissible. When no longer guided by reason, insults, quarreling and even violence come within reach (see Chofetz Chaim, *Chovas HaShmirah*, p. 24).

2. **Ibid. – An angry person is disliked by others and is a burden on his family.**

An angry person does not find favor in the eyes of people, and he is hated by them. Because of this, his deeds will not be accepted by people ... An angry person is a burden on his family, who must constantly hear his anger and his complaints.

הכעסן אין לו חן בעיני הבריות והוא שנוא בעיניהם, ומתוך כך אין מעשיו מקובלים בעיני הבריות... הכעסן הוא כובד על בני ביתו השומעים תמיד כעסו ותלונתו.

Many people control their anger when they are among strangers. Consequently, a more accurate criterion for assessing a person's propensity to anger is how he reacts to his immediate family. We make more demands on our family than we do on strangers and hence are more apt to become angry (Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, Lev Eliyahu, Vol. I, p. 31).

3. **Ibid. – The angry person cannot teach others.**

Even if an angry person possesses Torah and good deeds, people will not learn from him.

הכעסן ... אפילו אם יש בידו תורה ומעשים טובים אין העולם למודים ממנו.

4. **Based on Talmud Bavli, Gittin 6b with Rashi – An angry person is likened to a murderer.**

Someone who creates an atmosphere of fear in his household due to his angry outbursts is likened to a murderer. Rashi explains that people will flee from his presence with such panic that they will not look where they are going, and might fall into a pit or off a bridge.

In truth anger is even more dangerous than described in the previous source. Just think how many lives have been lost at the hands of angry people in fits of road rage or acts of revenge.

5. **Driving Instructor Resigns Over Incident of Road Rage, www.nytimes, October 16, 1997 – One third of fatal crashes attributed to road rage.**

A driver's education teacher resigned after he was accused of having a student driver chase down a motorist who had cut them off and then punching the man.

The teacher, David C., 36, quit on Wednesday after being suspended over the incident.

Earlier in the day, the 23-year-old victim, Jon M., and his lawyer said they hoped Mr. C. would be able to keep his job. Mr. C. has taught health, physical education, and science at a middle school for 11 years. Mr. M.'s lawyer, said, "Here's a guy who's a very good teacher, and he does something that's less than wise. We're very concerned about the County school system losing a good teacher."

The police said Mr. C. was with two students on Sept. 19 when another car cut them off. Mr. C. told the driver to chase the car. When they caught up to it, Mr. C. got out and punched Mr. M., the police said. Mr. M. took off, and Mr. C. again told the student to chase him. When Mr. C's car was pulled over for speeding, Mr. M. pulled up to tell the officer what had happened, the police said. The student driving the car was not charged.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that one-third of all fatal car crashes, in which 41,907 people died last year, could be attributed to road rage, which has been identified as aggressive and even violent behavior by some drivers who become enraged by the actions of other drivers.

PART C. UNDERMINING PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

We will now discuss how anger hinders a person's personal and spiritual growth, causing one to be prone to a destructive cycle of anger and unproductive behavior.

1. **Orchot Tzaddikim, Gate 12 – An angry person cannot achieve any positive spiritual growth.**

Anger denies a person all things good, [for example]: a person who is angry does not have

הכעס מונע לב האדם מכל הטובות, כי כשאדם כועס אין לו לב לרחם על העניים. ... הכעס מבטל כוונת לב

a compassionate heart toward the poor ... Anger prevents a person from having intent when he prays, and the Divine Presence cannot rest on someone who is angry ...

An angry person cannot learn or accept constructive criticism, because nobody will be willing to reveal his failings out of fear of his fury. Even if someone will rebuke him, he will not accept the rebuke, out of his anger ...

In short, a person who habitually gets angry cannot achieve anything positive, unless he dispels the anger from his heart.

האדם בתפילה, ואין שכינה שורה מתוך הכעס.

... הכעס מונע מעצמו מוסרים ותוכחות, כי אין אדם רשאי לגלות לו טעויותיו ודרכיו המכוערות, כי כל אדם יפחד ממנו להגיד לו עניניו, כי הוא ירגז עליו. ואפילו אם יוכיח אותו שום אדם, לא יקבל ממנו מתוך הכעס:

כללו של דבר: אין הכעס מקבל שום מידה טובה, אם לא יסיר מלבו הכעס.

2. **Rabbi Menacham Twersky, Meor Einayim (Chernobyl), appendix (Ikkutim) on Berachot 29b – In spiritual terms, anger is the all-inclusive transgression.**

For every night, at the time when the soul ascends, the Hand writes down all the transgressions that a person did on that day. However, if he became angry on that day, only that sin is written, and nothing else needs to be recorded. Everything is included in anger, because anger leads to all transgressions. Therefore, the Talmud states that “nothing emerges in his hand but his anger” [Kiddushin 41a] because this is all that is written down. (Clearly a person’s positive acts are also seen; here the focus is on the importance of improving one’s shortcomings.)

שכל לילה בעת עליית הנשמות כותבת היד כל מה שחטא האדם בזה היום, והנה אם היה לו לב רגז באותו היום אינה כותבת היד אלא חטא רגזותו, ואז אינה צריכה לכתוב יותר, מאחר דדא ביה כולה ביה בו זה מביא לכל העבירות. וזה “לא עלתה בידו”, רצונו לומר לא עלתה ידו לכתוב אלא וכו’.

Judaism understands that a person is composed of a *Yetzer Hatov*, which is the inclination to do good and build oneself as a refined human being, and a *Yetzer Hara*, which is the inclination to act negatively and self-destructively. The goal of life is to choose to act in accordance with one’s *Yetzer Hatov*, and minimize the control of the *Yetzer Hara* over one’s actions.

If however, a person is so overcome by his *Yetzer Hara*, that he can no longer think rationally, he is compared to one “who worships idols.” This is because his *Yetzer Hara* rules over him. His weakened capacity to choose anything except for what his *Yetzer Hara* tells him makes him like a servant to it. His *Yetzer Hara* has become a like a god who rules over him and decides his every action.

3. **Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 105b – When a person is overcome with anger, he is subject to a “foreign god,” which is the Evil Inclination within him.**

A person who tears his clothes in anger, or breaks his possessions or scatters his money in rage, is considered as though he worships idols ...

המקרה בגדיו בחמתו, והמשבר כליו בחמתו, והמפזר מעותיו בחמתו, יהא בעיניך כעובד עבודה זרה ...

What is the verse that alludes to this? “There shall not be a foreign god among [literally, inside] you, nor shall you bow down before an alien god” [Tehillim/Psalms 81:10]. What is the “alien god” that is present inside man? This is the Yetzer Hara [the self-destructive, Evil Inclination. When a person is angry, he is a servant of the Evil Inclination within him.]

מאי קראה? “לא יהיה בך אל זר ולא תשתחוה לאל נכר”. איזהו אל זר שיש בגופו של אדם? הוי אומר זה יצר הרע.

4. **Mishlei (Proverbs) 29:22; Rabbeinu Yonah ibid. – Not only is anger itself negative, but it leads to all sorts of negative behavior without limit.**

“A man of anger will incite strife, and a man of fury is full of offense.”

Rabbeinu Yonah:

Anger is a great evil for most people and on most occasions. The Sages stated that someone who is angry is considered as if he serves idolatry, for today the Evil Inclination tells him to do such-and-such wrongdoing, and tomorrow it will tell him to serve idolatry.

The Sages also stated that anyone who gets angry becomes involved with all types of wrongdoing and transgression, for anger leads to all transgressions and there is no limit to the evil of this trait.

איש אף יגרה מדון ובעל חמה רב פשע.

רבינו יונה

ענין הכעס ברוב הפעמים וברוב בני אדם הוא רעה רבה, כמו שנאמר איש אף יגרה מדון ובעל חמה רב פשע. ואמרו רז"ל (זוהר בראשית כז, ע"ב) כל הכועס כאילו עובד עבודה זרה. כי היצר אומר לו היום עשה כך ולמחר אומר לו לך עבוד ע"ז.

ועוד אמרו כל הכועס כל מיני עבירות תלויין בו, כי מתוך הכעס בא לעשות כל העבירות, ואין תכלית לרעת המדה ההיא.

5. **Rabbi Yosef Giktilia, Sefer HaMashalim, # 76 – Anger leaves a person vulnerable to the enticement of the Evil Inclination.**

To what is anger comparable? To an unlocked doorway before a thief. The explanation of this [parable] is that while the light of wisdom shines within a person, he resembles a strong house with iron bolts, into which the thief – the Evil Inclination – cannot break in. But if one of the walls of the house is breached, the thief is able to enter. So, too, when a person is calm and composed, and is not prone to outbursts of anger for every occurrence, there is no opening for the Evil Inclination to rule over him.

However, if he is angry, the Evil Inclination finds a point of entry and entices him to do other transgressions. For anger is the cause of all quarrels, fights, and murders, and the abandonment of faith.

למה הכעס דומה לפני יצר הרע - לפרצה לפני הגנב: פירושו, בעוד שאור החכמה מאיר בגוף הרי הגוף דומה אצל יצר הרע לבית שכתליו בריאים ומנעוליו חזקים שאין לגנב דרך להכנס לבית, ואם נפרץ כותל אחד שבבית הרי מצא הגנב פירצה ליכנס לבית, כן בהיות האדם מיושב בדעתו ואינו מתקומם לכל דבר לכעוס אין דרך ומקום ליצר הרע למשול בו,

ואם הוא כועס הרי מצא יצר הרע פרצה להכנס לפתותו לעשות עבירות, שהרי הכעס הוא סיבת המריבות והמכות והרציחות וציאה מן הדת.

This section can be summarized by the following source:

6. **Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 40b-41a – A person gets nowhere by getting angry, and is left with the destructive consequences of his anger.**

Bar Kafrah said, “There is nothing left for the angry person except his anger.”

דרש בר קפרא: רגזן - לא עלתה בידו אלא רגזנותא.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I.

- ⇒ There is no part of a person’s life that is not adversely affected by anger.
- ⇒ Regarding the person himself, he loses his intellectual and spiritual levels, relegating himself to a “life that is not a life” in which personal achievements are sadly elusive.
- ⇒ Socially, the ills of anger are self-evident, causing a person to be disliked and shunned.
- ⇒ Spiritually, anger leaves a person vulnerable to all forms of transgression, and deprives him of growth and fulfillment.
- ⇒ From a Torah perspective, the failing of anger goes far deeper than a character quirk that we can learn to live with. When a person loses control in fury, the Sages tell us that there is “somebody else” in control. By transferring the reigns of power from his conscious self to his Yetzer Hara, a person detaches his actions from God, and even from the “image of God” in which man was created.

SECTION II. THE BENEFITS OF PATIENCE

In stark contrast to the destructive nature of anger, patience is calming and constructive. By maintaining calm at all times, a person is able to avoid thoughtless reactions, and can act constructively under all circumstances. It is therefore not surprising that several great Sages were famed for their remarkable patience.

1. **Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 30b-31a – Hillel was the leader of the generation, and could not be angered even by someone who set out purposefully to anger him with inane questions on a busy Erev Shabbat.**

It once happened that two men were talking with each other and made a deal, “Whoever goes and angers Hillel shall receive four hundred zuz.” One of them said, “I will go and anger him today.”

It was Erev Shabbat, and Hillel was washing his hair. The man went past the door of Hillel’s house, and called out, “Who here is Hillel, who here is Hillel?”

מעשה בשני בני אדם שהמרו זה את זה אמרו כל מי שילך ויקניט את הלל יטול ארבע מאות זוז אמר אחד מהם אני אקניטנו.

אותו היום ערב שבת היה והלל חפף את ראשו הלך ועבר על פתח ביתו אמר מי כאן הלל מי כאן הלל?

Hillel wrapped himself up and went out to him, saying, “My son, what do you want?”

“I have a question to ask,” he said.

“Ask, my son.”

Thereupon he asked, “Why are the heads of the Babylonians so round?”

“My son, you have asked an important question,” he replied. “Because they do not have skillful midwives.”

[The man came back twice with similar inane questions, and each time Hillel answered patiently. Finally, the man said:]

“I have many questions to ask, but fear that you may get angry.”

Hillel tightened his robe, sat before him, and said, “Ask all the questions you have to ask.”

“Are you the Hillel who is called the Leader of Israel?”

“Yes,” Hillel replied.

“If that is you,” he retorted, “may there not be many like you in Israel.”

He said, “Why is that, my son?”

“Because I have lost four hundred zuz through you!”

נתעטף ויצא לקראתו. אמר לו בני מה אתה מבקש?

אמר לו שאלה יש לי לשאול.

אמר לו שאל בני שאל.

מפני מה ראשיהן של בבליים סגלגלות?

אמר לו בני שאלה גדולה שאלת מפני שאין להם חיות פקחות ...

אמר לו שאלות הרבה יש לי לשאול ומתירא אני שמא תכעוס.

נתעטף וישב לפניו אמר לו כל שאלות שיש לך לשאול שאל.

אמר לו אתה הוא הלל שקורין אותך נשיא ישראל?

אמר לו הן.

אמר לו אם אתה הוא לא ירבו כמותך בישראל.

אמר לו בני מפני מה אמר לו?

מפני שאבדתי על ידך ארבע מאות זוז.

The point of this story is to inspire us to attain Hillel's level of patience and humility. From Hillel's example, we learn that a person should be ready to calmly answer questions under the most trying conditions.

Regardless of how annoying the questioner is, be polite to him and speak with a pleasant and affectionate tone (Orach Mishorim 7:15). The next source shows how patience and calm can be the cause of bringing people closer to God and spirituality.

2. Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 31a – The gentleness and patience of Hillel brought people closer to God.

It happened that a certain non-Jew came before Shammai and said to him, “Convert me on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot.” [Shammai] pushed him away with the builder's measuring stick.

מעשה בנכרי אחד שבא לפני שמאי אמר לו גיירני על מנת שתלמדני כל התורה כולה כשאני עומד על רגל אחת. דחפו באמת הבנין שבידו.

He went to Hillel, who converted him. Hillel said to him, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary; go and learn it" ...

Some time later three converts met up. They said, "Shammai's strictness sought to banish us from the world, but Hillel's gentleness brought us under the wings of the Divine Presence."

בא לפני הלל גייריה. אמר לו דעלך סני לחברך לא תעביד זו היא כל התורה כולה ואידך פירושה הוא זיל גמור:

...לימים נודווגו שלשתן למקום אחד. אמרו קפדנותו של שמאי בקשה לטורדנו מן העולם ענוותנותו של הלל קרבנו תחת כנפי השכינה.

3. **Rabbi Simchah Zissel of Kelm, Chochmah u'Mussar Vol. I, p. 433 – Patience is the root of all virtue.**

It would be ideal if we could become accustomed to the attribute of patience, for patience is the source of all good character traits and inner calm, and is the root of all virtue.

מי יתן ונתרגל במידת הסבל, כי זה שורש כל המידות והמנוחה והשורש כל המעלות.

4. **Talmud Bavli, Yoma 23a, Chidushei Ritvah ibid. – The virtue of those who do not respond to insult and remain calm.**

Those who suffer insult but do not return the insult, who hear their disgrace but do not reply ... regarding them the verse states: "Those who love Him will be like the powerfully rising sun" [Shoftim/Judges 5:31].

Chidushei Ritvah:

[Regarding the verse from Shoftim] it can be explained by the verse, "The wise will shine like the radiance of the heavens" [Daniel 21:3]: the person who wisely does not respond with anger when insulted shows great humility, and extraordinary inner strength. This person is above everything around him [and unaffected, just like the sun is above everything on earth]. Therefore, such a person's reward is compared to the greatest and highest object we know, which is the "powerfully rising sun."

הנעלבין ואינן עולבין שומעין חרפתן ואינן משיבין ... עליהן הכתוב אומר "ואהבו כצאת השמש בגברתו".

חידושי הריטב"א:

... זה כמו שנאמר "והמשפלים יזרחו כזרח הירקיע", ומפני שזו ענוה וחסידות גדולה שהיא למעלה מן הכל, דימה שכרם לגדול שבכולם, דהיינו "כצאת השמש בגבורתו" שתרגם אותו יונתן שהוא מה שאמר הכתוב ואור החמה יהיה שבעתים.

As the next source shows, not only is being calm praiseworthy, but one's words are more effective when said in a calm manner.

5. **Kohelet 9:17 – The words of the wise, quietly spoken, are accepted.**

The words of the wise spoken in a gentle manner are more readily accepted than the shout of a ruler among fools.

דברי חכמים בנחת נשמעים מזעקת מושל בכסילים:

The wise man remains in control under all circumstances. He listens courteously and quietly when others address him. He thinks before he speaks, allowing himself a few moments of thought before he offers his calm response (Rabbi Avrohom Feuer, *A Letter for the Ages*, p. 29). The next story is an example of this:

The son of a Rabbi came to Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, the Rabbi of Vilna, and tried to persuade him to influence a certain community to accept his father as their rabbi. Rav Chaim Ozer did not consider the person worthy for such a prominent position and politely refused. The son began to speak harshly and insolently, and kept insisting that Rav Chaim Ozer comply with his request, but he remained silent and did not reply. When the person's words were becoming too extreme, Rav Chaim Ozer and another scholar who was visiting him walked out of the room. The other scholar commented, "Rebbe, there is a limit to patience and tolerance. Why didn't you say something to this rude young man?"

Rav Chaim Ozer calmly replied, "He is trying to help his father. While my sense of responsibility for that community does not allow me to agree to his request, I still have no right to complain about this person and his words. After all, he was motivated by a desire to help his father" (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, *Gateway to Happiness*, p. 206).

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:

- ∞ The Sages emphasize the virtue of patience. Apart from being a great value in and of itself, patience is a vital stepping-stone for moving forward in all areas of personal growth and achievement. It is therefore natural to find that Sages of the Talmud were famed for their exceptional patience.

SECTION III. TOOLS FOR CONTROLLING ANGER

In this final section we will discuss various strategies to help control and combat anger.

Sections I and II dealt with the negative aspects of anger and the positive aspects of patience. Studying and integrating this information is itself a strategy for overcoming anger (Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz, *Sichot Mussar*, 5733, #23).

In this section we will focus on two other types of strategies: (1) forming positive habits, and (2) changing the way we think.

PART A. FORMING POSITIVE HABITS

By getting used to speaking gently, and by training ourselves in patience, we will find that we get angry far less than we used to.

1. **Ramban (Nachmanides), Iggeret HaRamban (Letter of the Ramban)– Speaking gently and calmly is a habit that should be practiced because it helps prevent a person from becoming angry.**

Accustom yourself to speak gently to all people at all times. This will protect you from anger – a most serious character flaw which causes one to sin.

תתנהג תמיד לדבר כל דבריך בנחת לכל אדם ובכל עת
ובזה תינצל מן הכעס שהיא מידה רעה להחטיא בני
אדם.

2. **Rambam, Hilchot De'ot 2:3** –Although concerning most character traits one should take the “middle path” of moderation, concerning anger one should take the “extreme path” and avoid it altogether.

There are certain character traits that one must distance oneself from in the extreme. In fact, it is forbidden to take [the standard approach of] the “middle path” regarding these character traits ...

Anger is an extremely negative character trait, and it is fitting for a person to distance himself from it to the opposite extreme. One should train oneself never to become angry, even regarding things for which anger might be justified.

ויש דעות שאסור לו לאדם לנהוג בהן בבינוניות אלא
יתרחק מן הקצה האחד עד הקצה האחר...

הכעס מדה רעה היא עד למאד, וראוי לאדם שיתרחק
ממנה עד הקצה האחר, וילמד עצמו שלא יכעוס
ואפילו על דבר שראוי לכעוס עליו.

Although the Rambam generally teaches that a person should balance his character traits – be strong yet flexible, compassionate yet firm – the one exception is anger. Regarding anger there is no middle way, and one must avoid it altogether. Since this may seem like an unattainable goal a person should begin by training himself for short periods.

3. **Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. II, p. 215** – Set aside half an hour a day when you practice responding to *everything* with patience and without becoming angry.

We will train ourselves to be patient: we will fix a specific amount of time every day – for example, half an hour – in which we will strive to bear with patience all that we see and hear, even when things may be upsetting to us, and even if they are hurtful to us, without losing our composure at all. In cases where it is necessary or obligatory to react, we will do so with measured, calm words, without becoming overly emotional.

נתלמד, איפוא, להיות סבלנים: נקבע לעצמנו זמן
מסוים כל יום, כרבע שעה, ובו נשתדל לשאת ולסבול
כל מה שאנו רואים ושומעים, אע"פ שאינו כלל לפי
רוחנו ואפילו אם הוא פוגע בנו, מבלי לאבד מנוחת
נפשנו כלל, ובמקרה שיש צורך או חיוב להגיב – נגיב
בדברים שקולים ומדודים בלי שום התרגשות.

Based on the two previous sources, a person should set aside 30 minutes to go to the “opposite extreme” from anger and practice being patient.

The next source describes how a person develops “inner-muscles” when he learns to be patient.

4. **Rabbi Reuven Leuchter, personal correspondence** – Anger is caused by a situation that does not conform to my own desires and wants. Learning to be patient is strengthening the ability to bear the burden of these unfulfilled desires.

How can a person successfully work toward uprooting anger? One needs to recognize the root cause of anger and how to manage it.

A person's wants and desires, or *ratzon* (רצון), will) are at the core of who a person is and form his greatest drive. The reason why anger is so difficult to control is that one is angered by a situation which goes directly against one's *ratzon* or desires. The anger is triggered because the situation is going against “Me.”

The opposite of anger is patience. The Hebrew word for patience is *savlanut* (סבלנות) which means to “bear” something. Patience is bearing the burden of one’s own *ratzon* or desires. The goal of dealing with anger is being able to bear the burden of something that goes against your will.

Developing positive habits requires a great deal of discipline. As a source of encouragement, one should remember that not every *tzaddik* (an upright individual in both character and action) was born a naturally calm person. The Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, 1838-1933, Radin), for example, worked constantly to improve his character.

A disciple once hid under a bench in shul, hoping to observe the Chofetz Chaim’s conduct at night. When midnight approached, the elderly tzaddik appeared, opened the ark at the front of the shul, and prayed that God help him overcome his feelings of anger (Rabbi Avrohom Feuer, A Letter for the Ages, p. 31).

The world renowned Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895 -1986, New York), was known for his pleasant demeanor; and even in the most provocative of situations he would avoid an angry response.

When a yeshivah student asked Rabbi Moshe Feinstein regarding his serenity, he made it clear that it wasn’t natural to him, nor did it come quickly. “It is years that I have worked on perfecting this trait,” he said (ibid.).

There are many other practical techniques for developing a positive habit. For example, set aside a sum of money that you will give away if you allow yourself to become angry (Reishit Chochmah, Sha’ar Ha’Anavah, Ch. 3). If someone is making you angry, try to avoid looking him in the eye while your anger is intense, for in this way you will more easily be able to control your temper (ibid., Ch. 5). If you ever find yourself angered by a situation, wait overnight to respond (Sefer Chasidim, 655).

PART B. PUTTING THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

Often, we become angry because our ego inflates an event far beyond its true proportions. Part of working on anger is diminishing the severity of the event by placing things in the right perspective and asking, “Is this *really* a reason to be angry?”

1. **Rebbetzin Feige Twerski, Anger Management (aish.com) – We can choose to think about events before responding to them, and often what seems to be personal is rarely about us.**

All of our behaviors and expressions of emotions are preceded by thought. Our take on any given situation we confront begins with the way we perceive it. There is no objective reality at play. Witness the fact that one day a given situation undoes us, and the very same set of circumstances doesn’t phase us at another time. We are the interpreters. We are the thinkers.

Awareness of this fact should allow us to step back when we have one of the negative thoughts attacking that sparks anger and ask ourselves if this is the bus we want to take. We have the wherewithal, if we so choose, to drop the contaminating thought and move on, thereby making room for the clear thinking of our innate wisdom, the better part of ourselves.

A second component of this approach is that generally speaking, when we feel affronted or take offense, it is about “me.” I feel targeted, hence my ego is bruised, and the anger is a defense of my ego. In reality, the affront that seems to be personal is rarely about us. The inappropriate behavior of the other which triggers our hurt and subsequent anger generally comes from a place of insecurity in the person who is provoking us. If we are able to recognize this truth, we will find a port in the storm.

When we place things in perspective, we see that our anger will do far more damage to us than the loss we suffered in the first place, as the following analogy illustrates:

If one lost a beautiful flower, it would be madness for him to react by breaking a precious object worth thousands of times more than the small flower. Similarly, the person who loses his temper shatters his peace of mind – a commodity far more precious than the relatively trivial loss which triggered his anger (Sefer Chareidim, Teshuvah, Ch. 4).

PART C. DEVELOPING HUMILITY

The Torah masters of character development (*baalei mussar*) teach that an angry person often suffers from a lack of humility. By working on humility, and diminishing one's arrogance, one is less prone to anger. The following source elaborates:

1. **Shelah HaKadosh, Letter Reish, # 19 – Removing arrogance and being humble are prerequisites for removing anger.**

“Words of the wise, spoken gently, are accepted” (Kohelet 9:17). Somebody who has acquired this trait will never come to anger. The meaning of “spoken gently” is that they are not spoken with arrogance. For a person who clings to the attribute of humility will never come to anger, for he is patient, and ignores those who deride him.

דברי חכמים בנחת נשמעים (קהלת ט, יז). מי שמדתו כד, אזי אינו בא לידי כעס לעולם. והכוונה בנחת נשמעים, בנחת רוח ולא ברמות רוח. כי מי שאוחז במדת הענוה ממילא אינו כועס לעולם, כי הוא סובל ומעלים עין מסוררים.

It should be noted that the above approach to developing humility is a subject of study unto itself. It is true that anger and humility are inter-related, but in practice, it is too difficult to work on both at the same time. Therefore, each should be tackled as an independent project in self-improvement.

PART D. DEVELOPING TRUST IN GOD

Finally, a fundamental principle of Judaism is that God is guiding us at all times to help us reach our potential. Everything that happens to us is a challenge and an exercise to bring out this potential. This is known as Divine Providence (*hashgachah pratit*, see the Morasha class on this subject). As the next sources illustrate, when this knowledge is integrated into our emotions then there is no longer reason to feel anger.

1. **Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzhal, Sichot LeSefer Bereishit (Genesis), Bereishit 50:20, pp. 287-288 – Knowing that everything is from God and is ultimately for the good means that there is no need for anger, bearing a grudge or revenge.**

Yosef (Joseph) teaches us a great principle of how we can fulfill the difficult instruction of “Do not bear a grudge” (Vayikra/Leviticus 19:18). We might be able to restrain ourselves from taking revenge, but how is it possible not to even bear a grudge against somebody who does us evil?

Yet, if we understand that the person did not do anything, there is no longer room to bear a grudge. “If you would not have sold me to Egypt,”

וכאן מלמד יוסף יסוד גדול על האופן בו ניתן לקיים את הציווי הקשה של “לא תיטור” (ויק' יט יח), כי לא לנקום אפשר עדיין להתאפק ולעמוד בזה, אבל איך אפשר שלא להרגיש טינה בלב כנגד מי שהרע לי כל כך?

אלא שאם מבינים שהוא בעצם לא עשה מאומה, הרי פשוט שאין מקום לטיור לו טינה. אם אתם לא הייתם למצרים גורמים שארד מצרימה, אומר יוסף, היה ה'

Yosef says, “God would have sent somebody else to do it” (see Ta’anit 18).

An additional reason for not bearing a grudge is to realize that only God makes things happen. “God thought it for the good,” Yosef calms his brothers (Bereishit 50:20). Moreover, “Everything that God does is for the good” (Berachot 60b). If so, there is no room left to bear a grudge.

Yosef even felt gratitude toward his brothers, for in their merit he became ruler over Egypt. Furthermore, concerning his sale, it was apparent that this led to “sustaining a great nation” (Bereishit 50:20).

However, the truth is that the same is true of every person and every case. If somebody harms you, Heaven forbid, know first of all that it is from God, and second of all that ultimately, good will come of it. Even in the case of Yosef, it took a full twenty-two years until it became clear that “God meant it for the good.”

שולח מיישהו אחר שיעשה זאת (עי' תענ' יח).

וכשמאמינים שרק ה' הוא הפועל והעושה, הרי מצטרפת סיבה נוספת לכך שאין צריך ליטור. “אלקים חשבה לטובה”, מרגיע יוסף את אחיו (ברא' נב), והרי “כל דעביד רחמנא לטם עביד” (ברכ' ס:), ואם כן על מה יש בכלל לנקום או ליטור?

יוסף עוד חש רגשי הכרת טובה כלפי אחיו על שבזכותם נעשה אדון לכל מצרים. אמנם במכירת יוסף יודעים כולם שהמכירה הובילה “להחיות עם רב” (ברא' שם),

אך האמת היא שכך הוא בכל אדם ומאורע. אם פגע בך מיישהו ח' ודע לך שראשית הכל הוא מאת ה', ושנית ודאי הוא שתצמח טובה מכך בסופו של דבר, שהרי גם אצל יוסף חלפו עשרים ושתיים שנה עד שנתברר לכל ש“אלקים חשבה לטובה”.

2. **Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, # 25 – Someone who angers us is just a messenger of God with no independent power. Being angry with the person is like being angry with the messenger for bringing the message.**

“Anyone who gets angry is considered as if he serves idolatry” [Shabbat 105b]. The reason for this is that when a person is enraged his *emunah* (faith) departs from him, for if he would believe that everything comes to him from God, he would not be angered at all. Even though the person who hit or cursed him did so out of free will, and he is liable under the law of both the human and Divine courts, nonetheless concerning the damaged party it has already been decreed from Heaven, and God has many messengers.

Furthermore, even at the very moment that the person curses or strikes, he receives his strength from God, Who constantly gives him life and existence ...

כל הכועס כאילו עובד עכו"ם וכו'. והטעם מובן ליודעי בינה לפי שבעת כעסו נסתלקה ממנו האמונה כי אילו היה מאמין שמאת ה' היתה זאת לו לא היה בכעס כלל ואף שכן אדם שהוא בעל בחירה מקללו או מכהו או מזיק ממנו ומתחייב בדיני אדם ובדיני שמים לרוע בחירתו אעפ"כ על הניזק כבר נגזר מן השמים והרבה שלוחים למקום.

ולא עוד אלא אפילו בשעה זו ממש שמכהו או מקללו מולבש בו כח ה' ורוח פיו ית' המחיהו ומקיימו...

The following short story illustrates that an attitude of “this too is from God” (Berachot 60b) prevents one from becoming angry.

The Chozeh of Lublin (Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak) once wanted to get up early in the morning to take care of an important matter. The day before, he asked his wife to prepare the evening meal earlier than usual.

But it turned out that the meal was prepared much later than usual. He commented, “It would be natural for me to become angry now. But the only reason I wanted to have the meal early was to do the will of my Creator. This too is the will of my Creator that I should not become angry.” (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, *Gateway to Happiness*, p. 186).

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:

- ∞ Working on anger is a lifetime’s labor, and we cannot expect to conquer it overnight. We are able to develop the positive habits of speaking gently and acting with patience, which over time will become our inner nature.
- ∞ The Sages instruct us to distance ourselves from anger to the farthest possible extreme. We should begin by practicing this for 30 minutes a day. During this time we should exert ourselves to be patient, which means learning how to handle events that go against our desires.
- ∞ By putting disappointing events in perspective, we can combat the inner drive for anger.
- ∞ If we internalize (1) the fact that all things are directed from God, (2) that incidents involving our ego are not as significant as we make them out to be, and (3) that humility is the correct approach to all situations, we will find ourselves becoming angry far less often.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

SECTION I. WHAT WE STAND TO LOSE

Talmud Bavli, Nedarim 22a
Zohar, 3:179a

SECTION II. THE BENEFITS OF PATIENCE

Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 5:10
Rabbi Yehudah HaChassid, *Sefer Chasidim*, # 145

ADDITIONAL SOURCES

Rabbi Avraham Yellin, *Sefer Erech Apayim* (Jerusalem 1963)
Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, *Anger – The Inner Teacher* (ArtScroll, 2003)