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Studying Every Concept In-Depth

Whenever we start a *sugya* (discussion), we need to learn it in all its details. Just like a person who is learning to become a doctor learns about all the details of health before he starts his practice, so must we learn about all the details of something when we want to know what it is. When a person tries to understand something, he has to see how it will affect him on a personal level, how it will affect the way he relates to his family and how he relates to the rest of the world.

Everything is made up of many details. For example, we find ten expressions of *tefillah* \prayer. This shows us that *tefillah* has to be to us a carefully built structure - made up of ten floors. All of these floors need to be climbed.

The same goes for every *sugya*. It is not enough just to focus on how something applies to us *l'maaseh* (practically). We are not supposed to simply be looking for advice on things. "An ignoramus cannot be a devout person." We must build a plan for ourselves.

"*The world is built on kindness.*" First we must always build our plan, and then we can implement it and be affected. But we can't jump to the "doing" part unless we first study the background of it. Inspiration and ideas are not either enough to be able to know how to act properly. In order to act properly, we need to study the background properly.

We first need to tackle the root information of a concept, in anything we learn.

Anger Destroys Our Structure

Each person is a microcosm of the entire universe. Whenever we build and develop anything, it is a part of our growth. But there is something in particular which can uproot whatever we are building: the trait of anger.

Anger is the destructive force in Creation. Chazal say that one who gets angry experiences all kinds of Gehinnom. An angry person also breaks things; anger is the antithesis to building and developing, because it comes and destroys things. Anger can destroy not only the person himself and his family, but it can even destroy the world, similar to how the Flood came and destroyed the world.

Different Kinds of Anger

Every person knows what anger is, but only in general terms. There is much more to anger, however.

Just as the body can get sick in many different ways, so are there many different forms of anger. Chazal list ten kinds of anger. Therefore, when we attempt to work on uprooting anger, we must know from which source the anger is coming from, and after we know that, we can then attempt to correct the anger.

We must each know the different kinds of anger that exist, and each person has to find his personal kind of anger that he sees manifest in himself most often, and which kinds of anger he does not have. After figuring this out, one can then attempt to begin weakening his unique anger.

The Gemara (Shabbos 55a) lists six kinds of anger. However, before one tries to figure out which kind of anger he has the most, we need to get to the root of anger.

There are four elements in our soul – earth, water, wind and fire. Rav Chaim Vital writes (in *sefer Shaarei Kedushah*) that each of our middos (character traits) stem from one of these four elements. Sadness and laziness are rooted in our element of earth. Desires are rooted in water. Evil speech is rooted in wind, and anger is rooted in – fire. Thus, the root of anger is always the element of fire.

Therefore, if a person has a problem with anger, it shows that his element of fire is getting out of hand. Anger is an internal illness – it comes from a defected element of fire in the soul.

The Gemara (Berachos 61a) says that “the liver gets angry.” However, the Gemara elsewhere says that anger is found in the heart; “the heart gets enraged.” We also know that anger is called “*charon af*” – wrath – and *af* means nose. Simply speaking, anger manifests physically in our nose. So where is our anger located? Is it in our liver, in our heart, or in our nose? We need to know where the source of our anger is coming from, because if we don’t know the source of the anger, we won’t be able to treat it.

We are not merely asking an intellectual kind of question here. We are not having a biology discussion on where anger is in the body! Anger is a bad character trait, and it is present in a layer of our soul. We need to locate where it is, and then we can know how to remedy it.

Let us try to understand this.

Fire Rises

Each of the four elements has their own unique nature. Water by nature descends, while fire’s nature is to rise. Anger is rooted in fire, and thus anger is a power to want to “rise.”

When something rises, it starts from a lower point and works its way upwards. If fire\anger rises, then it must be that the anger is beginning from a lower point in the body, and then it rises higher and higher. This explains to us the mystery of where the source of anger is. It starts in the liver, and this is the kind of anger of which Chazal say, “All kinds of Gehinnom control him.” Gehinnom can be found in a person – when he gets angry! Gehinnom is not simply a place to get punished. It is an existing reality exists even inside a person – and it exists in the liver. Thus, the root of anger begins in the liver.

The anger of the liver, when it continues to burn, rises its way upwards to the heart. It then becomes the “heart’s anger.” If the anger continues, it goes all the way to the nose, and if it is released through the nostrils, where it becomes *charon af* – wrath.

When a person gets angry, Chazal say that his entire body feels the anger. The anger acts very much like a fire, which eats everything in its path - destroying the entire equilibrium of the body.

Holy Anger: “Charon Af”\Hashem’s Wrath

Chazal also say that Hashem has a moment a day in which He has anger. This is obviously a holy kind of anger, and it is not destructive. We will soon explain what it is. Since we are all created in His image, then we have somewhat of Hashem’s anger in us as well, which is an anger that we can use to fix our own anger.

Hashem’s anger is called *charon af*, “wrath.” Humans also have *charon af*, and therefore, the holy kind of *charon af* can be found in our own *charon af*. Hashem overcomes His own anger each day, and this shows us that there is a holy kind of anger that exists – an anger that is restrained. Hashem has *erech apayim*, the trait of “being slow to anger”, and He uses this to cancel out His wrath toward us.

Hashem’s wrath is called *charon af* – it leaves His nostrils, so to speak. This shows us that we can use *charon af* to fix our own anger. Usually when a person gets angry, the anger will show up in his hands, and when he bangs down with his hand or strikes something in anger, the anger will get released. But the correct way to release anger is to release it from the nose – to use the holy kind of *charon af*. When the anger is coming from the nose and then it settles upon the heart, this is the correct kind of anger. When the anger rises from liver and then to the heart and then gets released from the nostrils, this is the evil kind of anger.

Using the *charon af* of Hashem is the holy kind anger. We need holy anger sometimes – otherwise, we wouldn’t be able to tolerate life. It’s impossible for a person to be perfect on this world when it comes to having good middos, and this applies especially when it comes to anger. Even Moshe Rabbeinu got angry. Why is anger so hard to avoid?

It is really because anger is an inherent part of our existence. The deep meaning behind this is that our soul is really angry that it is confined to the body. It is written, “There is no righteous person on the earth who does not sin.” Since no one is perfect and everyone has sins, there is always an anger from Hashem upon all Creations, even His greatest tzaddikim. But this is a kind of anger that is already built into Creation. It is a holy kind of anger – the anger of the Creator. The Gemara says that Hashem’s anger only lasts for a moment. This shows us what holy anger is: when the anger is restrained and under control.

Since we are all created in the image of Hashem, our middos bear somewhat of a resemblance to the middos of Hashem, and therefore, we are able to access a power in our soul to have holy anger.

Holy Anger Vs. Evil Anger

When a person goes against Hashem’s will, Hashem is angry with him – but for how long? Only for a moment. This shows us what evil anger is: anger is evil whenever a person feels that something or someone didn’t do like what he wanted – his *ratzon*\will got opposed. When we feel overridden by someone else, we get angry, because our *ratzon* was opposed.

Holy anger is thus when I am upset that something was done against *Hashem’s* will, not against my will. Evil anger is when I am upset that something was done against *my* will.

Anger is always a sign of pain about something. Whenever a person is angry, it is rooted in the fact that something pains him, and he is releasing the pain. The only question is what bothers the person. If it bothers the person that something was done against his own will, then his anger is evil. If it bothers the person that something was done against Hashem’s will, then his anger is good.

“Charon Af”: Angry On the Outside, Calm On the Inside

Charon af is the holy kind of anger. When a person is calm even as he's angry, he resembles then the anger of Hashem, Who remains calm even as He is angry, for His anger only lasts for a moment. It is for one to only show anger on his outside^[1], on his face; but on his inside, he is calm. *Charon af* is thus a balanced kind of anger – to be “angry” only externally, but to remain calm inside.

[1] Editor's Note: The Alter of Kelm zt"l is known to have said that anger is a mask that one should put on his face when it needs to be worn, and after the situation ceases, the “mask” should be taken off.

Source: <https://www.bilvavi.net/english/essence-month-012-teves-how-get-angry>