



## Pitfalls of anger

RABBI YAKOV BRONSTEYN  
Korach, Numbers 16:1-18:32

Road rage is a major problem in the United States. It is estimated that more than 30,000 people per year die in the wake of its devastation.

Phoenix is No. 6 on the list of cities with the most frequent incidences of road rage. The reason is the second word: rage.

When we allow the conflagration of anger to well up inside ourselves, we lose control. As the Talmud states (Nedarim 22a): "Whoever gets angry all parts of hell rule over them."

Such behavior is not new; it is the ugly side of human nature.

One such example is in this week's parsha. Korach and his congregation challenged the sovereignty of Moshe. In the thick of things, Moshe sends for an audience with two of the culprits, Dathan and Abiram. Their response was, "Even if you would gouge out the eyes of those men, we shall not go up." (Numbers 16:14)

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, the Chafetz Chaim of blessed memory, points out that it must be that they didn't even hear what they were saying. Who would want their eyes to be gouged out? Such are the effects of wrath.

He recalls a story of a man who became incensed with a sovereign in his Eastern European town. The man declared to his wife that he would reveal the scandalous behavior of the sovereign to the government. The man's wife tried to persuade him not to get involved and reminded him that this person was responsible for the absolution of their children from the army. Her husband's angry retort was, "I don't care if you, I and all our children go to jail as long as we see that man go down!"

When we lose control, we injure our relationships, our lives and forget about God. The Talmud declares (Shabbos 105b) that, one who rips clothing, breaks things or throws away money in anger should be in your eyes like an idol worshiper.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the Rambam is restrictive in his directives of how to deal with anger. He writes, "Also anger is a trait that is very bad. It is befitting that a person distance themselves until the other extreme. And one should accustom oneself not to get angry even for matters that one should get angry for ... this is the way of the righteous." (Mishnah Torah, Hilchos De'os 2:3)

Hillel the Elder was the exemplar of such behavior. The Talmud (Shabbos 30a) tells us that he would retain control even under the most trying of circumstances.

Certainly, no one wishes to be ensnared in the clutches of wrath. Situations occur and we cannot help ourselves. Then what are some methods that can be employed to avoid anger? Many works of ethics ponder these issues. One such work is the *Orchas Tzaddikim*.

It offers the following solutions. Low tones dissolve anger, high tones fuel it. When one senses anger, they should force themselves not to raise their voice. Furthermore, prior mental disposition of how one will conduct themselves in any given situation is very effective. The mind, when willed into action, exudes acute control over the body. Therefore, one should decide before the situation arises not to get angry.

The keys to anger management are some of the lessons in this week's parsha. A tertiary lesson is that God requires of us to work on ourselves to become better Jews. It is not enough to help the Jewish people in the form of support of organizations. We must also work on ourselves. I once heard Rabbi Yehuda Silver (father of the former rabbi of Young Israel of Phoenix) speak. He said that the question is not whether the Jewish people will survive. That is not a question. They definitely will welcome the Messianic era. The question is whether we will be a part of it.

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