

March 23, 1992, 3:26 p.m.

(the following is the Musar part of the *Sheur Kelali* entitled
(כעס ואבילות))

I. ANGER

1. Our halakhic discussion revolved about קורע בזהב, and the question of whether such outbursts of anger can be considered constructive (בהתקן) or destructive (בהקלקל). Clearly, however, anger is ethically repugnant--as straight *halakhah* according to most Rishonim, and as *halakhic musar* according to Rambam. This dimension of כעס is often accompanied by similar phenomena (בהלוקה) such as pride (גאווה) and disputatiousness (אבילות), as well as other such traits. We shall therefore proceed to discuss anger and then one or two of these related character defects that emerge from a study of how Judaism views the range of negative human emotions.

2. The Rav's axiological explanation of כל הכועס כאילו עץ -- that definition of idolatry is who/what stands at center of my existence, and that anger reveals that my ego is that center.

3. Proof of the Rav's thesis: Rambam holds that only two (individual) exceptions to Law of Moderation (דרך הבינוניות, דרך), and they are גאווה וכעס...Common denominator: ego at center. (ה'),

4. This is not as self-evident as it may seem. Thus, contemporary ethicists, under the influence of modern psychology, encourage the expression of anger as a catharsis, a voiding of noxious emotions that might otherwise becloud our judgment. Mental and physical health thus require free expression of anger. To put this in halakhic terminology, psychologists hold that because כעס can sometimes be technically considered בהתקן, because it provides נוחה לרוח ליצור, therefore it is commendable. Thus, they consider anger a neutral phenomenon; like hunger it is neither good nor bad. It is best to express resentment immediately rather than let it fester. Small angry encounters protect the individual against stagnated, unexchanged feelings.* (This is in keeping with the phenomenon one notices, especially with patients of therapists who are philosophically and ethically mediocre, that their original symptoms may recede or disappear, but they are immediately replaced by an obnoxious narcissism...) It is no wonder, then, that in keeping with this therapeutic outlook on ethics that there should result the legitimation of the wild and unfettered social and political protests of our time, and the enshrining of "rage" as a positive good in the expression by

* See, *inter alia*, Theodore I. Rubin, *The Angry Book* (MacMillan: 1969); Leo Madow, *Anger* (N.Y.: Ch. Scribner's Sons, 1972); Rebecca Stern Lamm, "The Legitimacy of Angry Feelings," unpublished paper, May 1982.

the underclass for its striving against the status quo. What these modernist ethicists and contemporary psychologists fail to recognize is precisely what we pointed out in our halakhic discussion, namely, that although anger may be technically considered a *חלק* psychologically, morally it is a *חלק*, it is idolatrous in nature! Psychology does not determine morality...

53. This does not mean that Judaism necessarily condemns anger at any time and any way as utterly sinful, as monstrous. Thus, Mishnah (Avot 5:11) describes four personality prototypes with regard to anger and appeasement, indicating that there is indeed a human tendency to react to provocation, but all depends on "how man manages his impulsive need to act out his angry feelings,"** for this is Judaism's central concern. This in no wise contradicts the judgment that anger is *per se* a negative attribute rather than a neutral one; it merely demonstrates the Torah's awareness of human limitations and its wisdom in guiding man to a higher level without attempting the impossible.

54. Indeed, the propensity for anger is universal; even the most perfect of men was subject to it. Thus, according to Rambam, that was the major sin of Moshe (*שמונה פרקים פ"ד*) for which he was condemned to die before entering ארץ ישראל.

55. Yet it remains the mark of a *חכם* that he resists the temptation to anger; thus, *דברי חכמים בנחת נשמעים*. And even if the *הנביאים* erred in submitting to the temptation of anger, that must not become the norm for all the rest of mankind, especially the *ח"ח*.

II. VULGARITY

56. The above is true for anger *per se*, but it holds as well for some of the related phenomena, such as violence or vulgarity of expression. Thus, the Rambam (*Hil. Deiot* 5:7):

חלמיל חכם לא יתא צועק וצווח בשעת דבורו
בהמות וחיות, ולא לגבילה קולו בלוחו אלא
דבורו בנחת עם כל הבריות, וכשילבר בנחת
לוחו שלא יתרחק עד שיראה כדבר גסל הרוח

It is understood that the Rambam's prescriptions for *ח"ח* refer not only to *לבוש* but, equally, to *בני הישיבה* -- even if they do not have *מליכה*.

** Rebecca Stern Lamm, p. 15.

9. Now, the source for this Rambam is, evidently, the ברליטא cited in יומא פ"ו ע"א that:

ואהבת את ה' אלקיך -- שיהא שם שמלים
כתאבה על ידך, שיהא קורא ושונה
ומשמש ת"ח, ויהא משאו ומתנו בנחת עם
הבריות, מה הבריות אומרות עליו,
אשר אביו שלימדו תורה, אשר רבו
שלימדו תורה, או לא להם לבריות שלא
למדו תורה, פלוגי שלמד תורה ראו כמה
נאים דרכיו כמה מתוקנים מעשיו, עליו
הכתוב אומר ולאמר לו עבדי אתה ישראל
אשר בך אתפאר...

But note that there is here no mention of the harsh term כבהמות. Where did Rambam get it from? What was he referring to (consciously or unconsciously)?

I suggest source is a בראשית רבה כב-כו on the verse ולאמר לו ה'. The Midrash records the comment of a Tanna, R. Judah, and the interpolation of an Amora, R. Levi:

ר"ל אומר נחנכסו בהמה חיה ועוף לתבוע
דמו של הבל, אמר להן לכן אני אומר כל
הורג קין ליהרג. א"ר לוי, בא נחש
הקדמוני לתבוע דינו של הבל, א"ל
הקב"ה לכן אני אומר כל הורג קין יהרג

The Midrash presupposes a question: since there were no other humans yet created, and it stands to reason that Cain's parents would not kill him, to whom was the Almighty speaking? Hence, it must have been the animals & beasts, who acted as the avengers (גואלי הדם) of Abel; and the Almighty refused to accept the decision of this first "kangaroo court."

R. Levi adds that the reason for this refusal was that amongst them in this zoological Sanhedrin was the Serpent -- and that is why G-d denied them their wish -- because He realized that the Serpent was not concerned over the blood of Abel that was spilled, but over the blood of Cain that was not spilled; *the snake was disguising his blood lust as a passionate call for justice!* (So-- R. Avraham Chen, in his במלכות היהדות).

Every one of us has, within himself, a נלצוץ of the נחש הקדמוני... and therefore must be acutely aware of our propensity to clothe our egos and anger and rage in the respectable garment of high ideology and noble causes.

בהמות וחיות לשם שמים... as the Rambam said, and as happened after the murder of Abel-- even as we wrap ourselves in the mantle of שמים...

If it is exceedingly difficult to avoid any and all מחלוקת in life, it is almost impossible, in the course of מחלוקת, to spurn the temptation to be שכולה תכלה...

משנה אבות ה"ט כל מחלוקת שהיא לש"ש סופה להתקלים, ושאינה לש"ש אין סופה להתקלים. איזוהי מחלוקת שהיא לש"ש זו מחלוקת הלל ושמואל, ושאינה לש"ש זו מחלוקת קרח וכו' עדתו.

ולכאורה בלתי מובן מדוע התנא הכביר במלים להדגים מה זה לש"ש ומה זה שאינה לש"ש, הלא כל אדם יודע את ההבדל בין כנות הכוונה וגורמים אנכילים! אלא נ"ל שהכוונה בזה היא, שרוב בני אדם מעמידים פנים כאילו כל מגמתם היא לש"ש ובאמת זה שקר גמור, עד כדי כך שצריכים מאוד מאוד להזהר מאלה אשר דוגלים בביכול במחלוקת לש"ש!

ולפיכך טרח התנא לתת לנו דוגמא של לש"ש: הלל ושמואל, כל רוב פעמים ה' צילנו מאלה הצועקים "לשם שמים!" ולבם בל עמם.

10. We in this Yeshiva advocate TuM. But there is a principle that precedes not only TuM but Torah itself, and that is: דרך... The Kotzker on this: like introduction to book... Is therefore vital that Torah, and especially TuM, be taught and learned and advocated -- with ארץ.... Without it, the Torah is not Torah -- and even the Mada is not Mada, certainly not in the Rambam's sense. Vulgarity of expression and intemperate, violent rhetoric are unbecoming a ח"ה of any stripe.

III. The Ethics of Protest

1. Does this imply that one may never protest a wrongdoing? Is passivity the only answer Judaism offers? Of course not; חז"ל harsh on those שיוכלין למהות ואינם מוהלין לתורה. However, protest, even on behalf of a right and righteous cause, is wrong and evil if it is overdone.

In the story of the Flood, the Torah refers to the major sin of the generation as חמס, which חז"ל defined as גזל. However, Midrash bothered: flood wiped out all of mankind; can understand the חמס, but why the חמס? Mid. (Gen.R. 31:4) answers: difference between חמס דברים and חמס ממון. Aggressors--monetary violence; victims--guilty of verbal violence. What does latter mean?

sin of the robbed= overreaction! Harmed for \$1, cried/protested \$1000. Over-indignant. The protest for the \$999 was חמס דברים, unjust and unjustified psychological aggression. So--flood destroyed all...

2. There are right ways & wrong ways to show dissent or disapproval. ST: R. Yitzchak Yaakov Reines (founder of Mizrachi; great both in Hal. & Agadah) "oif probe" in Lida, gave powerful *derasha* when interrupted by scholar who disputed, asked hard *kushya*. Reines: "I heard there was a big *lamdan* in town; but now I see you're only a *gazlan*!" Man, insulted, walked out. Reines got the position. The elders of the city came to him to pay their respects--but not the man who interrupted him. So, several days later, R. Reines visited him, asked, "How come you never came to visit me w other leading *baalebatim*?" He: I was insulted; you called me a *gazlan*. Reines: Reason--you asked very good *kushya*, and here's *terutz*... Now, reason I said what I said is because when you try to show up a Rabbi who's "oif probe" you're not acting like a *lamdan* but like a *gazlan*...

That is true for every protest or act of dissent. Do it properly, like a *ben torah*, and you're a *lamdan*. Do it improperly, and you're a *gazlan* -- or worse...

V. Conclusion

The qualities of *אמנותיות* כעס we discussed are largely matters of outward expression and conduct, especially that of speech. This is an area that is most difficult to control, and therefore demands the greatest effort and attention.

No wonder that our concern for the sanctity of speech is so important in *חזון הנביא* that we refer to it both before and after the *שמו"ע*. Right before Amidah: *ד' שפתי תפתח ופיל וכו'*. Afterwards: *נצור לשוננו מרע ושפתינו מדבר ברב*. Before standing before the *שכינה*, we implore Him to help us purify our lips from the contamination not only of *לה"ר* but, equally, of *והחלוקת*, of unworthy words that issue from rage and controversy and dissembling and psychological violence; of *היכוס דברים*.

And afterwards we append a prayer that we not be guilty of using the divine gift of speech to harm another person; and that should we become the targets of such villification, we not respond in kind: *ולבקלל נפש חיה ונפש כעפר לכל תהיה*...

It is these thoughts, suggested by the *סוגיא* we learned, that I share with you in the hope that we appreciate that, in the largest sense, *קלקול המדות* leads to *קורע בהמות*, and that our task is to train ourselves in *המדות*.

There is no other way to approach the even greater undertaking of *היקון העולם*, because the world is but individuals writ large.