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PARSHAS
MATOS-MASEI 5777

בשת

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS

Anger – The terrible dangers

There are two seemingly disparate events that occur in *Parshas Matos*, yet the Gemara¹ finds an important theme tying the two together. The first event - the warriors of Klal Yisrael returned with spoils of war; captured people, animals, and precious metals of the conquered Midyan. As they returned, Moshe Rabbeinu greets them, and sees them with the plunder. He expresses his displeasure, telling the leaders that they did not act properly, as they did not accurately fulfill Hashem's command.

A few *Pesukim* later, we arrive at the second event. Elazar HaKohein, not Moshe Rabbeinu, instructs the nation, in the name of Hashem, to *Kasher* the captured vessels. In the juxtaposition of these *Pesukim* the Gemara sees a moral lesson. "Anyone who gets angry – if he is wise, will lose his wisdom." First, Moshe Rabbeinu conveyed his chagrin, as the soldiers did not carry out Hashem's orders. Subsequently, Moshe Rabbeinu forgot a *Halacha*, and Elazar HaKohein was the one to explain the intricacies of *Libun* and *Hagala* to Klal Yisrael.

Reb Yisroel Salanter² points out that we cannot say that Moshe Rabbeinu truly was angry, as any *Navi* who gets angry loses his/her *Nevuah*. Rather, it must have been a very infinitesimal amount of anger, not enough to affect his connection with Hashem.³ Yet, despite the small amount of discontent, Moshe Rabbeinu, who received the entire Torah from Hashem, forgot a *Halacha*, because of the affects of anger.

Anger is something that takes a hold of us, and causes us to act and react in ways that no sane person would respond. We destroy objects, and deride people in a fit of anger. And when we finally calm down, we ask ourselves, "Why did I do that?"

One might feel that a little bit of anger is acceptable, yet we see from the Gemara that even someone as great as Moshe Rabbeinu was negatively affected by his anger.

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

How does one work on not becoming angry? We all know that once a person is caught up in their anger, it is extremely difficult to calm down. What can we do to prevent outbursts?

There are many methods and tools available to us to work on our *Middos*, here are some that may help for anger. The *Ramban*¹ writes that by accustoming oneself to always speaking pleasantly (even during normal everyday conversation) there will be carryover to trying times. A habit is a powerful thing, and difficult to break. If we habituate ourselves to speaking softly, it may be enough to overcome the impulse to raise our voice when we are angry.

Another trick is to recognize that a lot of anger comes from our expectations.² We expect people to act a certain way, or events to fall into place. When they don't work out, we can feel hurt, and become angry. If we appreciate that Hashem is the One running events, and always has our best interests in mind, it can help dissipate any irritation.

¹ *Pesachim* 66b

² Cited in *Michtav M'Eliyahu, Chelek 1*, Page 168

³ In fact, the same Gemara (*Pesachim* 66b) uses Elisha, not Moshe, as an example of one who loses his *Nevuah*. Moshe did not get angry enough to lose *Nevuah*.

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¹ *Iggeres HaRamban*

² *Mesillas Yesharim, Perek 11*

The Tzadik's Esrog

The following is adapted from a story written by S. Y. Agnon.

Succos was approaching, and Reb Michel was getting worried. Not because there wasn't a morsel of food in the house, that could wait for later. Rather, he didn't have the funds necessary to purchase a kosher *Esrog*.

Reb Michel had lived his entire life in poverty, but somehow could always find the means to buy whatever was necessary for Yom Tov. But right now, the only thing of value that he owned was the *Tefillin* handed down from his grandfather.

His *Tefillin* were written by a known *Tzadik*, and were sought after by *Talmidei Chachamim* and collectors alike. But he dared not part with them – until today.

Reb Michel returned home a happy man. True, he may have had to part with his precious *Tefillin*, and purchase a 'regular' pair, but now he was the proud owner of a splendid and delicate *Esrog*.

His joy, though, was short lived. Reb Michel's wife shared in her husband's hardship, but not his joy of a mitzvah. When she found out that he had bought an *Esrog*, instead of food for Yom Tov, she was furious. And in her fury, she picked up the *Esrog* and hurled it across the room – breaking off the *Pitum* in the process, making the *Esrog Pasul*.

Quiet reigned in the room, both husband and wife shocked by what just occurred.

Reb Michel quickly calmed himself, and quietly stated, "I don't have my *Tefillin*, and I don't have my *Esrog*. All I have is my marriage, and I won't destroy my marriage with my anger."

While the story may or may not be true, the lesson is perfect and accurate. We very rarely gain by getting upset, and we usually only stand to lose. After the anger has dissipated, hurt friends, broken objects, and destroyed relationships lie in its wake. Sometimes, all we possess is our composure, and if we lose that, what else do we have?

DID YOU KNOW?

- When a person becomes angry, he becomes another person in the truest sense – a spirit enters him and changes him.¹
- *Chazal* see anger as a gateway to many other bad *Middos* and *Aveiros*.²
- It is a rare person who never gets angry – Hillel was praised for never getting angry, but by implication, it seems that other *Tannaim* did.³

¹ *Zohar Tetzaveh* 54

² *Orchos Tzadikim Sha'ar HaKas*

³ *Shabbos* 31a