

Is Anger a Sin?

Perhaps one of the most important purposes of Torah is the life lesson each Parashah provides for us, in story form. Any child knows the best way to learn is through stories and the best stories are those with which we may identify. This week's parashah is no different.

Pray for our hearts to be open to Adonai's message – Is it Right to be angry with anyone?

Anger usually stems from unmet or thwarted expectations and builds upon frustration. Case in point – Korach, the great-grandson of Levi, and his followers believed they had as much right to be Cohen Gadol as did Aharon and Korach himself knew he could lead Israel better than Moshe. Listen to his words, as recorded in Numbers 16: *You take too much on yourselves! After all, the entire community is holy, every one of them, and ADONAI is among them. So why do you lift yourselves up above ADONAI's assembly?* (Numbers 16:3) Experiencing what he had, over the time spent in the wilderness thus far, you might believe Korach knew Moshe was Adonai's chosen leader and Aharon and his sons were the chosen Cohanim. Why would he dare challenge Adonai's rulings this way?

Pride and arrogance are extremely powerful aspects of human nature, often leading us along paths we would never travel, when filled with humility and Adonai's Grace. Clearly, Korach and his followers were angry with Moshe and Aharon but were they not also angry with God?

Anger can lead us to do things we wouldn't dream of doing, were we not angry. Relatively recent research over a protracted amount of time, with many subjects, indicates anger is the greatest source of stress for human beings, producing higher blood pressure than even does fear. Why would Adonai allow

anger to create such harm to the human body? Indeed, people who display anger frequently, having anger management issues, tend to suffer life-threatening illness four times more than people who maintain a peaceful demeanor. And, as we know, anger is one of the leading factors contributing to domestic violence and homicide. Indeed, this highly volatile emotion has been deemed one of the seven deadly sins. But is it really?

Does Adonai Elohim and Adonai Yeshua teach against anger? We have witnessed in Scripture, episodes of Adonai Yeshua's anger, particularly against the money changers within the Temple compound in Jerusalem. Remember His words in John 2 - *He made a whip from cords and drove them all out of the Temple grounds, the sheep and cattle as well. He knocked over the money-changers' tables, scattering their coins, and to the pigeon-sellers he said, "Get these things out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market?"* (John 2:15,16) and wasn't He also angry when the Pharisees would answer His question which action was from Adonai Tzivaot, as found in Mark 3: "*What is permitted on Shabbat? Doing good or doing evil? Saving life or killing?"* But they said nothing. Then, *looking them over and feeling both anger with them and sympathy for them at the stoniness of their hearts, he said to the man, "Hold out your hand."* (Mark 3:4,5) Here emerges a very difficult, if not impossible question to answer, a conundrum: if anger is a sin, why would Adonai Yeshua, who is sinless, display it? And where is the love, within in which the rebukes were given?

Scripture speaks frequently of God's anger, as we read in Psalm 7, *God is a righteous judge, a God whose anger is present every day* (Psalm 7:11) and Ephesians 4 - ***Be angry, but don't sin*** -- *don't let the sun go down before you have*

dealt with the cause of your anger. (Ephesians 4:26) However, anger must never be solitary within one's heart. Adonai Yeshua shares with us, in Mark 3, His emotions of anger and sympathy. In Psalm 7, Adonai's anger is held within the confines of righteousness. When anger is mixed with a righteous or compassionate element, is there no sin?

Are there appropriate times for anger? Surely anger directed towards injustice is appropriate and wouldn't anger be a righteous emotion felt by those who have been abused or taken advantage of by others? The Psalms certainly contain the cries of those who perceive injustice surrounding them. Look first to Psalm 94: *God of vengeance, ADONAI! God of vengeance, appear! Assert yourself as judge of the earth! Pay back the proud as they deserve! How long are the wicked, ADONAI, how long are the wicked to triumph? They pour out insolent words, they go on bragging, all these evildoers!* (Psalm 94:1-4) Notice the emotion in the cries of the psalmist. He is begging Adonai Elohim to punish those who have created injustice through their pride and arrogance. Is it wrong to desire the proud and arrogant to receive their just punishment, when we want this? Notice how the psalmist finds comfort and hope in the eternal promises of our Abba: *How happy the man whom you correct, Yah, whom you teach from your Torah, giving him respite from days of trouble, till a pit is dug for the wicked! For ADONAI will not desert his people, he will not abandon his heritage.* (Psalm 94:12-14) One of the needed aspects of our relationship with Adonai Tzivaot is our recognizing vulnerability and frailty within our lives and our dependence upon Abba. Hear this vulnerability and frailty: *If ADONAI hadn't helped me, I would soon have dwelt in the land of silence. When I said, "My foot is slipping!" Your*

grace, ADONAI, supported me. When my cares within me are many, Your comforts cheer me up. (Psalm 94:17-19)

Anger, as I mentioned earlier, is a healthy emotion, when it acts as a motivator, moving us to restorative action, when we face injustice to ourselves or others. When anger leads to violence or rebellion, as in the case of Korach and his followers, then it becomes dysfunctional, leading us along a path of self-destruction. Notice the difference, though. When anger motivates positive change, is it then a sin?

Is it appropriate to share our anger with God? In a very real sense, this is a redundant question. Would you share your anger with your loving and caring human father or mother? Well, let's be honest, if you were a teenager, then you might not. Why would it not be wise to share with the Ruler of the universe? For example, look at Psalm 109: *God, whom I praise, don't remain silent! For wicked and deceitful men have opened their mouths against me, spoken against me with lying tongues, surrounded me with hateful words, and attacked me without cause. (Psalm 109:1-3)* Adonai Elohim knows the condition of our hearts, even before we do; why, then, should I express my anger towards those for whom I feel this emotion? The answer is really tied into our relationship with Him. I can remember my mother noticing my being angry towards my father, for some long forgotten miniscule slight; even though she knew I was angry, she helped me express that anger, getting it out before it started to fester and grow into something much larger and more difficult to control. Anger is like a festering sore in our hearts – it won't go away by itself. This type of spiritual boil needs to be bathed in the love and care of our great Abba and He wants us to ask for His help, knowing we are conscious of our relationship with and our dependence upon

Him. Look around you on the streets and the homes of your community, both the saved and unsaved. It won't take you long before you will be aware of those who depend on their own strength and those who rely on the strength of Adonai Tzivaot, when they are experiencing anger.

Frederick Buechner, a Pastor and author, shares with us his understanding of holding anger within us, when he wrote, *Of the 7 deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.* If the message transmitted here and elsewhere hasn't been made sufficiently, let me clarify it now -- the only one who suffers from anger is the one who is angry. As Buechner has so eloquently stated, anger is fun but its consequences are anything but. Why, then, is it so difficult to release our anger to the One who desires to take it from us? Could it be we are having too much fun, rolling in the muck of self-pity and self-righteousness to release the anger which controls us?

But what happens, if we our anger is directed towards Adonai Himself? Is that appropriate, the right thing to feel? Here the response is not as clear cut. There are those who believe harbouring anger towards Adonai Elohim is harmful. For example, a study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, in 2010, concluded those who are frequently angry with God display signs of poor mental health and impoverished coping mechanisms when facing difficult situations. Often there is a tendency to blame God, rather than assume personal responsibility for our behaviours, thoughts and emotions. The loss of a loved one

to a violent act, a debilitating illness or carelessness, may be met with anger shown to God for His allowing this to happen. It is easy to understand how, in the heat of grief, such anger might emerge; this is part of the grieving process and all who do grieve travel through anger. However, when the anger is prolonged and begins to consume one's thoughts, this is when the downward ride to self-destruction begins. The study also discovered atheists and agnostics tend to blame their negative life events on God, more so than do believers, although professed believers are not immune from feeling prolonged anger towards Abba.

Anger directed to Adonai Elohim is often found in Scripture, mainly in the Psalms. For example, in Psalm 88, listen to the anger expressed - *You plunged me into the bottom of the pit, into dark places, into the depths. Your wrath lies heavily on me; your waves crashing over me keep me down.* (Psalm 88:7,8) Notice the anger in the tone of the Psalmist, as he blames Adonai for his troubles. How many times have you and I felt anger towards our Creator, yet were afraid to express this emotion to Him, believing even feeling this way to be sinful? So let's get to the heart of the question, is it a sin to be angry with God?

Well, this, it turns out, is not an easy question to answer. It is a little more complex than it appears on the surface. As I mentioned earlier, blaming God and being angry with Him for everything negative within our lives is sinful. When we do this, we upload our personal responsibilities onto Him. Although He has stated many times, *Throw all your anxieties upon him, because he cares about you,* (1 Peter 5:7) never does He ask us to relinquish our personal responsibilities for personal actions. Focus on this question with me, please: which actions of God should we respond to with anger? Not so easy to answer this question, is it? For example, do we react with anger, when he tests us financially, physically or

spiritually? Should we become angry with Him, when a loved one makes a mistake, resulting in serious injury or death? Are we to become angry with God, when diagnosed with a terminal illness? Should we be angry with Adonai Elohim, when we read Deuteronomy 32: *I put to death, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; no one saves anyone from my hand?* (Deuteronomy 32:39) Is it permissible to become angry with Adonai, when He allows the enemy to be a test, as He did with Job? Read Job 2 and ask yourself, if this action of our Abba was directed towards us or our children, would we be justified in being angry towards Him *ADONAI said to the Adversary, "Here! He (Job) is in your hands, except that you are to spare his life."* (Job 2:6)

John Piper, the noted teacher and writer, believes it is always wrong for us to be angry with God – no exceptions. His reasoning is interesting.

Using Genesis 18 (*Shouldn't the judge of all the earth do what is just?* – Genesis 18:15) as his basis, Piper claims, *It is arrogant for finite, sinful creatures to disapprove of God for what he does and permits. We may weep over the pain. We may be angry at sin and Satan. But God does only what is right.*

O.K., assuming it is sinful to judge the Supreme Ruler of the Universe as doing something wrong, which is what happens when we are angry with Him, how do we handle our anger towards Him when we feel it? Do we 'suck-it-up' and put it behind us? Definitely not, for it won't go away – it will only grow and begin to devour us, like a cancer. What do we do, then?

What would Adonai Yeshua do, were He in this situation? We don't have to guess here. He was in this situation, hanging from the cursed tree, His hands and feet firmly nailed to the wood. Listen to His cry of agony, *My God! My God! Why*

have you deserted me? (Matthew 27:46) However, this cry of anguish was followed with His humble prayer, *Abba! Into your hands I commit my spirit.* (Luke 23:46) To not confess our anger towards God, when we experience it, would be an act of hypocrisy and just as much a sin as harbouring that anger.

Alright, recognizing it is not sinful to share our angry with Adonai Elohim Tzivaot, the Ruler of the universe and the Lover of our souls, why would we want to feel angry towards Him? The answer to this question is grounded firmly in our relationship with Him. Look around to the relationships in your lives. Are there any in which you are involved where you feel comfortable in expressing your emotions freely, without fear of retaliation, rebuke or put-down? In any strong and healthy relationship the expression of emotion, love, anger, fear, hope, etc., is essential, as long as the expression is authentic and comes from a place of love.

Husbands and wives become angry with each other; parents and children become angry with each other. The expression of this anger is critical for the continued growth and health of the relationship. If not expressed, the emotion will be sublimated and, over time go deep into the subconscious. Here it will work to undermine the health of the relationship. Ecclesiastes 3 shares with us, in relation to emotions, there is *a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.* (Ecclesiastes 3:4) I realize there are passages of Scripture which argue against the expression of strong emotion, those based in sin, which will destroy relationships, such as Proverbs 29:11 - *A fool gives vent to all his feelings, but the wise, thinking of afterwards, stills them.* We also know Rav Sha'ul urges us to *run your lives by the Spirit. Then you will not do what your old nature wants,* (Galatians 5:16) meaning we are to use discernment, provided by the Spirit, to ensure we express our emotions in a frame of love and not the sinful

desires of our old natures. Adonai Yeshua clearly does not wish us to harbour anger within us, as He teaches, *So if you are offering your gift at the Temple altar and you remember there that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift where it is by the altar, and go, make peace with your brother. Then come back and offer your gift.* (Matthew 5:24) There is a thin line between healthy expression of emotion, which is designed to work towards the continued health of relationships, and unhealthy expressions of emotions, which Scripture calls, *enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions*, and will move to fracture relationships. My point here is to assure all of us, God wants healthy, growing and deepening relationships with each one of us; He wants us to tell Him of our love, our sorrows and our anger, especially towards Him and, at the same time, recognize our anger comes from pain and sorrow and is an authentic expression of emotion within a specific period of time and space. He doesn't want us to hide our feelings and push them deep into our subconscious, where they will do real damage. Remember, whenever we do share anger with our beloved Abba, He does no harm to us; He loves us beyond our understanding and He *is love; and those who remain in this love remain united with God, and God remains united with them.* (1 John 4:16)

Beloved, don't hide any of your emotions from God, our perfect Abba. Be with Him as you would be with your Spouse, your dearest Friend, your Daddy and be open and vulnerable in His presence – He will secure you and hold you tight.

Pray for our being open with our beloved Abba, in the expression of our emotions, particularly anger.